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The Use of Body Language and Non-verbal Communication in Teaching Grammar

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Abstract

This is an extract from a Ph.D. thesis entitled "The Impact of Non-verbal Communication in Conveying Meaning in English for EFL Classrooms". It aims solely at investigating the use of non-verbal communication and body language and their fundamental roles in facilitating English grammar to ESL students. It sheds light on the very significant points that non-verbal communication acts in making English grammar lessons easy and smooth for both teachers and students. The study follows the quantitative and the descriptive methods and the data have been analyzed statistically using the SPSS program. It hypothesizes that (Non-verbal communication helps EFL teachers to convey the grammar meaning). Five statements have been emerged out of the hypothesis to form the questionnaire (see table 2). After analyzing the data, the results reveal that the average of most agreeable statements are 61% and 27.6 strongly agree and agree consecutively. While the least percentages are 8% and 1.8% which are undecided and disagree with 0% of strongly disagree. Based on the obtained results, a conclusion can be drawn that the study is consistent and valid.

Keywords: Faculty of Higher Studies, English Department, Sudan University of Science and Technology, Sudan College of Graduate Studies, English Department, Nile Valley University, Sudan Body Language, Non-verbal Communication, Teaching Grammar

The use of body language and Paralanguage in teaching grammar

Introduction

This paper aims at highlighting and exploring the use of body language in teaching English language grammar. Experts have explored other methods and approaches of teaching grammar, but the means and technique of using body language and paralinguistic have not been addressed sufficiently in explaining the English grammar. The approaches that scholars focus on are mainly; deductive and inductive approaches, both of which correspond to explicit and implicit teaching of grammar. In the former approach, the target language is presented and follows with examples highlighting the target language. However, in the latter approach which is implicit one, the teacher tries to elicit the grammar rules from the students by providing a text that includes the target language. Here the role of the teacher is to help the learners to discover the rules by themselves. Another approach for teaching English grammar, is the communicative approach. This approach is not far differ from the inductive and implicit approaches. In this approach the focus is in communication rather than in accuracy where the teacher provides the students with a communicative contexts and lets them engage in meaningful task to use the authentic language. The teacher has to consider the students' needs and age when providing them with the context and text in order to be very effective. Considering all these approaches, this paper attempts to utilize body language and paralanguage in making the meaning of grammar clearer without undergoing the students in deep thinking. For example, when presenting present continues tense the teacher may just walk and asks the students about what s/he is doing. Moreover, s/he can check students' understanding by CCQs such as "is this happening now, past or future?". Another example utilizing body language in explaining grammar, is the explanation of the prepositions of places. The teacher can use body language to such kind of grammar. For instance, s/he can put a small ball over a table and asks the learner about the position of the table. The examples extend to adverbs, adjectives, action verbs and many more. As for the latter part of the title of this article (paralanguage), the teacher can elaborate type of sentences through tone of voice and intonation. Khalifa and Faddal (2017, 295) outlined that paralanguage is part of non-verbal communication and it is used as means to express thoughts and feelings through body language and voice tones. "*Paralanguage involves verbal and nonverbal aspects of speech that influence meaning, including tone, intensity, pausing, and even silence.*"

Materials and Methods

The quantitative and descriptive method have been followed in shaping out this article. A questionnaire has been distributed to English language students to check their opinions about the efficacy of using body language and paralanguage in explaining some English grammatical aspects. It has been hypothesized that paralanguage assists English language instructors in making meaning of English grammar crystal clear. Based on the hypothesis the questions for the questionnaire have been generated for students. The questionnaire was designed in a simple straightforward language and followed the Likert-5-scale points in order to give the respondents chance to opt the degree of which they agree with. The data have been analyzed statistically by using (IBM SPSS 25). Tables have drawn to indicate the scores for representatives (students). The questionnaire was set to measure the extension that body language plays in making meaning of (shape-related words, sizes, direction-related words, and reinforcing the basic meaning of words) clear.

