

THE INTERNET: BREAKING THE RULE OF TEACHING GRAMMAR

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Abstract In this paper the writer reports the use of the Internet as part of strategy in teaching grammar of English. In such a case, students managed to both experience the wealth of computer technology through the Internet abundant facilities for learning language and the success in grasping better ideas of the language rules. Through this activity, students functioned as "active explorer" of the rule of the language and as such were motivated to invest time and energy into their unusually interesting and challenging structure class. Students were put into groups with which they went exploring the Internet to find out the predetermined topic of exercises and practiced it together in groups, printed it out and then accounted for it in front of the class. They had to be able to defend their answer in front of the class and to be ready to explain their answer. Based on the observation made during the running of the class, the writer found that this teaching method allows students to more experience structure of English. Then, from their comments they admitted that they learned structure better as they feel they were challenged to experience more than the ordinary book-based class.

Key words: Internet-based exercises, rule active explorer, accounting for, real structure experience.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers and students are now living in such a different learning environment that we are hardly possible to compare with the mid twentieth

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century; the time when most current senior teachers used to be educated. Despite the availability of computer technology, it was still used for very limited areas. Even when the world of language teaching was begun to be introduced to the technology, it was only known to be capable of doing very mechanistic language exercises and still unluckily it was responded highly skeptically by the majority of English teachers. Nobody had ever predicted that it would ever undergo this revolutionary technological development or even think it would someday be the real part of teaching language.

COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY AND OPPORTUNITIES

Warchauer (1988) stated that recent years have shown an explosion of interest in using computers for language teaching and learning. A decade ago, the use of computers in the language classroom was of concern only to a small number of specialists. However, with the advent of multimedia computing and the Internet, the role of computers in language instruction has now become an important issue confronting large numbers of language teachers throughout the world.

From the perspective of history, as Warchauer mentioned, the computer technology in language teaching is divided into three main stages: behavioristic CALL, communicative CALL, and integrative CALL. Each stage, according to him, seemed to correspond to a certain level of technological development as well as a certain relevant pedagogical approach. Borrowing the explanation of Warchauer, those three periods can be briefly elaborated as follows:

A. Period 1: Behavioristic CALL

It adopted the behaviorist learning model as in this era repetitive drill was believed to be the way to gain skills. As he said, it was conceived in the 1950s and implemented in the 1960s and 1970s.

In this paradigm, the computer was viewed as a mechanical tutor, which never grew tired and allowed students to work at an individual pace, and therefore, it was used mainly to teach mechanistic exercises that allowed students to answer based on the predetermined options and answers. The task of computer was justifying mechanistically if the students' responses were correct or incorrect.

B. Period 2: Communicative CALL

It was in the late 1970s and early 1980s that some prominent language teaching methodologists such as Brumfit and Finocchiaro (1983) in Brown (2001) saw the loopholes of the Audiolingual method and then began to disseminate the advantages of communicative language teaching through various seminars. It was also during this period that computer technology began to adopt communicative approach that created new possibilities for students to generate original ideas and activities than simply manipulate mechanical drill-guided activities.

Warchauer cited that Communicative CALL corresponded to cognitive theories which stressed that learning was a process of discovery, expression, and development. There was a shift of teaching focus from so much on what students did with the machine to what they can do with each other while working at the computer.

C. Period 3: Integrative CALL

The communicative CALL was still viewed by many critics as failing in making it central element of the language learning process. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, critics pointed out that the computer was still being used in an ad hoc and disconnected fashion and thus “finds itself making a greater contribution to marginal rather than central elements” of the language learning process (Kenning and Kenning 1990: 90, cited in Warchauer 1998). Since then, there was a new reorientation of the computer use for language teaching. Such approaches as: task-based, project-based, and content-based approaches were considered to be able to integrate learners, various skills of language and use into authentic environments.

It is in the light of this integrative approach that my structure teaching method was inspired. The availability of multimedia networked computer with a range of informational, communicative, and publishing tools now potentially usable for various purposes that allow students to learn to use a variety of technological tools as an ongoing process of language learning to learn various skills that are very likely to be integrated into the ordinary classroom activities. Through this way, both the students and teachers are expected to respond positively to the technological advancement, while at

the same time may make the greatest benefit of improving the quality of teaching and learning (whether the exercises be behavioristic or communicative).

CAL TESTING, QUIZZES AND THE INTERNET

Early before the Internet became popular, language testings had been introduced through computer using the Authoring testing machine called Testmaster. Various kinds of tests were made by language test writers. Tests that are administered at computer terminals, or on personal computers, are those called computer-assisted tests. Brown (1997) mentioned two types of tests: Receptive-response and productive-response. Receptive-response items tests were among the most popular tests. They include multiple-choice, true-false, and matching items which are very easy to administer and user friendly to use. After that some productive-response item types such as fill-in and cloze began to be popularized and were easy to prepare.

Along with the introduction of the Internet, later on, the more interesting types of language tasks (e.g., role plays, interviews, compositions, oral presentations) came to be introduced too. Finally, more and more interactive model of tests and quizzes have begun to be easily accessible through the computer since then. There is no need anymore to specifically use separate software such as the Testmaster as the Internet has provided the users with various ready-to-click-on web pages through which the users just simply use it or make simple self-authoring preparation. There are a lot to offer to both the students and teachers as the kinds of the tests cover all skills of language. Lots of International test samples, such TOEFL, TOEIC, IELTS are also available in plenty of web sites.

