

Chapter 5

Conclusion, Evaluation and Recommendations

In this chapter, conclusion is drawn by assessing the implications of findings in this study for both teaching and learning. Also in the conclusion part, the disparity between theory and practice of grammar teaching is examined. After this, the study is evaluated for its strengths, weaknesses and execution. Recommendations are offered different stake holders in the language learning sector. These issues revolve round language teaching and learning, grammar and grammatical pedagogy, and the teacher factor in the teaching of English in Thailand.

5.1 Implications for Teaching and Learning

Having made useful discoveries about the implementation of explicit grammar instruction in Thailand EFL classrooms, the implications of the findings for both teaching and learning are examined in this section.

5.1.1 Implications for Teaching

The implications for teaching are divided into three parts: cognition, methodology and curriculum. One of the results of this study is the discovery of implementation lapses of explicit grammatical instruction on the part of the observed teachers. First, it calls to question the quality of formal and teacher education, and the extent to which a grammar teacher is exposed to Knowledge About Language (KAL). Brumfit et al (1996) put English language teachers in the UK down as possessing "...patchy and idiosyncratic" knowledge about language (p. 86). This assertion has a grave implication for the recruitment of teachers in Thailand schools. Simply being a native English speaker may not be adequate to secure an English language teaching position in a school. While the knowledge of grammar may not be the basic requirement for employability, it is an important factor in the English language teacher-efficiency calculation (Hollingsworth, 1989; Holt Reynolds, 1992; Lortie, 1975).

Basic grammar or pedagogical grammar plays important roles in the professional life of ESOL teachers. This is because, by the very nature of their professional calling, ESOL teachers have the primary responsibility of nurturing learners who are not native English speakers to proficiency in English. Non-native English learners need more exposure to the learning of grammar of English than do native English speakers (Shaughnessy, 1977, Labov, 1970; Hartwell, 1985). The implication of this is that

native and non-native ESOL teachers can hardly avoid coming in contact with English grammar in the form of questions and requests for clarification of certain language structures, from their non-native English students. Also, these students may need error correction (even when the teacher does not teach grammar as a primary professional responsibility).

It goes beyond the surface and also sinks into the learner's consciousness more, when a teacher gives sufficient reasons or proofs while explaining a deviant sentence than when the teacher only applies direct explicit error correction by only providing the correct statement for the learner. This is especially true in view of the fact that most learners do not know what structure or sentence is right or wrong until they apply grammatical dimensions, such as recalling a grammar rule pertaining to such structure (Terrell, 1991; Borg, 2001; 2003). It would therefore seem that a teacher trained in the art of linguistic pedagogy without being equipped with one of the major tools of the language to be taught, that is grammar, may be faced with vagaries and lack of professional confidence (Borg, 1998a, 1999a, 2001, Andrews, 1999b).

Findings in this study redound to teacher methodology awareness, too. Since it is discovered that most teachers take 'practice' and 'production', the second and third P's of the PPP principle in the CLT approach respectively for the same thing, (which they are not), language teachers owe the responsibility of demonstrating up-to-date knowledge of the methods of teaching grammar. As Skehan (1993) posits, there are now exhaustive CLT learning theories that can help grammar teachers. Fotos (2002) avouches that without ample practice of the features of a target language in an EFL milieu, learners are likely to remain behind in their learning. Since Thailand is an EFL country, this imposes some responsibility on EFL programme managers and teachers in Thailand to improvise environments conducive to plenteous practice and give 60 to 70 % of total grammar-lesson time to practising and producing input.

This finding---that teachers hardly give production a chance in their classrooms-----has an implication for class sizes. An intimidating number of students in a class could be a reason why an overwhelmed teacher would want to cancel the practice and production segments, outright. Teachers may need to find means of drawing students out of their shells for participating in practice and production.

Finally, a teacher, during the course of the study claimed that, by following a course book, the normal process of teaching explicit grammar in the required stages of implementation was abandoned by him since, according to him, departing from the laid down procedures in the book might confuse the students. However, the teaching procedures in the book did not include steps recommended in the literature for presentation of grammar structures. This finding is an indication that syllabus designers and course-book writers may need to work towards making course materials amenable to flexible use in the classroom.