Understanding Body Language and Paralanguage

Communication is never limited in verbal words. However, there are other types and means of communication, one of these types of communication is body language or non-verbal communication. This type of communication should be used in the classroom deliberately for many purposes. According to Liu (2019, 962) English language teachers should not only rely on oral and written language when delivering information to their



students, but also utilize paralanguage to facilitate the teaching process. Moreover, it improves the teaching quality. Pratolo (2019, 121) suggests that acquiring paralanguage as supplementary of oral communication is very important to send and understand messages precisely because some people misunderstand others when communication happens only in written or verbal forms. According to Bedir and Daskan (2023, 116) the main reason of using body language is to convey the intended meaning properly because uttering words alone is not enough for grasping the full meaning.

As far as it concerns with grammar, body language and paralanguage are used to effectively enhance the understanding of the grammar rules of foreign languages to students. It helps in clarifying different aspects of English grammar such as preposition of places, different types of tenses, adjectives, action verbs, and pronouns ...etc. Matsumoto and Dobs (2016, 5) state that there was no sufficient attention of initial research regarding the investigation of gesture in teaching various aspects of grammar. However, the focus was solely on the context of lexical items elaboration. In their paper they focus on using gesture in teaching various aspects of grammar. Since gesture is considered as part of body language, it can be cited here a reference. For instance, metaphoric gestures play a basic role in portrayal of grammatical concepts of locative prepositions, simple past tense, superlatives, degrees of comparison, demonstrative pronouns, and progressive aspect. Body language plays a major role in providing clear instructions to students in classrooms when accompanying with verbal language. Khuman, P. (2024, 90) asserts it that multimodal communication makes the instructional delivery more effective. It can be noticeable that when the teacher gives the instruction s/he always uses hand gestures and body language to make the instructions clear. For example, in matching exercises the teacher moves his/her hand to show the students how to do the task. Case (2023) in her article gives intensive information about the practical use of body language and its efficacy in teaching grammar points. She argues that teachers commonly depend on timelines and techniques to elicit, explain, and practice grammar. However, utilizing body language is the best way covering such. Through body language, students can absorb the target language.

Advantages of Using Body Language and Paralanguage in Teaching Grammar

There has been a large consensus of teaching English grammar among linguists and that because of its importance particularly in foreign language acquisition. There has been a debate of which approach is effective of teaching grammar. This paper aims to scrutinize each approach and highlights the advantages of body language in explaining grammar points which can be represented in students' engagement, contextualization, memorability, and visual reinforcement. The common approaches of teaching English grammar have been known as implicit or explicit, deductive or inductive, and communicative approaches as indicated above. Each of the above mentioned approaches has its positive and negative sides and can be applicable to teaching grammar in accordance with the level and needs of the students. To give brief account of each approach, Altun and Dinçer (2020, 97) state that explicit approach of teaching grammar remained important for years in spite of being old. In explicit approach, rules are shown then followed by examples. Meaning that, the focus is being put on the forms rather than on meaning which is considered passive learning according to current trends of teaching approaches. On the other hand, implicit teaching method of grammar focuses on the meaning of the task and the form is deduced by the students.

Considering all these approaches, body language can be combined with the verbal words to reinforce and give a clear image of the grammatical points. Teaching grammar through body language has its properties and features. It helps students discover the language as language is being portrayed in contexts. Alem, D. (2021, 8) confirms it that *"teaching grammar in context will help learners to acquire nature of the language which facilitate their understanding of the language"*. He also adds that one of the advantages of teaching grammar contextually is that; it exposes students to the target language in an authentic setting where they can practice it naturally. This can be portrayed in the actions of the teacher when presenting new grammar items through his body language. For instance, walking slowly to present the adverb "slowly". By utilizing body language, the teacher can keep the students motivated and make the class dynamic. Bedir and Daskan (2023, 117) state that using body language in the classroom raises students' motivation. Teachers can employ it to support their students. For example, a teacher can walk around the class to explain present continues and asks the students about what s/he is doing to elicit the target language. A teacher can also ask one of the students in the class to do something such "stand-up" and similarly asks the rest of the class about what their colleague is doing to elicit the intended tense. By doing so the class will be vivid and dynamic.