In this current Informational Technology (IT) world, the word "Internet" has been very familiar to all of us. Tracing from its root, the word 'Internet' derives from 'Inter' and 'Net'. Net itself stands for Network. A term which is used metaphorically as cyberspace, the information superhighway or the online community, the electronic library, etc. But, what is the Internet really? It is, in fact, "magnificent global network with millions and millions of computers (and of course, people) connected to one another where each day people throughout the world exchange an immeasurable amount of information, electronic mail, news, pictures, resources, and more

importantly, ideas” (Sperling 1998: 2). A similar definition is given by Teeler and Gray (2000:1), “the Internet is a network of people and information, linked together by telephone lines which are connected to computers”. It is also defined as “ a confederation of thousands of computers from various sectors of society such as education, business, government, and military”(Singhal 1999:4) In other words, the Internet is a network of people linked to other computers connected by telephone lines through which they can exchange ideas and information on multipurposes.

Viewed from the functions, the Internet can in fact be named as: 1. Huge library; 2. Shopping centre; 3. Channel of communication; 4. Media for promotion; 5. Chatting rooms; 6. Intertainment centre; 7. Rooms for financial transaction; 8. Tour and travel agent; 9. Activity organizer; 10. Learning resources. It is this last function of the Internet which is relevant to this current discussion. Within this function, mirriads of websites are made available for learning purposes. They are starting from a very general subjects up until a very specific ones. We can learn a very simple thing to the most complicated one; from fun and entertaining activity to the harder and more serious one. Simply by typing words/phrases inside the search box and clicking the search engine, we can look for the subject of learning we will want to find out.

An internet surfer may find book titles, extracts of books, book reviews, articles, research journals, topics of discussion, historical pieces, teaching inspiration, etc. Of course, the same applies to the field of teaching structure.

As Kratjka proposes (2000), the Internet gives students variety and choice, since they have the enormous number of sites to choose from. Thereby, every student should be encouraged to do something different, and later the class could compare their findings orally, in this way adding speaking and listening development to the lesson. This is in sharp contrast with the traditional coursebook, where the whole class is given the same text or exercise, and there is no possibility of change. Another benefit of the Internet lessons is that the Web materials are completely authentic, unabridged and not prepared with a learner in mind, which can be sometimes difficult in terms of language, but extremely rewarding when students realise that what they read or write is real and belongs to the outside world, not the world of the classroom and textbook.

BREAKING THE RULE OF TEACHING STRUCTURE

As Brandl (2002:87) suggested, in designing lesson by integrating Internet into teaching, a teacher should consider the following areas:

1. the learning resources, that is, the topics and content.
2. the scope of the learning environment, that is, the number of different sources (sites or links) to be integrated
3. the learning tasks, that is, the ways in which the learners explore the materials, synthesize and assimilate what they have learned.
4. the degree of teacher and learner involvement in determining the areas mentioned above

By-and-large, little empirical Internet-based research exists that provides us with clear guidelines. Furstenberg (1997, cited in Brandl (2002:88) suggests student tasks should “exploit the associative nature of hypertext or hypermedia so that students can collaboratively discover and construct new connections, which they combine in a coherent whole”. She sees the role of the instructor or Web designer as that of designing “tasks that enable students to tell us what they have seen, learned, or understood and that enable students to work collaboratively to create valid arguments, contexts, and stories that they can support, illustrate, and justify”.

On the basis of the above consideration, the class procedure and the students’ learning tasks can be done through the following stages; the ones which are beyond the traditional rules of teaching grammar:

1. Determining the topic of structure to be learned. This can be done through teacher-student negotiation or pre-planned on the basis of the requirements of the syllabus.
2. A brief account of the classroom activities to be done with the Internet. One sample of surfing technique to find out a test or quiz site as well as the relevant explanation of it’s’ usage principle can be shown to students.
3. Setting work groups as well as time limit of surfing the Internet and other book references.
4. Resource finding activity, printing out the findings and then it is followed by group discussion which is part of the group presentation preparation prior to the real classroom presentation.

5. Class plenary discussion done in group. One group comes up with its finding and account for the grammatical review of exercise (quiz) along with its account for its usage. The rest of the groups are active plenary audiences which are supposed to be actively involved in a critical discussion.
6. Once the whole groups have come out with their ideas, the teacher provides feedback and evaluation upon what they have brought into the class. His role is particularly giving reinforcement to what has been accurately presented and putting right anything that is found wrong.

The following table provides the general look of what has happened in the class of structure using the above teaching approach. The result shown in the table is the summary of the result of the observation throughout the whole process of the teaching which was conducted several times.

<i>Categories</i>	Quality of each category		
	high	medium	low
<i>Involvement & Cooperation</i>			
Degree of involvement	?		
Active searching	?		
Individual participation			
Individual contribution	?		
learning cooperation	?		
<i>Motivational aspect</i>			
Enthusiasm	?		
Motivation	?		
Attitude			

<i>Learning resource Searching</i>			
<i>Internet surfing and resource finding</i>			?
<i>Presentation quality</i>			

Overview of students' performance.

CONCLUSION

Despite some limitations in integrating the Internet into the teaching of structure, such as the students' computer surfing skills and the uniformity of the students' learning pace which is different from one student to others and from one group to the other, involving Internet resources in the structure teaching and learning process, one way of breaking the traditional rules of teaching English grammar, is of a highly motivating and encouraging learning experience. This method truly drove the students to be actively doing the exercise and searching for relevant information. Through this way, the learning process can be turned from merely passive recipient of knowledge to an actively self-searching as well as building up responsibility to account for the grammatical point so that they experience a more memorable process of structure learning. Eventually, all that can be done to overcome the problem of surfing skills and comprehensiveness of the grammatical explanation is giving them more exposure to usage principles as well as frequent experience of surfing.

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