5.1.2 Implications for Learning

Learners on the whole need to be more active and not any more passive listeners in the classroom. From the point of view of findings in this study, learning English may have been made less rewarding with the absence of grammar rules. This finding makes the formulation of rules in the presentation stage of grammar structures essential and almost compulsory since these rules serve some functions for learners and learning (Terrell, 1991). Most researchers recommend that students learn grammar through the explicit formulation of rules. Nassaji & Fotos, (2004) argue that:

[A] large number of laboratory and classroom-based studies as well as extensive review on the effect of instruction over the past 20 years ... indicate that grammatical instruction (presenting the structure, describing and exemplifying it and giving rules for its use) results in substantial gains in the learning of target structures in comparison to implicit instruction (usually consisting of communicative exposure to the target form) alone and that these gains are durable over time (p. 128-129).

Learners taken through explicit grammar teaching without the important components of the structure presentation stage highlighted above are likely not to perform as well as those who experience these conditions and go through the processes. The finding about *practice* is that many of the teacher-participants featured written exercises at this level in their lessons that were observed. Learners who go through this process are likely to understand (but not internalise, yet) the structure taught, and they can reproduce the substance of the taught structure in writing. This probably explains why Thai learners of English are said to be better at writing good or grammatically correct sentences than being able to make correct orally communicated sentences in English in real life situations. It has been shown (see 2.5.3.4) that the critical period in learning grammar is the production time, that is, the segment in the teaching process where real-life, verisimilitude, task-based activities are practically performed by learners in effort to act out or demonstrate the 'theory' just learnt. At this level, the foundation for both accuracy and fluency is laid for the learner.

5.2 Disparity between Theory and Practice

Apart from providing answers for the research questions posed at the beginning of this study, certain pertinent facts based on the literature have surfaced in relation to explicit grammar teaching in Thailand. These pertain to the disparity between theory and classroom language teaching practices. Though research shows that explicit instruction can translate into implicit knowledge (Schmidt, 2001; R. Ellis, 2002a, 2002b, Larsen Freeman, 2003; Azar, 2007; Spada, 1997; Borg, 2003; Fotos, 2002) for learners in places where English is taught as a 'foreign' language, this position continues to defy fulfillment in Thailand. Whereas teachers in this study have confirmed a measure of improvement in learners' accuracy, they have honestly only hoped that same would be said about the learners' fluency, in future. This shows that the failure of learners to respond to teachers' (though marginal) communicative overtures may be an indication

that CLT is not practicable in Thailand, for, if CLT is an approach based on extensive learner participation in speaking and carrying out diverse communicative activities in the classroom, but it is already established that Thais are passive, taciturn and reticent (Iwatake, 1978; Sue 1983), the question then is, is CLT the most suitable English language learning method for Thais---or, by extension, Asians? Whereas CLT is a potentially effective language learning method, is it suitable for the learners for whom it has been adopted? (Kumaravadivelu, 1994; 2001). To make matters worse, disparity has been found between the theory and practice of CLT, in relation to grammar teaching in Thailand.

Comparing the findings of this study with the position of the literature brings attention to one major cause of the problem: the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) programme situation in the ascendancy in Thailand. Khunying, (2005) and Arunee, (2001) claim that in Thailand, most teachers do not carry out practice and production with their students in the EFL classes just in line with discoveries in this study). Azar, (2007) avers that grammar teaching and CLT are mutually complementary, not mutually exclusive. Celce-Murcia, Donyei, and Thurrell, (1997) avouch that "...explicit direct elements are gaining significance in teaching communicative abilities and skills" (p. 109). Whereas it has been generally researched and empirically established that fluency and accuracy can be achieved through grammar learning (provided there is, especially an extensive communicative dimension to it) the CLT practice according to Celce-Murcia et al has been hijacked by the teachers who believe in and still practise the anachronistic Audiolingual and traditional, Grammar-Translation teaching methods. This means that rather than make CLT an activity-oriented engagement for learners, teachers have made theoretical, paper-work exercises of it. CLT activities are expected to be essentially practical and task-based (Ellis, 2003). This compels CLT to assume incongruous operational characteristics in Thailand as seen during this study.

