# Enhancing Grammar Competence of the Senior Secondary Students through Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

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## ABSTRACT

*This study sought to determine how Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) enhances the grammar competence of the senior students. This made use of teaching grammar in six areas: verbal, modifier, subject-verb agreement, pronoun, preposition, and possessive noun, in a communicative way through varied communicative strategies with grammar and language focus. Learning performance was measured using the pretest and posttest scores in CLT group (experimental) and the traditional language teaching (control). The method used in the study was the quasi-experimental design in a pretest and posttest group design with fifty-two senior secondary participants CLT developmental activities were based on a teacher-made rubric and evaluated through teacher-made questionnaires validated by experts with TOS with teacher's learning guide. Traditional teaching approach was based on discussion and lecture method. When posttest results were compared in the six areas, the experimental group's result using communicative language teaching (CLT) showed significant difference in their performance as reflected in their posttest mean score in all areas while there were only four learning areas in the control group using traditional approach. Subsequently, when compared in groups, findings showed that there was no significant difference between CLT (experimental) and Traditional approach (control) in teaching English language. This implies that either of the two approaches used could enhance grammar skill.*

**Keywords:** *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), grammar, traditional, competence*

## INTRODUCTION

The number one problem which the Philippines is facing is the declining supply of English speaking graduates, Since BPO's (Business Process Outsourcing) requires a labor force that is proficient in the English language, this is very alarming indeed. Experts say that this is brought about by different factors; one is the mass exodus of professionals who are experts in the English language. Another factor to consider also is the migration of workers who are English proficient to other countries for they have always been in demand abroad. Definitely and admittedly, the public schools are failing to teach the youth good English speaking skills. If this would continue, then other countries will out-run us in terms of English proficient workers which would result to the decline of the attracting foreign investors and transaction of business in the world market will also suffer. Many will lose their jobs, and the economy will gravely suffer.

Since improvement in English speaking skills requires confidence and mastery of the grammar rule, the researcher thought of exposing students to a communicative language teaching instruction. According to Richards (2006), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) starts with a theory of language as communication. The goal of classroom instruction is focused on developing learners' ability to communicate using target language through interaction.

This study aims to enhance the grammar competence of the senior high school students of MATS College of Technology, to enable them to become proficient in the English language, by learning grammatical structures and performing various tasks such as describing, expressing ideas, giving and following directions, and solving problem.

## THE GOALS OF LANGUAGE TEACHING

Communicative language teaching sets as its goal the teaching of communicative competence. Grammatical competence refers to the

knowledge one has of a language that accounts for his or her ability to produce sentences in a language. It refers to knowledge of the building blocks of sentences (e.g., parts of speech, tenses, phrases, clauses, sentence patterns) and how sentences are formed. Grammatical competence is the focus of many grammar practice books, which typically present a rule of grammar on one page, and provide exercises to practice using the rule on the other page. The unit of analysis and practice is typically the sentence. While grammatical competence is an important dimension of language learning, it is clearly not all that is involved in learning a language since one can master the rules of sentence formation in a language and still not be very successful at being able to use the language for meaningful communication. It is the latter capacity which is understood by the term communicative competence (Folse, 2006). According to Wilde (2010), in CLT, grammar is not studied per se and practiced just for the sake of practicing. It is not a part of the technique either. Rather, the method includes working on grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence in the development of the four skills –listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Communicative Language Teaching has been put forth around the world as an innovative way to teach English (Savignon, 2006). This method focuses on language as a medium of communication. This recognizes that all communication has a social purpose of teaching language to a range of relevant topics and situation. It allows communication to embrace useful functions like asking where the canteen is, expressing likes and dislikes and the like.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

As observed by the researcher, the common method of teaching grammar is the traditional method wherein the teachers just analyze the structure of the sentence to teach grammatical rules. The focus is on grammatical parsing, like the form and inflection of words. To some, it is enough that students just pass the quiz which is more on knowledge formation like underlining and identifying rather than using it for communication.

Consequently, English course for students at the undergraduate level does not bring them the required competence in all areas of the language the moment they graduate. Many students are not proficient in communication and generally lack the growing demands of the workplace competency. It was found that majority of them regarded themselves as good in reading and listening but need help in speaking and writing skills.

