

The Evolution of Asian ESL Students' Perceptions of Grammar: Case Studies of 9 Learners

Sunkyong Yoon, Kyoko Hoshi, and Hong Zhao
Carleton University

Introduction

The debate on issues, such as whether to teach grammar, how to teach it, and what effect will be achieved if certain linguistic form is taught in certain way, has been one of the central issues in second language acquisition research and teaching practice. Though some research leads to the conclusion that grammar instruction does promote learners' (i.e. old children, adolescents, and adults in particular) interlanguage development (Celce-Murcia, 1991; Ellis, 2002; Gascoigne, 2002; Long, 2002), many research findings regarding most details of these issues are either controversial or not solid enough to provide meaningful scaffolding for teaching practice (Ellis, 1998). Whereas grammar was taught as content or a major component of the syllabus in traditional language teaching approaches such as grammar-translation and audiolingual approach, it is in a completely different instructional place in communicative approach that was advanced in the 1970s and dominates many English as a second language (ESL) classes today. According to Celce-Murcia, since communicative approach views language as an instrument of communication, language teaching is aimed at enabling learners to use language communicatively and courses should thus be "organized around subject matter, tasks/projects, or semantic notions and/or pragmatic functions" instead of grammar. Then what does grammar instruction mean to learners currently learning English in English as the primary language environment as opposed to English as a foreign language environment? Therefore, what place grammar learning and teaching should take in the communicative approach calls for our understanding of ESL learners' perceptions of grammar that can not be provided by empirical research alone. This paper will then focus on how Asian learners' perceptions of grammar and grammar instruction change after they are exposed to English in ESL settings for a certain period of time. That process of change is believed to be beneficial to both EFL and ESL teaching practice.

Literature review: Background of the study*Grammar and communication in EFL contexts*

Although Larsen-Freeman (1992) states that the relationship between grammar and communication is “non-hierarchical,” the balance of the two differs crucially in English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts (Anderson, 1993; Burgess & Etherington, 2002; Li, 1998; Rao, 2002; Sakui & Gaies, 1999; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999; Savignon & Wang, 2003). While the ultimate purpose of second language (L2) instruction in ESL is to develop students’ communicative competence and linguistic competence to prepare them for the “real life” (Burgess & Etherington, 2002) in the English speaking environment, students rarely have a chance to use English outside the classroom in EFL, and the aim of the English class; to equip students with grammar knowledge for the university entrance exam (Li, 1998; Rao, 2002), determines how the L2 is instructed in the classroom. Whereas the concept of focus on form (Ellis, 1999; Long, 1991) is now used among ESL instructors to draw learners’ attention to grammatical features in the communicative classroom, the concern among EFL teachers is that how to make the heavily grammar-oriented classroom communicative (Anderson, 1993).

Reflecting the need for communicative competence in English in the age of globalization, EFL countries have been implementing communicative language teaching (CLT) in language classrooms (Rao, 2002; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999). For example, in South Korea, the government has decided to shift the traditional teaching method to CLT in secondary schools by the year 2010 (Li, 1998). The characteristics of CLT are: meaning-based instruction, authentic materials, fulfilling students’ real-life needs, small-group works, task-based activities, and learner-centeredness (Li, 1998; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999). Although these features are common in ESL classrooms (Burgess & Etherington, 2002), the change is slow in EFL contexts due to teachers’ lack of proficiency in English, their traditional attitude toward language teaching, the lack of authentic materials, the class size, socio-cultural environments, students’ lack of motivation, and so forth (Anderson, 1993; Li, 1998; Rao, 2002). The language teaching literature indicates that EFL students in these countries, as a result, are very familiar with traditional classroom practices and beliefs, and when they move to an ESL program in an English-speaking country, must revise their views.

Numerous researchers have investigated what EFL students think about their communicative competence and the grammar-oriented English classes, as well as teachers’ beliefs about language learning and teaching (Borg, 1998, 1999; Burgess & Etherington, 2002; Li, 1998; Rao, 2002; Sakui & Gaies, 1999; Savignon & Wang, 2003). The following section reviews a

number of qualitative and quantitative studies focusing on Asian contexts to elicit EFL students' views of their classrooms.

