

Using Advance Organizers in the Teaching of Language Functions to Student Teachers of English

by

Dr. Mohammed Hassan Ibrahim

Associate Professor of TEFL

Faculty of Education

Zagazig University

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of using advance organizers in the teaching of language functions to prospective teachers of English. The subjects of the study were prospective English language teachers who were divided equally into two groups : the experimental group and the control one. Taught through the suggested approach to the teaching of language functions by using advance organizers, the experimental group students achieved better results than the control group students in performing language functions. Thus, the suggested approach proved to be effective.

Introduction :

There has been widespread confusion amongst teachers and students about the role that grammar has to play now that notional syllabuses and the communicative approach to language teaching have caused yet another revolution in the English language teaching world. However, there would be no sense in excluding grammar from the curriculum : the many functions that English can perform, and the many ways of communicating in the language, all more or less demand the application of those conventions that constitute its grammar.

As learners of English as a foreign language, EFL prospective teachers are supposed to be proficient in the subject-matter to be taught (linguistic competence) and in the necessary skills to impart that linguistic competence to students (pedagogic competence). It may be argued that the courses taught to EFL prospective teachers during their preparation programme enable them to acquire these two kinds of competences.

By examining the content of the academic subjects taught to EFL prospective teachers in Zagazig Faculty of Education, the researcher observed that it is more theoretical than practical. In other words, the materials do not help to improve the linguistic competence of the would-be teachers. The materials are more suitable for students of linguistics than for prospective teachers of English. There is no conversation course and there are no components in the programme that might help EFL prospective teachers to use language forms to express language functions. Hence, this study is an attempt to approach the teaching of reading comprehension in such a way that might enable EFL prospective teachers to use suitable language forms for expressing language functions.

Rationale for the study :

Language functions are not taught to EFL prospective teachers at Zagazig Faculty of Education. The assumption is that language functions are taught indirectly through the English language courses in literature and linguistics. However, the attention of EFL prospective teachers may not be drawn to how language forms are used to express language functions. It may be, as Heaton (1990) stated, that in our teaching, we may sometimes be tempted to concentrate on following the syllabus and ignore the needs of students. If we do this, a lot of our students may fail however thoroughly we have covered the syllabus.

Hence, this study tries to approach a reading text from a different teaching perspective, i. e., to approach it by drawing the students' attention not only to comprehending the text as may enable them to answer comprehension questions but also to using language forms that may help them to perform different language functions.

However, reading comprehension has been exploited as the core of this study so that the textual component may not be neglected or ignored while focusing on language functions.

The English language courses taught to EFL prospective teachers may enable them to master grammatical structures for their own sake. However, it is futile to construct perfectly grammatical sentences without being able to say what a learner wants or has to say at the moment when he feels compelled to say it.

The present study tries to make EFL prospective teachers conscious of the need to use English for definite purposes and to convey specific meanings through it.

Significance of the study :

The present study may be of value to EFL prospective teachers as it may enable them to learn to say in English what they want and need to say. For

example, they will learn that there are several ways of making a suggestion, ranging from formal to informal.

If the primary purpose of our instruction in English is to help EFL prospective teachers use English fluently and appropriately, it should be remembered that some classroom time should be devoted to teaching English functionally and to having EFL prospective teachers practise certain structural patterns.

In this way, the present study may be of use in helping EFL prospective teachers gain communicative competence in using the language.

This study may also be significant in that it shows how EFL prospective teachers become aware of how grammar works for a particular function.

By showing how English is used in different ways in a variety of everyday situations the approach used in teaching may enable EFL prospective teachers to deal with similar situations more effectively and confidently.

The study may also be of importance in the sense that it may draw the attention of materials producers and English language curriculum designers to the utility of incorporating a language functions component into their EFL teacher education programmes.

The study may also be important to EFL teachers as they may make use of its applications for classroom instructional activities.

Statement of the problem :

From the researcher's teaching experience he felt that EFL prospective teachers at Zagazig Faculty of Education had difficulty in using the right language forms to perform language functions. To give more evidence to this feeling, the researcher administered a language functions quiz (see Appendix 1) to a random sample of third year students (N = 30) in the English Section at Zagazig Faculty of Education.

It was evident from the students' answers to the questions that their standard in expressing language functions is very low.

Thus, the problem of this study lies in the inability of EFL prospective teachers to use the right language forms for the right language functions.

Specifically, the problem of this study can be stated in the following questions :

- (1) To what extent can EFL prospective teachers use different structural patterns to express one language function ?

