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## Use of CLT Textbooks for Enhancing Grammatical Competence in Indian ESL Classrooms

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### **Abstract:**

It was in the late 1960s when the communicative approach took over as a paradigm shift in the field of language teaching across the globe. But in India, the application of the principles of CLT in ESL classrooms is not up to the mark. It has been observed that many local as well as state board schools in rural areas have failed to update their curriculum and teachers still adhere to the classical methods for teaching grammar. Their instructional materials have been the same since ages. Consequently, students in large number although have completed English language programs at various levels fail to compete in different public exams when it comes to testing their grammatical competence in English. This situation necessitates pondering over the fact that such schools should update their English syllabus and employ CLT materials for teaching grammar. The paper aims to make language teachers aware of how grammar should be taught inductively by using textbooks that are activity based and promote “learning by doing”. For this purpose the paper makes a brief comparison of the exercises given in two extremely popular grammar textbooks commonly used in Indian Schools-one based on the communicative approach while the other is based on the deductive approach to teaching grammar.

**Keywords:** Communicative approach, ESL, classical methods, grammatical competence, curriculum, textbooks.

### **An overview of language teaching methodologies**

For decades, English language teaching has been greatly influenced by some traditional language teaching methods such as the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), the Direct Method and the Audio-Lingual Method. These methods suffered from various criticisms like the G.T. Method of the 19<sup>th</sup> century focused on memorization of grammar rules and their application in translation passages from TL to MT and vice-versa. The focus was on reading and writing of literary texts while the oral aspect of language was completely ignored. Translation exercises included extracts from literary texts which were of little use for transaction purposes. It turned language learning into a ‘tedious experience of memorizing endless lists of unusable grammar rules’. This paved the way for the Direct Method in the 1900s. This method was based on the inductive approach to teaching grammar and emphasis was given to correct pronunciation. Translation exercises were completely forbidden and lessons were carried out by making associations between foreign words/phrases and visual

aids (pictures, objects and actions) to convey meaning. Use of students' native language was strictly avoided which posed a difficulty for some learners who learnt best when the medium of instruction was carried out in their mother tongue. It failed to take into account the difference between naturalistic first language and classroom foreign language. In the 1940s the Audio-Lingual Method evolved as a reaction to the G.T. and Direct method but very soon went out of fashion. It fell short of promoting communicating ability as it paid undue attention to memorization and drilling while downgrading the role of context and world knowledge. Grammar was taught using the 'presentation-practice-production' technique. It was too systematic and scientific in terms of its classroom activities and materials. Hence, these traditional methods failed to live up to the expectations of the language learners.

### **Historical background of ELT in India**

English language is a gift to India from the British as it came along with the East India Company in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Then it was the Christian missionaries who started imparting training in English by establishing primary schools in India. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century the East India Company supported the missionaries and they started using English as the medium of instruction in high schools. It was at that time that the modern Indian leaders realized the significance of English language as the main key towards the success of the country and demanded for western scientific education through English in place of the traditional teaching of Sanskrit and Persian. This changed the status of English from foreign language to the main language of study at university level. In 1835, English was declared as the medium of instruction after the primary stage by Lord Macaulay. Consequently, the Central Institute of English was started in Hyderabad in 1958. Regional institutes were also established in Chandigarh and Bangalore (Vijayalakshmi&Babu).

Even after independence, English language enjoyed the official status along with Hindi after the parliament enacted the Official Language Act in 1963. It became the official language of some of the Indian states like Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Nagaland. English was taught as the second language in all states and at all stage of education in India. Although it remained an important language in India the system of English education was mainly literature based. However, the recent trend towards globalisation necessitated the members of the world family to reach out and communicate with each other. To serve this purpose English played a major role in the global stage. In India, the liberalisation of the economy paved way for many international brands, and the mushrooming of MNCs, BPOs, Malls and IT sectors also provided rich environment for the exposure of English. All these factors increased the quest among Indians to learn English as the language of education and communication. This raised the need for new approaches and methods in English language teaching which shifted the focus from grammar to the communicative aspect of the language. This paved way for the communicative approach to teaching language as a reaction to the earlier approaches.