Asian Students' beliefs about L2 learning

Rao's study (2002) describes a group of Chinese students who prefer traditional teaching methods to modern ones. Rao administered a questionnaire to 30 university students in China to investigate their perceptions of communicative activities such as task-based activities and discussions, and non-communicative activities such as audiolingual drills and a grammar rule explanation by the teacher. The results show that whereas 8 of them liked communicative activities, 22 of them favored non-communicative activities. Nevertheless, it is important to note that all of them answered that the combination of the two would be the best way. In the interviews, students commented:

"We are Chinese students learning English in China. Though we do need, to a certain degree, communicative activities to help us improve our communicative competence in the classroom, we should not discontinue the use of our traditional classroom activities". (Liang Qian, 11 October 1999)

"I know it is very important to be able to communicate in English. But if I want to graduate from university, I have to pass all kinds of examinations, which are all grammar-based. That is why I like to work on English grammar". (Zhang Jianse, 15 October 1999)

In EFL contexts, students study English for different purposes such as exams and future careers (Sakui & Gaies, 1999). Since the students in this study are university students who are more serious about studying for those purposes than secondary school students, it is understandable that they prefer grammatical activities to communicative activities.

Interestingly, Taiwanese students' attitudes and beliefs in Savignon & Wang's study (2003) are very different from the above. The researchers distributed a questionnaire to 174 university students to find out about their attitudes and beliefs on L2 learning in secondary school days. The results illustrate that even though classroom practices in secondary schools were strictly grammar-oriented, students wanted communication-based language learning more and they had negative feelings toward the classroom practice. An interesting finding of this study is that the learners who began to learn English at private institutes with native speakers prior to the formal school instruction expressed stronger negative attitudes on the form-focused

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instruction. Nowadays, Asian parents are getting more and more enthusiastic about English education for their children, so the parents' beliefs along with the students' beliefs will influence the way the L2 is instructed at secondary schools.

Sakui & Gaies's wide scale study (1999) of Japanese learners' beliefs about language learning is very insightful. 1296 university students answered the questionnaire which consists of 45 items. The extract below explicitly shows that the traditional English class is not satisfying the students' needs.

Mean*	Items
3.52	English conversation class should be enjoyable*1
2.99	If I learn to speak English very well, I will have many opportunities to use it*2
2.96	I am studying English only pass the entrance examination*3
2.94	If I learn to speak English very well, it will help me get a good job*4
2.83	I would feel embarrassed to speak English in front of other students
2.75	I can improve my English by speaking English with my classmates*5
2.60	I make mistakes because I do not study enough
2.09	I believe someday I will speak English very well
2.04	I can learn to improve my English only from native speakers of English*6
1.85	I am satisfied with the English education I received*7
1.83	Japanese are good at learning foreign languages*8
1.82	In order to learn to read and write English very well, English education at school is enough*9
1.64	In order to speak and understand English very well, English education at school is enough*10
1.64	Considering the amount of time I have studied English, I am satisfied with my progress**1

*Means are based on a four-point scale (1-strongly disagree, 2-disagree, 3-agree, 4-strongly agree) n=1296

The results show that the students' expectations to communicative language learning is high (*1,2,5), the EFL students want to study English for different purposes (*2,3,4), and, obviously, students are not happy with the language instruction they have received (*7,8,9,10,11). Furthermore, the researchers interviewed some of the students, and 2 students were asked about their preference of teachers (*6). Both of them answered that they don't care even if the teacher was not a native speaker of English as long as the teacher can speak English clearly enough with an appropriate speed.

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Littlewood's study (2000) questions if Asian students still believe their teachers as a "fount of knowledge." Littlewood compared the viewpoints of 2307 students from various Asian countries with that of 349 European students. He finds that the students' dispositions are not very different in the two backgrounds and concludes that Asian students want to explore their knowledge themselves rather than be "spoonfed" by the teacher.

The implication among these studies is that Asian students seem to be ready to participate in CLT classes, and what they are looking for is both communicative competence and linguistic competence of English. Rao (2002) argues that the important thing is the balance between grammar teaching and communicative teaching. Since CLT is not banning grammar teaching (Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999), teachers can try and see if the integration of the two works or not. However, EFL teachers' beliefs in the next part show quite a different picture.