- (2) How can EFL prospective teachers be helped to do so ?
- (3) What is the effect of using advance organizers on EFL prospective teachers' scores on a language functions test?
- (4) What is the effect of using advance organizers on EFL prospective teachers' scores on a reading comprehension test ?

Definition of terms :

For the purpose of this study, language functions are defined as ways in which structural patterns are used to express the user's purpose.

Advance organizers are defined as relevant introductory structural patterns introduced in advance of learning and presented at a higher level of abstraction, generality, and inclusiveness to help learners in using these patterns for expressing language functions.

Review of Literature

Three main points are covered in this section, namely, advance organizers and reading comprehension, language functions and language forms, and importance of learner's awareness.

Advance Organizers and Reading Comprehension :

The contemporary concept of advance organizers was developed by Ausubel (1968), who defined them as appropriately relevant and inclusive introductory materials introduced in advance of learning and presented at a higher level of abstraction, generality, and inclusiveness (p. 148).

In Ausubel's view, advance organizers help to provide ideational scaffolding for the stable incorporation and retention of the more detailed and differentiated material that follows. With its emphasis on enhancing reading comprehension and retention, research on advance organizers has spanned 30 years and dozens of studies.

Overall, advance organizers - especially if they are well learned and concrete rather than abstract and are followed by a moderate delay prior to reading the to-be-learned passage - seem to have a consistently positive effect on students' comprehension and retention of passage content (Corkill, Glover, Bruning, & Krug, 1988 ; Dinnel & Glover, 1985 ; Mayer, 1984).

But Snapp and Glover (1990) were the first to conduct three experiments to determine how the careful reading of advance organizers affected the answers

that students constructed for study questions. In the first experiment, those middle - school students who read and paraphrased an advance organizer prior to study correctly answered significantly more lower study questions than did students not encountering the organizer.

Later, in experiments 2 and 3, Snapp and Glover (1990) indicated that middle - school and college students who read and paraphrased the advance organizer constructed significantly better answers for higher order study questions than did those students who had no access to the organizers.

Although the main concentration of adjunct-question research has been on how the questions influence readers memory for the text material, an equally important outcome may be the quality of answers that students construct as they read through text. An examination of classroom situations suggested to Snapp and Glover (1990) that the accuracy and completeness of answers to adjunct study questions are important factors in students' reading comprehension course performance. This is because in a common pedagogical procedure, a teacher may assign a set of study questions for students to answer in writing as they read text materials. Students' answers to these questions then become the nexus of their study notes as they prepare for class discussion and examinations .

Hartley (1985) suggested that correct, complete answers to adjunct questions lead students to attain their teachers' instructional objectives, whereas poor quality answers almost certainly ensure poor performance .

It is obvious then that advance organizers, long observed to have a positive influence on readers' comprehension of text material (e.g., Mayer, 1989), also aid readers in answering adjunct questions.

Language Forms and Language functions :

Learning a language cannot be explained as learning single units of any kind, be they notions, functions, structures, or lexis. It is, as pointed out by Dubin and Olshtain (1987), some combination of all these together, along with the previous experience that the learner brings to the tasks, which accounts for language learning. As a result , they call for integrating notional and functional meaning with grammar, thematic content and lexis .

Both language forms and language functions are significant in the teaching / learning process. The foreign language learner does not merely have to learn the rules of the linguistic system itself, he also has to learn how to perform in the new language.

It may be, as Rivers (1991) thinks, that you can't keep people from having a grammar- a framework within which they operate .Without this framework

there would be no communication, because there would be no agreement about the accepted forms to convey meanings .

Hammond (1989) suggests that the teaching of grammar from a systemic functional perspective, in which learners are taught how language actually works at the level of text, has a number of major benefits. Principal among these is the fact that it can contribute to learner's literacy awareness. It also provides teachers and learners with a shared vocabulary for talking about language and the way it works.

Importance of learner's language Awareness :

Lier (1996) views language awareness as one of three foundational principles to form the basis of the language curriculum. The other two principles are autonomy and authenticity. However, Lier (1996) warns that though the three principles are examined one at a time, they only make sense as a unity. This means that each principle can only be understood in relation to the other two .

To explain the meaning of "awareness", Lier (1996) pointed out :

" To learn something new one must first notice it. This noticing is an awareness of its existence, obtained and enhanced by paying attention to it. Paying attention is focusing one's consciousness, or pointing one's perceptual powers in the right direction, and making mental 'energy' available for processing. Processing involves linking something that is perceived in the outside world to structures (patterns of connections) that exist in our mind. " (p. 11) .