According to Fotos, (2002), the success of an English language programme in an EFL (not: ESL) milieu is contingent upon abundant communicative opportunities in class and much exposure after the class, a luxury which many Asian countries (including Thailand) cannot afford. Ellis (2006) avouches that "the interface position supports PPP---the idea that a grammatical structure should first be presented explicitly and then practised until it is fully proceduralised", (p. 97). However in contemporary times, there seems to be little evidence to suggest that a task-based CLT pedagogy (Long and Crookes, 1992) is taking place or making any impression in Thailand.

Teacher-participants in this present study have, by their lessons that were observed, confirmed that many teachers in Thailand are not aware that form can best be learned when the learners' attention is focused on meaning (Beretta, 1989). This trend of failing to recognize post-practice 'production' of forms confirms the fears and position of Celce-Murcia et al (1997) that practical activities have been sidetracked in favour of the theoretical version (traditional method), "...whereby new linguistic information is passed on and practiced explicitly", (p.110) It therefore remains anecdotal or, at best a chimera, that grammar teaching in Thailand schools is supported with CLT practice. As Legutke and Thomas, (1991) declare, "In spite of trendy jargon in textbooks and

teacher's manuals, very little is actually communicated in the L2 classroom" (p.8). Apart from the absence of pattern practice drills, the addition of information-gap activities and a greater tolerance of error in the Thai classroom, the current practice is indistinguishable from its predecessors, such as weak audiolingualism and Situational Language Teaching (Richards and Rodgers, 1986). This is the position in Thailand as this recently concluded study reveals. The view that giving explanation to learners, alone holds the key to productive, usable grammar learning, without the fulfillment of the requisite practice and especially the production component, may be unrealistic.

It may be helpful to reprioritise knowledge-oriented instruction over skill-oriented instruction (Holliday, 1994; Phillipson, 1992). However, according to Ur, (1996), if learners want grammar, they should get it. Grammar, according to authors and researchers, should not exist independent of CLT nor CLT, of grammar. Grammar teachers may truly have been starved of CLT learning theories in the past (Richards and Rodgers, 1986), and could be excused for by-gone lapses but they are, in the present time inundated with research in communicative teaching, from SLA perspectives, with theories that "...underpin neatly, the range of classroom activities imaginatively devised by practitioners of CLT" (Skehan, 1993, p. 17). Thornbury (1998) charges that such mantra as "I sit and talk with my students and I correct their mistakes" is a retrogressive approach to teaching. Something more need be done.

Finally, CLT as seen from the consensus of opinions in the literature cannot be independent of grammar learning as is the case in contemporary Asia (including Thailand). This is especially true for the universities where "English Communication" is the main approach to learning English at degree levels. Nassaji & Fotos (2004) say that a great deal of research shows inadequacies "where the focus is primarily on meaning-focused communication and grammar is not addressed" (p. 128). They report that the body of research holds that communicative language teaching by itself is grossly inadequate. Grammar on the other hand, is best not contemplated without CLT practice. Non-native English teachers may need to be specially trained to excel in demonstrating CLT through the teaching of grammar. Native English teachers may need to undergo training in basic grammar or pedagogical grammar (even if grammar teaching is not their main brief or primary professional assignment). Without doubt, grammar remains one of the major building blocks in language learning.

5.3 Evaluation

This study has focused on teaching processes and outcomes. It may be a direction to investigation and understanding of the L2 pedagogy, having been predicated upon the exploratory-interpretative paradigm. In a way, it shows in practical terms, how a typical explicit grammar lesson is implemented in Thailand. It opens before us not only how lessons are conducted but also suggests to us some of the probable reasons why accuracy has not always translated into fluency for the learner who studies grammar explicitly. It provides an insight into the behavioural dimensions of grammar teaching in Thailand providing a realistic account of what L2 grammar teaching involves.