EFL teachers' beliefs on L2 instruction

Li's study (1998) illustrates that EFL teachers are hesitant to implement CLT because of their lack of speaking proficiency in English and other factors. Li examined 18 South Korean secondary school teachers' perceptions about communicative language teaching with a questionnaire and interviews. The perceived difficulties are in the chart below:

Source	Difficulty
Teacher	Deficiency in spoken English Deficiency in strategic and sociolinguistic competence Lack of training in CLT Few opportunities for retraining in CLT Misconceptions about CLT Little time for developing materials for communicative classes
Students	Low English proficiency Lack of motivation for developing communicative competence Resistance in class participation
Educational System	Large classes Grammar-based examinations Insufficient funding Lack of support
CLT	Inadequate account of EFL teaching Lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments

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These difficulties are common in EFL contexts (Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999), and the language teachers are struggling between the policy change and the reality they are facing. In the interviews, the teachers commented;

“Before attending this teacher education program, I thought that communicative language teaching does not teach grammar and only teaches speaking. I didn’t think that was a good way to teach our kids English. I think grammar should be part of it, at least for our kids. After all, they have to pass a lot of exams and there is a lot of grammar in them”. (Myong-Sook, July 30, 1995)

“We have a totally different situation in Korea. In ESL situations, teachers care mostly English native speakers and they are fluent in English But in our case, English teachers are mostly Koreans, and our spoken English is poor. Besides, in ESL situations, there are many English materials of different levels that can be used in English classes. But in Korea, I have difficulty to find authentic English materials except textbooks”. (Tack-Soo, July 30, 1995)

Over all, there seems to be a huge gap between what EFL students want and what EFL teachers can provide in the L2 classroom, and the teacher’s proficiency of the target language (TL) seems to be a crucial factor. However, is being a native speaker of the TL enough to satisfy the students? In Burgess & Etherington’s study (2002) about EAP teachers’ beliefs in British universities, and in Borg’s studies (1998,1999) about EFL teachers’ beliefs in Malta, the teachers, who are all native speakers of English, try to know students’ expectations, and they change approaches flexibly according to the students’ needs. One teacher says:

“The approach is determined by different needs / interest / level of ability of English in the students. My own approach varies enormously”. (T7)

They teach grammar if the student wants it by using focus-on-form activities (Ellis, 1999; Long, 1991), which combine grammar and communication, and they are very confident with what they are teaching in the classroom, even though some of them admit that they don’t have sound grammar knowledge. Borg (1998, 1999) claims that teachers’ beliefs are influenced by their own learning experiences as students and formal teacher trainings they receive. There is no wonder that the EFL teachers in Asia, who grew up in the grammar-centered English education and never received any

training about CLT, can only form their beliefs based on their knowledge of L2 learning and teaching. Even so, the teachers have to become aware of this gap and find solutions as this trend would be intensified more as the world becomes smaller.

Toward the integration of grammar and communication in EFL

As English education policies are changing dramatically in Asian countries, and many of them are starting L2 education in elementary school level (Li, 1998; Savignon & Wang, 2003), teachers, systems, and exams, all of them have to change to meet students' needs, i.e. to develop their communicative competence as well as linguistic competence.

However, the problem here is that the vagueness of how to change what, in other words, both EFL teachers and students are not sure how much communicative competence should be acquired in EFL and how the role of grammar would change in the course of the reform. I think EFL countries should set a realistic goal for both teachers and students so that the teachers would not have to worry too much about their speaking proficiency as long as they have clear English with an appropriate speed as the students in Sakui & Gaies's study (1999) suggest. EFL do not have to be just the same as ESL since the two are training students for different purposes, hence the manner of the integration of grammar and communication can be different in the two contexts.

A qualitative study

In the following study, 9 learners from Asian countries who have experienced language learning in both EFL and ESL contexts are interviewed about their beliefs on language learning, especially that on grammar, and their evolution. The qualitative study will explore the learners' expectations to the language classroom and will give insights to the integration of grammar and communication in different settings.

Design of the study

To investigate Asian students' beliefs about language learning, focusing on that of learning grammar, and their evolution in living and studying in the ESL environment, a qualitative study was designed.

Method

To maximize the perspectives on this topic, 8 ESL students: 2 Chinese, 3 Koreans, and 3 Japanese, who have stayed in Canada for different periods of time, 3 months to 1 year, were interviewed by one of the researchers. The interviews were conducted either in their first or second language depending on the participants' choice, and each interview lasted about 30 to 100 minutes. All the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed into English.