For this reason, the researcher found it necessary to conduct a study on how to improve grammar teaching among high school students to make teaching more meaningful, experiential, and easier for the students and the teachers as well. She also noticed that language teachers teach grammar with verbosity. Their teaching entails a lot of explanation making the lesson more confusing on the part of the learners. Thus, the focus has become more on accuracy, rather than fluency. The what questions has become the focus rather than the how.

As cited by Larcen-Freeman (2006), the researcher now agrees that it is essential to integrate some form of grammar instruction within a communicative framework if students are to attain high levels of target language accuracy. As an alternative to delivery of a formal grammar lesson, the communicative task has been recommended to supply students with communicative use of target grammar points. Moreover, as mentioned by Celce-Murcia ( 2006), the use of purely communicative tasks which nonetheless require comprehension and production of target grammar points has been recommended. It is important, therefore, to have a wide range of resources in the classroom so that the students can have a rich base and stimulus for grammar and speaking development, and one of these resources must include pictures intended to motivate students to apply their grammatical skills in speaking.

In VanPatten and Oikenon's research as cited in Lee and VanPatten (2006), three groups of learners were compared on their learning of object pronoun and word order rule in Spanish: a processing instruction group, a structured input only group that receives no explanation, and an explanation-only group. On pretest/posttest experiment, the first two groups made significant improvements and were not different from each other. The explanation-only group made no improvements. The conclusion was that the activities alone (the structured input activities) constituted the necessary and sufficient aspect of the instruction that would lead to the learners' improvement.

Since then, other studies have emerged that support the findings that explanation is not necessary for acquisition. An excellent replication study of VanPatten's and Oikenon's research is one conducted by Sanz and Morgan-Short

(2003), in which all instruction happened via computer with no instructor. The researchers found that not only is explanation unnecessary, but with careful constructed activities, even feedback is unnecessary (and unhelpful, for that matter). Benati (2003) has replicated the same results in Italian with the teaching and learning of the future tense; Farley (2003) has shown that the Spanish subjunctive can be learned without explanation; and Wong (2003) has shown that two structures in French were learnable without explanation. As cited by Schmidt (1995) in Lee & VanPatten (2003), to be sure, some research has shown that explanation may be beneficial early on to help learners get into acquisition more quickly.

However, no research that has been known of has demonstrated that explanation or explicit information is necessary. As reviewed in the book, Making Communicative Teaching Happen by Lee and VanPatten (2003), in 1972 Savignon's study was the first empirically based research to suggest a very important aspect of language acquisition: one learns to communicate by practicing communication. In a similar study conducted in the Philippines by Sungahid, "The Effectiveness of Communicative Strategies in Teaching English Plus", as cited in the study of Jacobo and Tan (2005) which states that the primary function of communicative approach is the interaction and communication of students. It is revealed that the variable exposed in communicative strategies gained better achievement in school and found enjoyment in social activities. It also states that communicative strategies are better than the traditional method in teaching English. The same result is also evident in the study of Jacobo and Tan (2005), which show that the social communicative approach in teaching reading has a significant effect on the learners, thus beneficial among the grade six pupils.

With the advent of communicative teaching, the instructor is no longer simply drill leader but is also charged with providing students with opportunities for communication, that is, using the language to interpret and express real life messages. The students' task is no longer to parrot but to create an answer. The instructors' task is no longer just to drill but to interact.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study attempted to show how CLT enhanced the grammar competence of senior secondary students of MATS College of Technology. Thus, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are the pretest mean scores of the experimental and control group in the following areas:
   - Verbals;
   - Modifiers;
   - Subject-verb agreement;
   - Prepositions;
   - Pronouns; and
   - Possessive nouns?
2. What are the posttest mean scores of the experimental and control group in the following areas:
   - Verbals;
   - Modifiers;
   - Subject-verb agreement;
   - Prepositions;
   - Pronouns; and
   - Possessive nouns?
3. Is there a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test when the respondents are grouped according to:
   - Experimental and
   - Control?

## Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested using 0.02 level of significance.

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the pretest/posttest of the control group and the experimental group in the following areas:
- Verbals;
- Modifier;
- Subject-verb agreement;
- Prepositions;
- Pronouns; and
- Possessive nouns.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The research design used in this study was the quasi-experimental design, specifically pretest-posttest design which involved selecting groups without any random pre-selection processes. The experimental group was exposed to the experimental or independent variable while the other group called the control group was not exposed to the experimental variable.

### Locale and Participants of the Study

The respondents of the study were taken from the two sections of senior high school. The researcher compared two approaches of teaching, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and the traditional approach. The Senior Quezon had been selected as the experimental group because the students got

lower average grades during the first grading period compared to Senior Rizal, which was the control group. The selection was done according to their average grade in the first grading period. The former got 82 percent while the latter had 84 percent.

The Senior Quezon, whose class is at 3:15 was the researcher's experimental group while the Senior, whose class was at 4:15-5:15, was the control group. The researcher met them for one hour three times a week at the time allotted for their English class in Communication skills,

The class was scheduled from Wednesday to Friday. Senior Rizal was exposed to the traditional teaching approach with teacher–manipulated activities focusing on lecture, note-taking and analyzing sentence structure, while Senior Quezon used the Communicative Teaching approach with different learner-centered interactive activities focusing on fluency of language.

The participants as well as the teacher used English only as medium of instruction to focus on the target language, English; the use of vernacular was discouraged.

After considering the threats in the validity of the research, the researcher came up with 28 participants in the experimental group and 24 in the control group, making them 52 participants in all. A pretest and posttest were given to each section prior to and subsequent to the study for comparison to determine the significance.

### Instrument

There were two instruments used by the researcher in this study, namely the, test instruments and the learning guide. The first is the researcher-made tests (as shown in Appendix E, p. 95) classified as multiple choice tests which contain the following content areas and number of items; Verbal (35), modifier (27), S-V Agreement (30), Pronoun (36), Preposition (37), and Possessive nouns(30) items. Each test was arranged from easy to difficult whose rubrics for validation was patterned in Bitgue (2007) and validated by three highly experienced instructors.

After recommendations about the coverage were given, validity of the tests was established with moderately agree or very good. When recommendations were met, the instruments were administered to the officially enrolled two sections of the Third year high school students of MATS College of Technology for pilot study. To facilitate the easy checking of the test

instruments during the study, the researcher saw to it that answers were readily available. Each test was administered before and after each learning area had been conducted to find out the difference between the two approaches. The content of the test in the pretest was the same as in the posttest.

To determine the level of reliability of the paper/pen activity or tests, using George, D. and Mallery, P. (2003), of each content area, the following results of reliability were established (as seen in p. 90, Appendix E); Verbals-Excellent, Modifiers-Acceptable, SV-Agreement-Excellent, Preposition-Excellent, Pronoun-Excellent, Possessive Nouns-Good.

The second instrument was the planned Learning Guide (as shown in Appendix H) for the two approaches of teaching, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and the Traditional, which was used as a helpful tool to determine the kind of strategies used and the flow of teaching.

### Data Gathering Procedure

Before each content area was taken, a pretest was given to the participants. Subsequent to the study of each content area, a posttest was given. Answers were readily available for easy gathering of data. Then, data were gathered for comparison.

### Data Analysis

The study made use of paper-pen exercises to get the pretest/posttest data. These data were tabulated and analyzed for comparison to get the significant difference. The researcher used the mean percentage to analyze the pretest mean scores and the T-test for the posttest mean scores. The T-test was used to test the significant difference between the mean of the experimental and control group when they were analyzed in terms of pre-test and post test. All computations were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) at 0.02 level of significance to determine the high affectivity of the result.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### The Pretest Means Score of the control and experimental

The results of the pretest of both groups were gathered and analyzed to answer the first problem. The mean percentage was used to analyze the data. Table 1 presents the data for the pre-test mean scores of the control and experimental group.