According to Merriam, (1998), there is a fundamental relationship between the rationale for selecting a particular design and the merits it affords. This study has been influenced by the qualitative design upon which it is built. It is most improbable that a case study would have provided opportunities for varied teaching scenarios seen and which informed our perspectives of grammar teaching in Thailand. It is also doubtful if a quantitative study could have yielded a variety of eclectic episodes as have been analysed in this study. The qualitative approach engendered repeated opportunities to investigate a single item which needed to be enquired about, as many times as possible. It provided an opportunity to institute inquiries whose answers were not entirely dependent on the words of the participants but which allowed for informed judgements based on what was seen, heard and reasoned from available facts.

The cyclical data-collection process whereby the whole study was divided into three: the first, second and third phases of data collection investigations was particularly helpful as, concluding investigations after the first phase would have yielded unrealistic results.

Data from the two church-affiliated schools in phase one of this study show teachers' similar patterns of teaching grammar, but data from both the language school and the public schools in the second and third phases of investigation provide a departure from the results in the phase one study. While private schools tend to resort to the less cumbersome approach to teaching grammar (perhaps deliberately leaving out the construction of grammar rules and putting practice and production in the back seat so as to focus more on explanation as seen in the lessons observed) public schools and language schools in the study appear to stick with the method of implementing a good part of the PPP principle of the CLT in their classroom grammar teaching.

It is noted that the education policy as handed down by government to public schools may be a major factor that explains the disparity in the approaches employed by teachers in the whole study. The Thai education policy recommends grammar teaching with renewed emphasis on practice and a great deal of production according to a report credited to a Ministry of Education official (see Chaturon, 2005). Teachers in the primary and secondary school classroom in private institutions may defer to the policy direction and yearnings of stakeholders such as parents and school proprietors. As such, both public and private school teachers feel committed to the positions of the policy guiding them differently. Having viewed this generally, this study found teachers in two Chiang Mai secondary schools in particular, teaching in styles consistent with government policy on practice and production of new grammar items.

Re-focusing and narrowing the study down from a general perspective to more specific inquiries as investigation progressed helped get to the root of important questions in the study. The design also allowed for both the perspectives of the literature and the participants. This admixture of perspectives enabled a comparison between what explicit grammar teaching is (and should be) and, what teachers believe it is.

The instruments used: classroom lesson observation, Post-observation interviews and a questionnaire really provided opportunities to establish the veracity of claims by some participants. For example, some of the questionnaires answered purported that some teachers were conversant with explicit grammar teaching, and with the inductive and deductive basic approaches to its teaching. However, observing their classes, and interviewing them clearly indicated differently. The instruments therefore served to give a fairly good degree of reliable information.

In Appendix C, Part C of the questionnaire) an error or slip on the part of the researcher was noticed after the study. This involves the 5-point scale and the option 1 (given as “Not Sure” and another option “NS”, meaning ‘not sure’. This could have confused some of the respondents somehow in answering that portion of the questionnaire. This lapse was however made up for by falling back on other instruments used in the study. Observation of grammar lessons and post-observation interviews conducted with the subjects helped close this gap, (for only teachers whose lessons were observed).

5.4 Limitations

There were a few limitations of the study. As true of almost every study predicated on observation, in some cases during the study, it was difficult to see the natural evolution of classroom dynamics because, it is natural for a teacher to be observed to have been unusually well prepared. However to be able to see lessons given in the usual, natural circumstances by the teachers, no information about the thrust of the observations was given prior to the observations.

In addition, since no teacher wanted to be out of favour with the employer if it was discovered that they were not familiar with the theory of the grammar which they taught explicitly, some participants found it easy to give face-saving responses to such question as, “do you provide your students with a lot of ‘production’ (task-based activities) opportunities after the written practice in their grammar lessons?”. As earlier mentioned, triangulating with other instruments really helped in finding the true position of things.

Finally, this study was carried out entirely in the Chiang Mai Province of Thailand. The extent to which it should be generalised for Thailand as a whole is not certain. However, that it cut across private, public and language schools may be an assurance of the representativeness of the study for the most common school categories in Thailand.

5.5 Recommendations

This account may be of particular benefit to different stake holders. It may not be a prescriptive model of quintessential grammar teaching but it may inspire teachers and people interested in advancing the cause of language education to re-assess their own practice of professional teaching (Clark,1986) of English as a foreign language and

attempt a rationale for their present practice by adducing practical arguments (Fentemacher, 1986), in ways that could benefit English language learners.