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Although the interviews were organized based on the research questions below, we tried to elicit the participants' own words in the natural conversation. Our research questions are:

1. How does the way students learned English in their home countries affect their perception on grammar learning?
2. How have the learners' beliefs about language learning and grammar evolved as the learners spend more time in the ESL milieu?
3. How do the learners perceive the role of grammar and grammar knowledge?

For the naturalistic interview our questions for the interviewees focus on developing interviewees' own terms to avoid mismatching meanings of terms used by researchers and participants. We tried to develop their idea from the broad idea on their life to the specific interest of our research questions. However, these questions were only initial guidelines not a strict questionnaire and we used these questions flexibly according to the flow of conversations. Our specific questions were:

1. How long have you been in Canada?
2. How do you like Canada?
3. Why did you come to Canada?
4. What's your purpose of studying English?
5. Did you study English in your country?
6. How did you study English in your country?
7. What did the class look like? Or what did you do in your class? Or what did the teacher teach in the class?
8. Would you explain your class in Carleton?
9. What do they teach or what don't they teach?
10. What do you do to learn English in class or out of class?
11. Are the studying English in two countries different?
12. How different?
13. What do you think is the best way to learn English?
14. To improve English language skills what do the students have to do or what do the teachers have to teach?
15. Do you think grammar should be taught in classroom?
16. Do you think you have enough grammar knowledge?
17. Is grammar necessary to improve English skills?
18. Did you study grammar in your home country?
19. How much was the grammar knowledge you studied in your country helpful here?
20. Did the classroom in Carleton make you feel different about learning English?

Participants

We had interviews of three Japanese, three Korean, and three Chinese ESL students in Carleton University in Canada. In Carleton University, there are two kinds of ESL programs according to the purpose of the study. IC (Intensive Course) program is for the students who want to study in English speaking countries and prepare their academic English for the university level study. The other program is PPD (Personal and Professional Development) which is for the students who want to study English for the purpose of other than studying in English speaking country. Both of the programs divided according to the students' English proficiency level from the beginner (level 10) to advanced level (level 30).

We interviewed students who studied in Carleton ESL for 3 months, 6-7 months, and 9months-1year to see how their perception on grammar and language learning has changed according to their duration of staying in Carleton and their background.

Three Korean students were belonging to the same PPD advanced class. Bonghyun is a senior of a Korean University majoring in Aerospace materials who stayed for 3 months in Canada. He is planning to get a job after graduating his University and he has no plan to study in English country in the future. Therefore his purpose is purely for getting a good job. Ahram is a sophomore of a Korean University majoring in architecture who stayed for 7 months in Canada. He is planning to study more of his major in other countries such as English speaking country or Japan and expecting business trips to diverse countries in the future. His purpose of studying English has two kinds of purpose: academic purpose and improving communication skills in natural situations. Yuhui is an elementary school teacher in Korea who stayed for 9 months in Canada. She is an elementary teacher in Korea. She came to Canada because her husband came to Canada as a post doctorate. She wanted to learn something and she wanted to know how they teach English in Canada because she can have chance to teach English in her classroom in the future.

Satoshi (Japanese) has participated in the ESL course for one year as an exchange student, and he was almost finishing his 5th term at the time of the interview. He majors in business at a private university in Japan, and he will become a senior after he goes back to Japan in April. Hanako (Japanese) has been a student in the ESL course for 7 months. She is an English major student at a private foreign language university in Japan. 9 students including herself from her university are taking the ESL here as exchange students for one year. Chie(Japanese) has been in Canada for 7 months since last September. She took English classes at a private institute in Toronto for 4 months before she came to Ottawa. She has been in the ESL at

CARLETON PAPERS IN APPLIED LANGUAGE STUDIES

Carleton for 3 months. She majors in Korean at a public university in Japan, and now she is taking a year off to study English.

Two Chinese students came to Canada right after graduated their high school for the purpose to enter Canadian university. They both were participating in IC program. Ivan came to Canada 7 months ago and Maggie one year ago.

The cases of three Korean students

Bonhyun

As most of the students in Korea did, he started his English learning in his 7th grade. However, he didn't think that was "English studying" From the explanation of his previous English learning, we can recognize he distinguishes active learning effort from passive learning. He didn't appreciate this passive English learning experience in his junior and senior high school.