**Table1.** *The pre-test mean scores of the control and experimental group*

| Learning Areas | Control Group | | Experimental Group | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | Level of Performance | Mean | Level of Performance |
| Verbals | 80.64 | Average | 81.90 | Average |
| Modifiers | 75.23 | Below Average | 74.00 | Failure |
| SV-Agreement | 76.39 | Below Average | 78.75 | Below Average |
| Preposition | 82.78 | Average | 80.33 | Average |
| Pronoun | 87.01 | Above Average | 88.36 | Above Average |
| Possessive Noun | 81.75 | Average | 79.50 | Average |
| **Overall** | **80.64** | **Average** | **80.48** | **Average** |

The total average mean score for the control group is 81.64 or described as average; likewise the total average mean score of the experimental group is 80.47 or average. With the same level of performance, homogeneity has been established. This implies that both groups have equal level of performance before the study was conducted.

**Posttest Mean Score of the Experimental and Control Group**

After the study was conducted to both groups; the control (traditional) and the experimental (CLT), posttest was given and data were gathered.

**Table2.** *The post- test mean scores of the experimental and control group*

| Learning Areas | Control Group | | Experimental Group | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | Level of Performance | Mean | Level of Performance |
| Verbals | 85.18 | Above Average | 85.15 | Above Average |
| Modifiers | 75.23 | Below Average | 76.35 | Below Average |
| SV-Agreement | 79.79 | Average | 85.75 | Above Average |
| Prepositions | 84.58 | Average | 85.45 | Above Average |
| Pronouns | 89.48 | Above Average | 90.74 | Outstanding |
| Possessive Nouns | 86.17 | Above Average | 85.71 | Above Average |
| **Overall** | **83.41** | **Average** | **84.86** | **Average** |

The posttest of the control group has an overall mean score of 83.41 or described as average. The control group has an overall total mean score of 83.41 while the experimental group has a mean score of 84.86 which are both described as average

**Pretest and Posttest of the Experimental Group**

**Table3.** *The Significant difference of the pretest and posttest mean scores of the Experimental and Control group*

| Areas | Mean | | t-value | p-value | Decision (Null Hypothesis) | Interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **XPERIMENTAL GROUP** | | | | | | |
| | Pre test | Post test | | | | |
| Verbals | 81.90 | 85.15 | 4.96 | 0.00 | Reject | Significant |
| Modifiers | 74.00 | 76.35 | 2.90 | 0.01 | Reject | Significant |
| S-V Agreement | 78.75 | 85.75 | 9.95 | 0.00 | Reject | Significant |
| Prepositions | 80.33 | 85.45 | 6.25 | 0.00 | Reject | Significant |
| Pronouns | 88.36 | 90.74 | 3.54 | 0.00 | Reject | Significant |
| Possessive Nouns | 79.50 | 85.71 | 9,76 | 0.00 | Reject | Significant |
| Overall | 80.48 | 84.86 | 12.34 | 0.00 | Reject | Significant |
| **CONTROL GROUP** | | | | | | |
| Areas | Pre test | Post test | t-value | p-value | Decision (Null Hypothesis) | Interpretation |
| Verbals | 80.64 | 85.18 | 5.51 | 0.00 | Reject | Significant |
| Modifiers | 75.23 | 75.23 | 0.001 | 0.99 | Accept | Not Significant |
| S-V Agreement | 76.39 | 79.79 | 4.94 | 0.00 | Reject | Significant |
| Prepositions | 82.78 | 84.58 | 2.12 | 0.05 | Accept | Not Significant |
| Pronouns | 87.01 | 89.48 | 2.89 | 0.01 | Reject | Significant |
| Possessive Nouns | 81.75 | 86.17 | 7.20 | 0.00 | Reject | Significant |
| Overall | 80.64 | 83.41 | 9.61 | 0.00 | Reject | Significant |

All the data were gathered for further analysis and comparison to answer the third problem. Paired T- test was used to determine the significant difference of the pre-test and post test of the experimental group and the control group when analyzed according to groups. All computations were analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences at 0.02 level of significance.

Since both groups yielded significant results as the mean scores show and that there is just a slight difference in the results, this means that when compared as groups, there is no significant difference in the result. This implies that either Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or Traditional approach, grammar competence of the senior secondary students is enhanced.