To sum up, body language has great advantages in teaching English grammar and teachers can employ it to make grammar lessons memorable, engaged, meaningful by contextualizing the lesson, and reinforce students' understanding by exhibiting the visual cues.

Body Language as a Tool of Eliciting Grammar Points

One of the important processes in language teaching is elicitation, whereby a teacher tries to get information from the learners rather than giving it directly to them. Teachers use the elicitation technique to let their students participate in the lesson and make the class alive. Ayouni, N., & Sukny, M. El. (as cited in Rastari et al. 2023, 83) outlined that elicitation is a technique that teachers use to make their teaching more student-centered that can be employed to engage students in the lesson taught. Halim and Halim (2020, 116) defined it as *"The process by which a teacher tries to get all the language and other answers from the students before finally giving them the solution"*. English language teachers use this technique to help their students in learning the four skills and language system (vocabulary and grammar). The focus in this article will be on the latter part of language system

(Grammar). However, teachers seem to use elicitation that based on the questions only without exposing their learners to any further aids to supplement their questions.

English language teachers can utilize their body language accompanying with questions as a tool to elicit the grammatical concepts and there are a plethora of examples of doing so. For example, a teacher walk fast and ask "how am I walking?" to elicit the adverb "fast". A teacher can also step forward when tries to convey action that will happen in the future and ask the students, "is this happening now, in the past, or will happen in the future?" to elicit the future simple. The same could be done when teaching past simple, the teacher can step backward to indicate that the action happened in the past and asks the students about the time of the action to elicit the past simple tense. As for the present continuous, the teacher can perform live action such "drinking", "writing", or "reading" and elicit the target language by asking the students "what am I doing?". The elicitation is not only limited to tenses, but also other grammatical aspects can be elicited through body language or paralanguage such as comparative and superlative, prepositions ... etc. as indicated earlier. It is also never limited to teacher's body language or paralanguage, but the teacher can show any motions of human body or any living creature and elicit the targeted grammatical aspects. For example, a teacher can project an animal or human that walking slowly to elicit the adverb "slowly" and so on.

Integrating Body language from Theory to Practice to Teaching Grammar

In fact, theories seem easy to be written or talk about. However, obstacles reveal when trying to implement them. Body language can be implemented for teaching many grammatical aspects if not all. It can be employed in different forms according to the grammatical aspects that need to be explained. A teacher can use various types of body language to explain or presents a variety of grammatical points. For instance, s/he can employ hand gestures to explain and reinforce understanding of different kinds of tenses, facial expressions to explain emotional adjectives, emblem gestures to explain (some pronouns, possessive adjectives, and passive and active voices), miming to explain action verbs and adverbs ...etc.

As far as it concerns applying body language to teach the mentioned grammatical aspects, thorough examples will be provided in this section. Beginning by subject pronouns, hand gestures is the best method to be used for teaching them. For example, the pronoun "*I*" a teacher can simply point to him/herself by his forefront finger to convey the meaning. The same method can followed to illustrate the pronouns "*he*", "*she*", and "*it*". For the pronoun "*we*" a teacher can use hand gestures like drawing a circle around some students including him/herself to illustrate it. Likewise suits the pronoun "*they*", but this time the teacher excludes him/herself. As for possessive adjectives, a teacher can hold any object for example a pen and make closer to his/her chest the demonstrate "*My* pen.". Similar action could followed to facilitate the understanding of "*his*", "*her*", "*their*", and "*its*". Regarding eliciting and explaining the passive voice, a teacher can employ two different mimes to demonstrate this. For example, active sentence "I hit the door" mime that you hit the door. Passive sentence, "I was hit by the ball" mime that you was hit by the ball. The teacher could follow the same technique to propositions of place. For instance, the teacher can simply place a small ball on the table to elaborate the accurate meaning of "*on*", and put it under the table to show that it is "*under*" and in the box to explain the preposition "*in*" ...etc.