"There was English subject in the junior high school curriculum but I can't say that I started English studying then. It was when I was in 12th grade. I really studied English hard for the university entrance exam. I didn't study English in the first two years in university. 9 months for TOEIC....I went to the private institution for 3 months and studied 6 more months for myself". (Bonhyun, April, 2004)

Bonhyun's experience of English learning in his junior and senior high school is quite different from other students from Asian countries. He didn't have much chance to study grammar in his junior and senior high school. Korean English curriculum is strongly influenced by the most important test which is University entrance exam. The university entrance exam was changed since 1994 and English test has been testing listening and reading. It didn't have many grammar related questions any more. Accordingly, high schools didn't teach grammar much and he decided not to study grammar at all. Instead, he practiced reading and listening.

He blamed the test oriented English classes and surprisingly, he explained how much English classes were mechanical from this description of his English classes in his junior and senior high schools.

"I don't know if I was lucky or not. All of my English teachers teach us English for exams. Final or midterm exams. Exactly, they let us know the questions in the test. They let us know 100 questions if the test has 10 items". (Bonhyun, April, 2004)

CARLETON PAPERS IN APPLIED LANGUAGE STUDIES

However, even teaching for the exam in school was not so effective for him to take the university entrance exam and he had a private tutor for listening.

Overall, his opinion on English class in his high school was very critical.

“There was very little that improved my English ability. We had a lot of reading but almost none of writing. We were not allowed to speak”. (Bonhyun, April, 2004)

As he didn't study grammar at all, he had a problem with TOEIC test. When he took his first TOEIC test, he got only 400. He had only 4 right answers in the grammar section. For compensating this deficiency in grammar, he took two TOEIC courses in a private institution for 3 months. What he learned there was a listening class and a reading (including grammar) class. In the listening class, he learned the technique to choose the right answer in the multiple choice questions. He studied one grammar book 20 times over and over for 6 months to make the rules his own. After 9 months preparation, he got 850 at his second test. He answered the questions if this grammar study was helpful for his English skills.

“It helped a lot. However, what I was very strongly impressed was that Canadians, not just teachers, knew English grammar very well....Their English is from not just their habit but their study as well”.(Bonhyun, April, 2004)

However, he didn't think the TOEIC score meant his high English ability. He got already high score in TOEIC and he didn't have problem with getting a job. It seems that he wanted to have 4 skills balanced. As we see his English study in Korea, he studied reading in school and listening with a private tutor but not writing or speaking at all. However, it is interesting that he didn't felt need of writing skills. I asked him why he came to Canada to study English though he has enough score in TOEIC and he mentioned about speaking skill only. Then, he said he felt writing is very important after he studied for 3 months in Carleton. To improve writing skills, it is important to write much in English. He said he could do this in Korea as well.

While I was studying in Korea, there was no chance to speak English. I wanted to do it. .(Bonhyun, April, 2004)

As for the grammar teaching, he felt teachers in Carleton didn't teach much about grammar but they taught somehow. The main difference between Korean classes and Carleton ESL was the

CARLETON PAPERS IN APPLIED LANGUAGE STUDIES

way of presenting grammar. He might understand how focus on form grammar teaching work in the communicative classroom at some level. His opinion on the Carleton ESL grammar teaching is that they teach very useful grammar but it takes too much time in that way.

In Korea, they teach grammar and give examples. Here, while the class goes on, if they meet grammatical elements, they teach it. But we didn't learn that much about grammar. (Bonhyun, April, 2004)

I'm satisfied but it takes time to study that way. I'm not in that situation that I can study here without time limit. There might be individual difference. .(Bonhyun, April, 2004)

It is interesting that he doesn't complain any class about not teaching grammars both in his high school and Carleton ESL class even though he explained he had hard time to catch up grammar knowledge to get a high score in TOEIC test. It is probably because he studied grammar by himself enough before and it was enough without any other help or special environment.

He thought that the most important thing to improve speaking and writing skills is not to fear to make mistakes. He said he didn't much care about grammar while he was speaking or writing because just spitting out is helping to prevent from fear of speaking or writing. On the other hand, he expressed concern about fossilization as well. He said, "However, once I spit out, it becomes habit and I make same mistake repeatedly." However, this concern about fossilization is not his number one priority and still he think developing fluency is more important. Accordingly, as for the limitation of error correction, he didn't want to be corrected primarily but he said it is necessary to correct when the error makes the intention or manners different.