Thus, language awareness is a crucial aspect of language learning. In addition, educational settings require awareness of learning strategies and processes, social awareness of classroom structures, awareness of learning and teaching styles, and so on .

Schmidt (1994 in Lier, 1996) distinguishes four common senses of consciousness in language learning as follows :

- (1) consciousness as intention. This means something like, 'on purpose'. In learning it highlights a contrast between intentional and incidental learning, i.e. learning one thing while doing another .
- (2) Consciousness as attention. This includes such notions as noticing and focusing .
- (3) Consciousness as awareness. In this sense, consciousness means 'having knowledge of, either perceptually or cognitively. In language learning it often refers to knowing rules, but it could also refer to noticing, in which case it will be hard to distinguish from consciousness as attention .

- (4) **Consciousness as control.** We often perform routine tasks (including language- using tasks) with a great deal of automaticity, and without conscious effort.

Moreover, Nunan (1991) regards grammatical instruction as consciousness-raising. He pointed out that consciousness raising rejects the split between conscious learning and subconscious acquisition. However, it also contrasts with traditional grammatical instruction in a number of important respects . In the first place, there is much greater attention paid to form- function relationships. It also attempts to situate the grammatical structures and elements in questions with a broader discorsal context. In addition, it takes an organic rather than linear view of learning, and therefore rejects the rather naive notion that once something has been taught it will of necessity have been learned.

Unlike traditional approaches to teaching grammar, then, grammatical consciousness raising fulfils a process rather than product role : it is a facilitator, a means to an end rather than an end in itself .

Taking a rather different line, Sharwood- Smith (1988) argues that traditional instruction is one type of conscionsness- raising, and draws attention to, the distinction between explicit knowledge and 'implicit,' suggesting that consciousness- raising can be both highly explicit (referring to a conscious, analytical awareness of the formal features of the language) or largely implicit (referring to an intuitive feeling for what is correct) .

Dealing with systemic functional linguistics, Nunan (1991) argues that language exists in context, and that the context and purposes for which language is used will determine the ways in which language is realised at the levels of text and grammar.

While there is no one - to - one relationship between form and function, the relationship between the two are not arbitrary. Therefore, there are principled links between form and function .

Methodology

Subjects :

The sample of this study was chosen randomly from third year students in the English section at Zagazig Faculty of Education .The subjects were divided into two groups : the experimental group (30 students) and the control group (30 students). No one of the thirty students who were involved in the pilot study for evidencing the problem took part in the experimental phase of the study .

Instruments :

1. A language functions test (see Appendix 2)
2. A reading comprehension test (see Appendix 3)

Description of the language functions test :

The purpose of this test was to assess the students' ability to use the appropriate language forms for expressing language functions .

The test is divided into five sections, each of which requires the students to use the appropriate structural patterns to express a language function, such as giving advice, making arrangements or making suggestions.

Section One of the test covers the language forms used to give advice and those used to give advice and opinion together. Section Two is devoted to the language forms used to make arrangements and those used to extend invitations. Section Three covers the language forms used to talk about permission .

Section Four covers the structural patterns used to make suggestions. Section Five covers the language forms used to make statements of complaint and those used to make statements of protest, apology and excuses .

Description of the Reading Comprehension test :

The purpose of this test was to assess the students' ability to understand and take information out of the text given .

The test demanded the students to answer three questions on each of the areas of vocabulary, writing points, context questions. The students were also required to summarize the three arguments raised in the reading passage.

The rationale for using this test in this study was that language forms and language functions are inseparable and both of them should be contextualized .

Validity of the tests :

Both the Language Functions Test and the Reading Comprehension Test were validated by submitting them to a panel of judges who suggested that some items be changed and modified. Their suggestions were considered and modifications were made .

Besides, the intrinsic validity of the two tests were realised by using the square root formula of the coefficient of stability : $V = \sqrt{RAA}$, where V stands for intrinsic validity and RAA stands for the reliability coefficient of the test. The intrinsic validity coefficient for the Language Functions Test and the Reading Comprehension Test were found to be 0.88 and 0.83 respectively .

Reliability of the tests :

To determine the reliability of the two tests, the test- retest technique was used. Before administering the tests to the subjects of the experiment, eight students (not in experiment) were given the tests and two weeks later, they were given the same tests. The resulting coefficients of stability were found to be 0.70 and 0.70 for the Language Functions Test and the Reading Comprehension Test respectively .