## Literature Review

The paper briefly reviews some of the limitations of traditional approaches to teaching language and the effectiveness of communicative grammar put forward by the language experts.

Jack C. Richards in his book *Communicative Language Teaching Today* highlights that “traditional approaches to language teaching gave priority to grammatical competence as the basis of language proficiency”.

Similar view has been expressed by Brown in his *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* that “it (G.T. Method) does virtually nothing to enhance a students’ communicative ability in the language”.

Rejecting the theories of Structuralism and Behaviourism in *Linguistic Theory*, Chomsky (1966) argued that “language is not a habit structure. Ordinary linguistic behaviour characteristically involves innovation, formation of new sentences and patterns in accordance with rules of great abstractness and intricacy.”

In *Teaching English as a foreign language*, Broughton adds that “language student is best motivated by practice in which he senses the language is truly communicative, that it is appropriate to its context, that his teacher’s skills are moving him forward to a fuller competence in a foreign language.”

As far as CLT is concerned Littlewood in *Communicative Language Teaching- An Introduction*, points out that “One of the most characteristic features of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language, combining these into a more fully communicative view”.

Howatt, in his work *A History of English Language Teaching* states that CLT “stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use English for communicative purposes and attempts to integrate such activities into a wider program of language teaching.”

Ronald V. White also criticizes the traditional grammar teachings in his book *The ELT Curriculum* that such an approach treats language as “a body of esteemed information to be learned, with an emphasis on intellectual rigour” (White 8).

Frustrated with the structural syllabus, many experiments were carried out in India. Some of the influential projects include- The Bombay Project started in 1977 is a skill-based approach for teaching English at the under graduate level. The Bangalore Project under taken by N.S. Prabhu in 1979-1984 was a communicational teaching project that gained popularity internationally. The Loyola Experience of Madras was the first one to introduce the CLT at the Tertiary level in India in the 1980s. The UGC Curriculum Development Cell or CDC (1987) is a learner-centred, interactive, skill-oriented methodology that designed different syllabuses keeping in mind the learners’ needs and their level of competence. But the success of CLT depends upon the implementation of these projects pervasively in each and every school operating at all levels.

## Indian Education System and application of CLT in ESL Classrooms

India is a multilingual country having a vast diversity of schools operating at three levels- central, state and local. Also, there is a multiple board education system in India such as

CBSE, CISCE, IB, IGCSE, state boards. Amongst these, the CBSE (Central Board of Secondary Education) is the most popular school board with over 9000 affiliated schools in India. It changed its English syllabi and introduced the Interact English Project in the 1990s. The Interact in English Series is based on the communicative curriculum and is designed for both teachers and students. It includes Main course book, Literature Reader and Work book for class 9 and 10. It has been in use for more than 15 years and has received positive feedback from teachers teaching in various school systems such as Kendriya Vidyalaya and Navodaya Vidyalaya Sangathan. As far as state boards are concerned, each state has its own board of education that conducts certificate examination for class 10 and 12. Each state board works according to a syllabus designed and categorized by the 'department of Education' of the state government. It has been witnessed that some state boards have failed to update their curriculum and are not on par with the changing scenario of the education field in the contemporary times. Their teachers have fastened on to the deductive approach for teaching grammar. The instructional material used in many schools lack rich communicational environment. One such text book is 'High school Grammar and Composition' - it is a series of English grammar textbooks written jointly by P.C. Wren and H. Martin in 1935. It was written primarily for the children of British officers residing in India and was widely adopted in the Indian sub-continent. The content of the book is largely based on the Manual of English Grammar and Composition by J.C. Nesfield. Other series of the book are still used in many private as well as government aided regional schools.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to determine the effectiveness of CLT materials over the traditional textbooks, two English grammar textbooks used in Indian high schools have been selected. One is **English Grammar & Composition by Wren & Martin** based on the deductive approach to teach grammar and the other is **Interact in English Workbook** which is based on the current CLT approach. Excerpts of grammar exercises have been taken and comparisons have been made regarding the treatment of grammar in these books. The models for teaching past tense in both the books have been compared.