Sometimes, I don't mean to but the listener becomes upset. Or, teachers say 'you shouldn't say that.' I think it is good to correct in those cases. It is important to be careful not to make those mistakes. (Bonhyun, April, 2004)

The best way to learn English he thinks is living in the English speaking country for a long time. For improving his English, he tried to make many friends outside. However, he said it is a good way to improve English at the beginning and it is time to study now. He thinks this is the time to change his focus from fluency to accuracy.

CARLETON PAPERS IN APPLIED LANGUAGE STUDIES

I felt my English skill is improving for 3 months and now, I think I have to know what I don't know well. I think it is the right time to study... after 3 months. (Bonhyun, April, 2004)

He said his thought about learning English was not change at all for 3 months. Even before he came to Canada, he had thought English has to be taught as in Carleton and he was very satisfied with the Carleton ESL.

In sum, he think English should be learned by exposing natural situation and grammar should be taught by communicative ways. Error correction is not necessary unless it bothers conversations. However, his view about grammar learning also seems contrary to this statement. This contradiction is partly explained by the issues of time limitations and the issue of language proficiency exams which are linguistically and grammatically based. Perhaps, in addition, it could be explained by the fact that he is in the middle of changing his views.

Aram

Aram has started learning English since his elementary school year. He went to auxiliary language school of a University where his father was working. He said that language school was very similar to the Carleton ESL class which was focusing on group activities and conversation. He said that experience was the most helpful for his English ability now.

He has two purpose of studying English. He is planning to study in other country and expecting to trip to other countries. So, his purposes are academic purpose and general communication purpose. His opinion was contrary sometimes and probably because these two different purposes have two different views.

First, he said his studying English in his junior and senior high school was not that helpful for his English, which was mainly memorizing vocabulary and studying grammar and reading. He wished to have more conversation in the classroom instead. Again, he said vocabulary and reading was a little helpful but not grammar. However, when I asked if the grammar he studied in Korea was helpful in writing and speaking, he said it was helpful and more grammar is better.

When he thinks about the general communication purpose, he thinks grammar is not important and the 'grammar' here is opposite concepts to 'communication'. Whenever he says negative opinions on grammar, he expressed his hope to have more conversation activities.

First of all, teaching style in junior high school focused on grammar or reading rather than conversation..... I don't think it is helpful to improve English ability..... When I arrived in

CARLETON PAPERS IN APPLIED LANGUAGE STUDIES

Canada, I couldn't speak. I felt I short of it. I wish to have more conversation in the class.(Aram, April, 2004)

Reading was sometimes helpful when we have articles in the class but I don't think grammar was helpful. People say other language schools such as Ottawa university teach much grammar. Here, they don't teach grammar. I like here Carleton. It is focusing on speaking. (Aram, April, 2004)

On the other hand, he thinks grammar is helpful for his academic purpose or writing.

Of course, I have to study more grammar. But, I don't think I'm not that short of grammar. It is enough for communication. But, in the writing class, sometimes I feel stuffy. Then I desperately realize I need more grammar.

Personally, I have to study more grammar but other students...(Are you going to study more grammar and reading?). Yes, I need them. (You think conversation English and academic English different?) Yes. (Aram, April, 2004)

While he speaking English, he thought he concerned about grammar. However, he didn't want to be corrected when he has errors. His reason of this is same as Bonghyun's: it prevents from fear and makes it easy to talk. Basically, his focus was conversation. For improving conversation skills, he thought basic vocabulary was necessary but not much of grammar. He consistently insisted to have more conversation in the classroom.

As Bonghyun said he didn't, Aram also said he didn't change his perception on grammar learning. He experienced communicative English class when he was very young and he has had opinion that communicative approach was the ideal way to learn English since then.

Yuhui

Our third interviewee is elementary school teacher and she has more interest in teaching method. Her EFL experience in her school years was also very similar to other students: following textbooks, a lot of reading, memorizing vocabulary, translating and grammar. She didn't think they were useless but they were discrete at that time. After she studied in Canada, she felt that those things were connected each other. She seemed very impressed by theme-based approach in Carleton. Because she is also a teacher, she expressed her opinion as a teacher.