Scoring the tests :

The testee's scores were identified according to his performance on the two tests. One mark was given for each correct answer to any of the questions included in the tests. No mark was given for wrong answers .

The answer was considered correct on the Language Functions Test if the testee wrote the appropriate language form for the language function required.

The answer was viewed to be correct on the Reading Comprehension Test if the testee gave the appropriate factual information for the question raised .

For both tests, minor errors in spelling and mechanics were overlooked. For the Language Functions Test, the focus was on producing the language form appropriate for the language function. For the Reading Comprehension Test, the focus was on providing information or ideas that might indicate the testee's understanding of the text or his recognition of the meaning of vocabulary items .

Instructional Procedures :

The language functions covered by both groups were the following :

- 1- Giving Advice
- 2- Giving Advice and Opinion
- 3- Making Arrangements
- 4- Extending Invitations
- 5- Talking about Permission
- 6- Making Suggestions
- 7- Expressing a Complaint
- 8- Expressing Protest and Warning
- 9- Expressing Apology and Excuses
- 10- Explaining and Justifying Plans

The above language functions were taught to both the control group and the experimental group students through comprehension texts (see Appendix 4). However, the researcher taught the two groups. His role in teaching both groups was that of a facilitator, i.e., asking students to read the comprehension texts by themselves on a self-study basis. In case of encountering any difficulty in the reading texts, students of both groups were encouraged to ask the teacher (the researcher) for help. The rationale for adopting the self-study strategy was the truism that learning has to be done by the learner. This means, as Lier (1996) stated, that teaching cannot cause or force learning, at best it can encourage and guide learning.

The only difference between teaching the experimental group students and teaching the control group students was that language forms were introduced to the experimental group students before they read the text. Besides, they were asked by the researcher to pay particular attention to these language forms because they would appear in the text later. The language forms presented to the experimental group students were regarded as advance organizers, i.e., relevant introductory structural patterns introduced before reading the text.

Reading the text thoroughly, the experimental group students were required to answer a number of comprehension questions and to answer one or two questions on the language functions that could be expressed by using the language forms introduced in the organizer before the text.

On the other hand, no advance organizers were presented to the control group students. But they were asked, as they used to be taught, to read the text thoroughly, and if facing any difficulty, ask the teacher for help. Their attention was not drawn to the language forms appearing in the text before they read it.

Similar to the experimental group students, the control group students were asked to answer the same comprehension questions to be answered by the experimental group students. But they were not required to do any exercise on language functions as was the case with the experimental group students.

Five reading texts were studied by both groups. Each text, whether with an advance organizer or without it, took 75 minutes. The experiment lasted for ten weeks.

Statistical Treatment :

To ascertain whether there were significant differences in the performance of both the experimental group students and the control group students on the pre-post test of language functions, the T-test technique was used.

Table (1)

Group	Mean of Language Functions Pre-test	Mean of Language Functions Post-test	T
Experimental	4.1	24.93	0.01
Control	2.93	4.07	0.01

The above table shows that there were significant differences at .01 level in the performance of the experimental group students on both the pre- test and post test of language functions in favour of their performance on the post test. The table also shows that there were significant differences at .01 level in the performance of the control group students on both the pre-test and post- test of Language Functions in favour of their performance on the post- test.

For computing the effectiveness of the suggested approach, the mean scores of the students were found and the following formula was used afterwards :

$$\text{effectiveness} = \frac{X - Y}{D - Y} + \frac{X - Y}{D}$$

Where :

x = mean of students' scores on the post- test.

y = mean of students' score on the pre- test.

d = total mark of the test.

The degree of effectiveness was found to be high enough (.80) and the ratio of increase for the experimental group was also found to be 1.49, which is a reasonable ratio for progress.

The same formula above was used to compute the ratio of increase for the control group students.

The ratio of increase for the control group on the Language Functions Test was found to be very low (.078).

The following table shows the mean of the students' scores on the Language Functions Test and the ratio of increase for both groups.

Table (2)

Group	Mean of Scores on the Pre-test	Mean of Scores on the Post-test	Total Mark	Ratio of Increase
Experimental	4.1	24.93	30	1.49
Control	2.93	4.07	30	0.078

The above table shows that the ratio of increase for the experimental group in terms of language functions is greater than that of the control group.

To find out whether there is a statistically significant difference between the means of the post- test scores on language functions for both the experimental and control groups, the comparison technique was used.