First, from the point of view of findings in this study, language education professionals may wish to consider re-focusing attention on the teaching and learning of English grammar not only in primary and secondary schools but also in tertiary institutions since it has not been found that grammar is incapable of engendering either accuracy or fluency for the learner. Contrariwise, researchers argue that a grammarless formal language education has proved less effective than one with it, for both accuracy and fluency (Leow, 1998, 2001; Tomlin & Villa, 1994; Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001a, 2001b). Thus, Nassaji & Fotos, (2004) declare that a "... large body of research [points] to the inadequacies of teaching approaches where the focus is primarily on meaning-focused communication, and grammar is not addressed...communicative language teaching by itself was found to be inadequate" (p. 128). In concurrence are Cadierno, (1995); Harley & Swain, (1984); Lapkin, Hart, & Swain, (1991); Swain & Lapkin, (1989). What this present study reveals is that grammar is not faulty but teachers generally might need to become more creative with teaching grammar. That some of the teacher-participants in this study did not implement explicit grammar teaching as required and demonstrate the level of cognition in grammar required of them is significant and instructive. It may however prove productive to think in terms of developing teachers of grammar who are a major factor in making the teaching of grammar a success or failure (Borg, 2003; Mulroy 2003; Brumfit, Mitchell & Hooper 1996; Andrews, 1999b).

Second, prospective applicants for ESOL teaching jobs may need to demonstrate a balance in ability for instruction and communication (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988; Thornbury, 1998). To be qualified, applicants may need to demonstrate a combination of both a fair knowledge of grammar and fluency in English. Being a native English speaker may be made only a secondary factor (not the only or primary 'qualification') for hiring EFL teachers. This can be regulated by asking applicants to provide evidence of formal certification in both areas of basic grammar and speaking. As previously shown, this is to guard against situations where teaching is given, or learner errors are corrected by the teacher who only gives the correct form of a deviant sentence or form. Many researchers are agreed that demonstrating cognitively to learners when correcting them, for example, giving verifiable, cognitive reasons why a structure is right or wrong, is likely to give clearer perspectives to the learner about the structure being explained than when this is not done. Johnson, (1988), has argued that "learners need to see for themselves what has gone wrong in the operating conditions in which they went wrong" (p. 93).

Third, retraining teachers to ensure their ability to blend CLT with grammar in their lessons may help. Teachers may also need to make the practice of CLT their focus. (Stevic, 1980; Thornbury, 1996a; Hopper, 1988, 1998; Larsen-Freeman, 2002).

In addition, since most (if not all) of the trainee teachers' prospective students are non-native English learners who are usually from backgrounds of grammar learning and

who might be a lot more responsive to grammar teaching, (Shaughnessy, 1977) ESOL teachers-in-training may strive to have a basic understanding of the workings of grammar and the grammar pedagogy (Andrews, 1999a; Borg, 2003, 1998b; Chandler, 1988; Eisestein-Ebsworth and Schweers, 1997; Azar, 2003). This is especially essential because teacher cognition in grammar is required for many pedagogical activities in the English language classroom such as application of simple and common metalanguage to explanations, answering learners' questions which may sometimes border on grammar and offering of feedback.

It has been observed that "... the teaching of grammar in the absence of well-founded guidelines is like a landscape without bearings" (Borg, 1998 p. 10). Grammar teachers are required to acquire working knowledge of grammar teaching and master the step-by-step approach to grammar teaching with a view to perfecting the implementation practices of such approaches that they may find most useful for their students (Harley, 1993, Mulroy, 2003; Widodo, 2006; Azar, 2007; Skehan, 1993).

Second, a grammar teacher may need to understand the technicalities that characterise the blending of CLT with grammar teaching. They will be expected to carry out the same in every lesson taught even if it would mean improvising such communicative and task-based activities for their students. (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei & Thurrell, 1997; Thornbury, 1998; Richards and Rodgers, 1996; Lynch, 1996; Legutke and Thomas, 1991)