Sample1.Grammar Exercise taken from **High School English Grammar & Composition by Wren & Martin** (Ch. 25)

Figure 1(a)

## **THE PAST**

### **Simple Past Tense**

226. The Simple Past is used to indicate an action completed in the past. It often occurs with adverbs or adverb phrases of past time.

The steamer sailed yesterday.

I received his letter a week ago.

She left school last year.

227. Sometimes this tense is used without an adverb of time. In such cases the time may be either implied or indicated by the context.

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I learnt Hindi in Nagpur.

I didn't sleep well (i.e, last night).

Babar defeated Rana Sanga at Kanwaha.

228. The Simple Past is also used for past habits; as,

He studied many hours every day.

She always carried an umbrella.

### **Past Continuous Tense**

229. The Past Continuous is used to denote an action going on at some time in the past.

The time of the action may or may not be indicated.

We were watching TV all evening.

It was getting darker.

The light went out while I was reading.

When I saw him, he was playing chess.

As in the last two examples above, the Past Continuous and Simple Past are used together when a new action happened in the middle of a longer action. The Simple Past is used for the new action.

230. This tense is also used with always, continually, etc. for persistent habits in the past.

He was always grumbling.

Figure 1(b)

### **Past Perfect Tense**

231. The Past Perfect describes an action completed before a certain moment in the past; as,

I met him in New Delhi in 1996. I had seen him last five years before.

232. If two actions happened in the past, it may be necessary to show which action happened earlier than the other. The Past Perfect is mainly used in such situations. The Simple Past is used in one clause and the Past Perfect in the other; as,

When I reached the station the train had started (so I couldn't get into the train).

I had done my exercise when Han came to see me.

I had written the letter before he arrived.

### **Past Perfect Continuous Tense**

233. The Past Perfect Continuous is used for an action that began before a certain point in the past and continued up to that time; as,

At that time he had been writing a novel for two months.

When Mr. Mukerji came to the school in 1995, Mr. Anand had already been teaching there for five years.

Figure1(c)



### Exercise in Composition 47

Choose the correct alternative from those given in brackets:

1. The Headmaster --- to speak to you. (wants, is wanting, was wanting)
2. I --- a new bicycle last week, (bought, have bought, had bought)
3. Here are your shoes ; I --- them, (just clean, just cleaned, have just cleaned)
4. It --- since early morning, (rained, is raining, has been raining)
5. I --- a lot of work today, (did, have done, had done)
6. I --- something burning, (smell, am smelling, have been smelling)
7. Look ! The sun --- over the hills, (rises, is rise, is rising)
8. She --- unconscious since four o'clock, (is, was, has been)
9. He used to visit us every week, but he --- now. (rarely comes, is rarely coming, has rarely come)
10. We --- for his call since 4.20. (are waiting, have been waiting, were waiting)

Sample 2. Grammar exercise taken from **Interact in English Workbook class 9** (unit 1 p.1)  
Figure 2(a)

**1. Simple Past and Past Perfect**

**Complete this story by Julius Lester. Choose the correct forms of the words given in the brackets.**

Brer Rabbit (a) \_\_\_\_\_ (*decided/ had decided*) gardening was too much hard work. So he (b) \_\_\_\_\_ (*had gone/ went*) back to his old ways of eating from every body else's garden. Earlier, he (c) \_\_\_\_\_ (*made/ had made*) a tour through the community to see what everybody (d) \_\_\_\_\_ (*had been/ was*) planting that summer and his eye (e) \_\_\_\_\_ (*was/ had been*) caught by Brer Fox's peanut patch.

Soon as the peanuts (f) \_\_\_\_\_ (*had been/ were*) ready, Brer Rabbit (g) \_\_\_\_\_ (*decided/ had decided*) to make his acquaintance with them. Every night he (h) \_\_\_\_\_ (*had eaten/ ate*) his fill and even started bringing his family. Brer Fox (i) \_\_\_\_\_ (*had/ had had*) a good idea who was eating his peanuts, but he couldn't catch him. He inspected his fence and finally (j) \_\_\_\_\_ (*had found/ found*) a small hole on the north side. He tied a rope with a loop knot and put it inside the hole. If anybody (k) \_\_\_\_\_ (*stepped/ had stepped*) in it, the rope would grab his leg and hoist him up in the air.