With these findings, Savignon (2002) made her point when her results showed that learner's performance on tests of discrete morphosyntactical features was not a good predictor of their performance on a series of integrative communicative tasks. In addition, the researcher also agrees with Snow (2006) when he said that for many students enrolled in school where test results determine their academic futures and careers, learning how to communicate is not the primary goal; the primary goal is to score well in examinations. In such situations, while adding as much of a communication skill element as much as possible to a course is no doubt desirable, it would be irresponsible for the teacher to fail to prepare students for tests. As a result, traditional methods become as effective in preparing students for examination as communicative methods are.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the light of the findings, the researcher formed the following conclusions: In all the learning contents of the experimental group which used Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, there have been significant differences in the results of the mean scores. The following content areas and their respective strategies such as pronoun, role playing/ television show as CLT Strategy; modifiers with, telephone conversation as CLT strategy; subject-verb agreement, interviewing and guessing game as CLT strategies; preposition content with relaying and carrying out instruction, also a game, as CLT strategy;

pronoun content, story construction game as its strategy; possessive noun content area, describing pictures as its CLT strategy, have enhanced the grammar competence of the experimental participants based on the mean score of paper-pen activities or pretest-posttest results.

On the other hand, in the control group, the verbal area with lecture/discussion as the Traditional strategy and Word race as its technique used, In SV- agreement, with lecture/word analysis as traditional strategy and board work, seatwork, and word game as its techniques used; pronoun, using lecture/discussion with sentence construction game and grammar race as techniques; possessive nouns, with discussion as strategy and drill/seat work as techniques, made significant results as shown in the mean score which means that the traditional approach in the following strategies and techniques enhanced the grammar competence of the learners. In view of the aforementioned results, the Traditional method is as effective in preparing students for examination as communicative methods are. Therefore, whether CLT or Traditional approach, grammar is enhanced among learners.

With these significant results in the mean score of the Traditional approach in enhancing grammar competence, it has been observed that there is no single theory of language teaching that can be taken as authoritative. However, in preposition content, which used lecture as traditional strategy and a game on word race as its technique, and modifiers, using drill and seat work as technique, there is no significant difference in these two content areas. This implies that the traditional approach used in preposition and modifier was not able to enhance the grammar competence of the participants.

Furthermore, when compared as group, the overall result of the experimental group yielded higher than the control group (Traditional). Thus, both hypotheses are rejected which means that there is a significant difference in the performance of the learners in either of the two approaches used. Though both groups' yielded to significant results as the mean scores of the paper/pen activity or the pretest-posttest show, there was just a slight difference in the results when compared as group. This means that whether Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or Traditional approach, grammar competence of the senior secondary students is enhanced.

The researcher also found out that the optimal combination of communicative activities in any given instructional setting depends on the following; the nature and length of instructional sequence or time element since five months was not enough; class schedule affected the learners' performance; and the opportunities for language contact outside the classroom since the participants are not used to communicate using English. There are times that CLT is not adopted in the environments where non-communicative method is the norm.

In addition, the researcher also found out that many students who are enrolled in school where test results determine their academic futures and careers, learning how to communicate is not the primary goal; the primary goal is to score well in examinations. In such situations, while adding a communication skill element as much as possible to a course is no doubt desirable, it would be irresponsible for the teacher to fail to prepare students for tests and traditional method becomes as effective method in preparing students for test examination as communicative methods are.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the findings, the researcher suggests the following recommendations: The teachers who would adopt the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in enhancing grammar competence have to monitor the different strategies to be given to students. Administrators should provide training for teachers to enhance teachers' competence in using this approach. Teachers must encourage their students to speak English and be consistent in the language they are teaching so students would do away with the non-communicative norm. Teachers, therefore, must use the English language for the students to follow.

Because learners' performance in tests of discrete morpho-syntactical features was not a good predictor of their performance on a series of integrative communicative tasks, a presentation rubric is highly recommended because paper-pen activities are not enough to measure grammar competence in communicative tasks. Moreover, a study on the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to enhance the grammar competence of students is recommended.

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