Concerning the former point which has been raised earlier in this section i.e. (using hand gestures to explain and reinforce understanding of different kinds of tenses). Matsumoto and Dobs (2016, 11) in their empirical study emphasised that a teacher uses backward gesture synchronized with the phrases (last week, last summer ...etc.) to teach the simple past tense. Adapting forward gesture accompanied with the future phrases to explain the future tense. They revealed that the teacher uses incomplete statements along with the gestures to elicit the responses from students. They concluded that "*deictic gestures associated with past and future tenses may be conventionalized in the classroom and readily employed by instructors, serving as important interactional resources for teaching tenses*"

Results and Discussion

The questionnaire has been distributed to 99 students and it has been analyzed as follows:

Table (1) Statistical Result of the Participants by Age

Gender	Number	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	ST Deviation	P-value
Male	47	18	22	19.67	0.79	0.312
Female	52	18	30	19.94	1.61	

As it can be noted that the above table displays the total number of the respondents which is 99 students in total. The majority of the participants are females representing 52 with the minimum age 18 and maximum age 30. A mean of 19.94 and 19.67 was drawn for both females and males respectively. On the other hand, the total number of the male students is 47 with minimum age 18 and maximum 22.

Table (2) The Frequency of Responses to the questionnaire

No	Items	SA	A	UN	DA	SD	Total
1	I understand word's class more quickly when the teacher uses changes in his voice. E.g. noun, verb...	67	22	9	1	0	99



2	I understand the types of sentences accurately when the teacher uses intonation. E.g. question or positive.	64	23	9	3	0	99
3	I determine the real meaning of words easily when the teacher uses vocal cues.	49	38	9	2	0	99
4	The teacher's hand gestures help me understand prepositions of places. E.g. in, on, over...	60	26	9	2	0	99
5	The teacher's body language helps me understand the meaning of adverbs of manner. E.g. slowly, quickly...	65	29	4	1	0	99
	Average	61	27.6	8	1.8	0	

Table (2) shows the frequencies of the statements in the questionnaire that have been opted by respondents to which they agree with. It is apparent that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed with all of the statements, but only statement (3) the 49 of the respondents strongly agreed with which is considered high compared with the other options. On the other hand, none of the participants strongly disagreed with any of the statements of the questionnaire. As for the understanding of word classes through the tone of voice, 67 of the respondents strongly agree with that which considered the highest frequency of all. 65 of the respondents strongly agree that the teacher's body language helps them understand the meaning of adverbs of manner. Regarding the understanding the type of sentences, 64 of the participants strongly agree that they understand it use of teacher's intonation, while 23 out 99 agree with that and 9 of them undecided. However, 2 disagree. Concerning the understanding of prepositions of places through body language, 60 of the participants strongly with that statement, while 26 agree and 9 undecided. However, 2 disagree.

The average of the respondents who strongly agreed with all statements of the questionnaire is 61, while 27.6 agreed with all statements. However, 8 of the participants undecided and 1.8 disagreed. On the other hand, none of the participants strongly disagreed.

Conclusion

To sum up, non-verbal communication and body language can be utilized effectively in facilitating English grammar lessons and making the lesson fun, live, and more enjoyable. Non-verbal communication not only facilitates the grammar lesson for students, but also helps teachers in assessing students' grammar accompanying it in concept checking questions. Moreover, non-verbal communication combines both techniques of teaching English grammar (i-e the implicit and the explicit techniques) meaning that it can be the medium for both techniques when teaching students new English grammar lessons. As for the explicit method, a teacher can write the form of the target grammar in a sentence and performs that through body language to help students get the right meaning; whereas for implicit method, a teacher can perform the action of the target grammar points and elicit the meaning from the students. Non-verbal communication relates between the traditional teaching techniques and the modern ones and that can be noted clearly in the most updated studies of the role of non-verbal communication and body language in language teaching. Therefore this article scrutinizes the advantages of using non-verbal communication and transmitted theories into practice.

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