That night Brer Rabbit (l) \_\_\_\_\_ (*came/ had come*) down to the peanut patch. He climbed through the hole and WHOOSH! Next thing he (m) \_\_\_\_\_ (*had known/ knew*), he was hanging in the air upside down. There (n) \_\_\_\_\_ (*wasn't/ hadn't been*) a thing he could do, so he made himself comfortable to catch a little sleep!

**1.1 Answer the following questions based on the story you have read.**

(a) What had Brer Rabbit found out?  
\_\_\_\_\_

(b) What did he do when the plants grew?  
\_\_\_\_\_

(c) How did he enter Brer Fox's peanut patch?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Figure 2(b)

You must have used the simple past tense and past perfect tense in your answer. Do you know most often, when you use the past perfect, you use it with the (simple) past?

Study the sentences from the story and write whether (a) the action happened before the action mentioned in the simple past tense, or (b) an action happened after the action mentioned in the past perfect tense.

(e.g.) Brer Rabbit had decided (a) gardening was (b) too much for him. So, he went \_\_\_\_\_ back to his old ways. Earlier, he had made \_\_\_\_\_ a tour through the community to see what everybody had been \_\_\_\_\_ planting that summer and his eye was \_\_\_\_\_ caught by Brer Fox's peanut patch.

Figure 2(c)

**5. Simple Past and Past Continuous**

**There was a burglary in your neighbourhood. You saw something suspicious. Tell the police officer all about it by filling in the blanks choosing the correct forms of the words from the options given below.**

It (a) was raining last night. I (b) \_\_\_\_\_ TV. I (c) \_\_\_\_\_ a little restless. I (d) \_\_\_\_\_ to the window and was looking out when I (e) \_\_\_\_\_ that Mr Sharma, my neighbour (f) \_\_\_\_\_ near the door. I thought he had gone to shut it. I also (g) \_\_\_\_\_ Mrs Sharma walking up and down in her garden. Then I heard Mr Sharma calling his wife to come in. I (h) \_\_\_\_\_ back to my table and opened my book. I (i) \_\_\_\_\_ when I heard a thud and a scream. I (j) \_\_\_\_\_ out of the house and saw a man in a black coat and hat running towards the gate. Mr and Mrs Sharma (k) \_\_\_\_\_ in the street. I saw a car speeding away with the burglar.

- (a) (i) raining (ii) was raining (iii) were raining (iv) rained
- (b) (i) were watching (ii) watched (iii) was watching (iv) watching
- (c) (i) has felt (ii) felt (iii) was feeling (iv) feel
- (d) (i) had gone (ii) went (iii) was going (iv) gone
- (e) (i) noticing (ii) was noticing (iii) were noticing (iv) noticed
- (f) (i) stood (ii) were standing (iii) was standing (iv) were stood

Figure 2(d)

**3. Working in pairs, fill up the table by asking your partner about what he/she does on the following days and times.**

Day	7.00 am	1.00 pm	6.00 pm
Sunday			
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			

Figure 2(e)

**6. Past Continuous**

**A young girl was kidnapped from the main street of Srutipur at 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon. Chetan was there at that time.**



**The police interview Chetan to get an eyewitness account of the kidnapping. In pairs conduct the interview. One of you can play the role of Chetan and tell your partner, who plays the role of the police officer, what happened when the kidnapping occurred.**

*Note: The police officer should ask as many relevant questions as possible to get a detailed account. Write the account in your notebooks.*

**Findings**



In Sample1 which is taken from **English Grammar & Composition by Wren & Martin** the teaching of past tense starts with an explanation of the rule followed by some examples to show the usage of simple past sentence. Then the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph states the rules for using the past continuous tense followed by some example. The rules for past perfect and past perfect continuous tense are prescribed in the same manner. Further practice is reinforced through exercises given in the form of fill in the blanks (fig.1c). This shows that a traditional grammar teaching approach has been adopted where the exercises are mainly structural with inclusion of grammar-rule explanation.