Table (3)

Control Group	Experimental Group	T	P
4.07	24.93	56.38	0.01

The above table shows that there is a statistically significant difference between the means of the post- test scores on language functions for the control and experimental groups, (4.07 and 24.93 respectively). The two groups scored differently on the Language Functions post- test. The mean score of the experimental group students was very high in comparison with that of the control group.

To find out whether there were significant differences in the performance of both the experimental group students and the control group students on the Reading Comprehension pre-post test, the T- test technique was used.

Table (4)

Group	Mean of Reading Comprehension Pre-test	Mean of Reading Comprehension Post-test	T
Experimental	20.9	24.17	0.01
Control	20.1	23.7	0.01

The above table shows that there were significant differences at .01 level in the performance of the experimental group students on both the pre- test and post- test of Reading Comprehension in favour of their performance on the post- test. The table also shows that there were significant differences at .01 level in the performance of the control group students on both the pre- test and post - test of Reading Comprehension in favour of their performance on the post- test.

For computing the effectiveness of the experimental technique, the mean

scores of the students were found and Black's equation for the ratio of increase was computed.

The degree of effectiveness of the suggested approach for reading comprehension was found to be very low, .36 and the ratio of increase was found to be .47, very far below the ratio determined by Black for effectiveness.

The ratio of increase for the control group on the Reading Comprehension Test was found to be far more below (.33).

The following table shows the mean of the students' scores on the Reading Comprehension Test and the ratio of increase for both groups.

Table (5)

Group	Mean of Scores on the Pre-test	Mean of Scores on the Post-test	Total Mark	Ratio of Increase
Experimental	20.9	24.17	30	.47
Control	20.1	23.7	30	.33

The above table shows that the ratio of increase for the experimental group in terms of reading comprehension is not much more greater than that of the control group.

To find out whether there is a statistically significant difference between the means of the post- test scores on reading comprehension for both the experimental and control groups, the comparison technique was used.

Table (6)

Control Group	Experimental Group	T	P
23.7	24.17	1.28	0.01

The above table shows that the difference between the means of the post-test scores on reading comprehension for the control and experimental groups was not significant.

Research Findings :

As a result of the statistical techniques employed in this study, the following findings were revealed :

- (1) There were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group students on the pre- test and their scores on the post- test of language functions at 0.05 level in favour of their scores on the post- test.
- (2) There were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the control group students on the pre- test and their scores on the post- test of language functions at 0.01 level in favour of their scores on the post- test.
- (3) There were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group students (i. e., who were acquainted with advance organizer language forms) and the control group students (i. e., who were not acquainted with advance organizer language forms) at 0.01 in terms of the ratio of increase in expressing language functions in favour of the experimental group.
- (4) There were no statistically significant differences between the means of the post- test scores on reading comprehension for both the experimental and control groups.
- (5) The suggested approach was found to be effective for the teaching of language functions.
- (6) The suggested approach was not effective in the teaching of reading comprehension.

Discussion of Results :

The results of this study indicate the effectiveness of using advance organizers in the teaching of language functions. The experimental group students (i. e., who were acquainted with advance organizer language forms) scored significantly higher than did the control group students. Besides, the ratio of increase in the experimental group students' expression of language functions was significantly higher than that in the control group students. This may be due to the use of language forms in advance with the experimental group students.

Again, this may support the prediction that students who were exposed to the language functions organizer prior to their appearance in a reading text would perform better on a language functions test than would students in the control condition.

However, this does not mean, as Yalden (1987) stated, that courses should be built on teaching language functions as their core. But they should incorporate language functions into the language curriculum in one way or another.

Although the performance of the control group students improved on the post-test, the improvement is much more less than satisfactory. This may be due to the fact that the students' attention was not drawn to the way language forms might be used to express language functions.

The results also indicate that the suggested approach is not effective in the teaching of reading comprehension. This may be due to focusing on language forms, not on factual information. Paraphrasing and presenting main ideas prior to a reading text may contribute more to reading comprehension than may the exposition of students to language forms.

However, the focus of this study was not much more on reading comprehension than on language forms.

Recommendations :

According to the findings of this study the researcher recommends that in the teaching of reading comprehension the students' attention should not only be drawn to the factual information used in a reading text, but also to the way language forms are used to perform language functions.

It is also recommended that a language functions component should be incorporated into the programmes of EFL teacher education.

The implications of this study for classroom instructional activities should be exploited by EFL teachers.

An eclectic approach to the teaching of reading comprehension is recommended : an approach which focuses on both information and language, or content and form.

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