In **Interact in English workbook** for teaching past and past perfect a short story is given in the form of a cloze passage (fig.2a). Students are required to complete the story first by choosing the correct forms from the bracket. Then they are asked to answer a few open ended questions related to the story. Finally, they are made to realize which tense they have used and then discover the rules for using past perfect integrated with simple past tense (Fig.2b).

The same procedure is used for teaching simple past tense along with past continuous (Fig. 2c). A short context-based incomplete passage is given and students are asked to complete it by choosing the correct form from the options. The options are in the form of list of structures in past and past continuous tense.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> part of the unit students are asked to work in pairs to complete a table. The 6<sup>th</sup> part of the unit encourages role play activity among the students for using past continuous tense in their conversation. Even the rest of the exercises in this book are based on similar patterns indicating a communicative approach to teaching grammar.

The comparison of excerpts from both the books clearly depicts the difference in their teaching methodology. The book by Wren & Martin is based on the presentation-practice-production method where the expectation for linguistic awareness is higher. Only one item of grammar is introduced at a time. Selection type questions are used in the form of gap filling exercises with few options from where the learners have to select the correct answer. The exercises consist of separate sentences which are out of context. It does not encourage any kind of communication in the classroom which turns the teaching-learning process into a boring task. The focus is mainly on the usage aspect rather than the actual use of past tense for daily purposes.

In comparison to Wren & Marin's book, 'Interact in English' is based on the modern CLT approach. Communicative activities are selectively placed in different sections of the chapter. Supply type questions are asked after the passages (figure 2a) to test the reading comprehension as well as to develop the writing skills of the learners. In addition, speaking practice is placed in which students have to work in pairs to complete the task (fig.2d & 2e). The teaching of simple past tense is integrated with the past perfect tense (fig.2b). The exercises are authentic and are based on a particular context rather than discrete sentences. Learners are encouraged to communicate in English through pair work or role play activities this makes learning grammar interesting and fun.

### **Limitations**

The application of teaching grammar communicatively in language classrooms involves some of the following challenges:

- Designing communicative activities and implementing them in language classrooms is a time taking process.
- Adopting different techniques and strategies for different classroom situations places extra burden on the teachers.
- Some criteria have to be set before the selection of appropriate classroom activities like the age and level of the learners, their linguistic and cultural background, trained teachers.
- Strength of the classroom also affects the implementation of grammar activities as it becomes difficult for the teacher to administer, manage and pay attention to towards the whole class.

### **Recommendations**

By looking at the complex nature of language and the deficiencies of the prominent language teaching methods, it becomes difficult to point out any one particular method to be adopted by all language teachers for every class. Therefore it is pertinent to suggest that the teaching of grammar should be blended with communicative activities in language classrooms. Teachers are advised to mould their teaching strategies to fit the interest and demand of the learners. They should not restrict themselves to only one specific method, they should rather allow the situation at any given time to determine the method or combination of methods to be used. Learners should be placed at the centre and they should be motivated to use the language more and more. Even the teachers should be tolerant towards learners' errors as they indicate that learners are building their communicative competence. A whole-to-part orientation instead of part-to-whole approach should be adopted. Greater attention should be paid to the social nature of learning rather than on students as separate individuals. Activities that require learners to organise their knowledge about language, negotiate meaning, interact with the peers, plan activities that require logical thinking and discovering grammar rules should be encouraged. Along with the emphasis on context, the focus should be on linking classroom teaching with the outside world as a means for promoting holistic learning.

### **Conclusion**

Despite some of the challenges it poses for language teachers, teaching grammar through CLT materials outweighs the difficulties encountered in its implementation. After going through the brief survey of literature and the comparisons of the excerpts from the grammar books it can be concluded that no single grammar teaching method is perfect enough to be adopted blindly in language classrooms. Since communicative methodology follows an integrative approach, it seems to be an effective move which would not only help the students to attain mastery over the target language structures but would also aid them in developing their overall competence. Communicative way of grammar teaching would thus be an excellent foundation for autonomous learning by letting the learners see the actual use of the structures, explore the given examples, discover the rules of grammar and deduce why certain rules are applied to specific examples. It would not only motivate the students to teach and

learn from each other but also to figure out things by themselves wherein the teacher can act as a guide, facilitator or even as participants in the class.

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