Connecting with one topic is very good approach. When we teach reading, children can have some new words. Sometimes, we should teach grammar while reading about that topic. If you want to teach some specific grammar, you'd better bring some reading which is including that element or some songs which is repeating that element... (Yuhui, April, 2004)

In the same context, project activity in the ESL class was especially helpful for her to connect discrete English knowledge each other. She appreciated the process of preparing project and presentation which including negotiating, communicating, and researching.

As for grammar teaching, she took a community center language course for 4 weeks while she is not taking Carleton ESL. They taught grammar much but it was different from the Korean classes. She seemed very impressed by practicing grammar with context. She also mentioned about the difficulty of EFL grammar books due to their meta-languages of grammar.

They taught mainly grammar. It was helpful to practice something like present perfect. When they teach grammar, they made us to practice speaking with it not like in Korea where they explain grammar and practice with paraphrasing mechanically. I could remember more with that speaking practice. And explanation in English was a lot easier. I think the grammar books in Korea are too difficult to understand. When they explained in English, Ah... it is for this case...I could make sense. (Yuhui, April, 2004)

In Carleton ESL, the main difference from her English study in Korea is using English. And for her, it is very important to make English internalized.

Here, I think every thing is connected to each other. All teachers are using English and students are also using English because they are from diverse countries. I have more chance to talk because I have to use English when I ask for something or make conversation. Before, when I wrote in English, I had to write in Korean first and translated using dictionary. Here, I have to write in English first. As I use English often, the process of reminding words is getting faster. Because I'm getting use to do it. (Yuhui, April, 2004)

CARLETON PAPERS IN APPLIED LANGUAGE STUDIES

Mainly, she doesn't care much about grammar when she is speaking. At the beginning she concerned about grammar much and she realized this hindered her natural communication and native speakers are not talking like grammar books.

At the first time, I concerned grammar very much and I couldn't talk. I found young people and talks in TV were not concerning much grammar. I couldn't understand. I had to think so many things before I talk and then I found I was behind the conversation. One topic is passed already and I just gave up talking.... That's why I couldn't talk much. As I met many foreigners, I tried to say something even it is just a word. I spit out words as they come to my mind and then synthesized them. I think about grammar but not as much as in Korea. (Yuhui, April, 2004)

She thought grammar knowledge and internalized grammar ability was different. She evaluated her grammar knowledge was bad. Even though she knew some grammar knowledge, it was hard to apply to using. However, even though she evaluated her grammar was bad, she didn't think it was important to correct grammar errors.

I have a lot of mistakes. But in my opinion, it is not a good idea to check only those small mistakes. Because the most difficult thing when I write is to know how to organize paragraphs, they have to focus on this first and then if it is practiced enough, then they'd better to correct detailed errors. (Yuhui, April, 2004)

And she doesn't seem to need more grammar knowledge. For her, internalizing basic grammars are more important than knowing more grammar.

I forgot every thing....and my grammar study is only when I was in my high school and for TOEIC... Even when I was preparing TOEIC, I didn't think I had to study grammar book. I didn't study grammar book after graduating high school. I don't remember grammar in detail. Roughly, to-infinitive is used for this case... I know just this level. (Yuhui, April, 2004)

Therefore, what she thinks the best way to improve English is experiencing English as much as she can. To do it, she had to get rid of fear first. To experience English more, she tried to find interesting TV programs

CARLETON PAPERS IN APPLIED LANGUAGE STUDIES

and watched it regularly and watched a lot of movies. When she met foreigners, she tried to find their interest and make conversations with them as much as she could.

As I asked if her perception of grammar or English learning and teaching was changed after she studied in Carleton, she said it was not changed much. She said she thought getting use to English is the most important thing in English learning even before coming to Canada.

In Korea, there are a lot of people who studied in foreign countries. Korea is influenced by US especially and changing continually.....Some elementary school teachers who are interested in English education....because the class is just 40 minutes and their parents are not using English... so they focus on to make students get used to English at least in the classroom. I think it is important. (Yuhui, April, 2004)

It seems that many Korean students thought that the way Carleton teach English is better than typical Korean way but still English classroom in Korea is not changing much. I asked her why.

I think parents' perception has to change. Parents compare English education now to their way to study before. Though the world is changing very fast, they still think 'English should be taught this way..' and the expectation is different. (Yuhui, April, 2004)

In sum, all three Korean students, in contrast to some of the conclusions found in the literature, had a negative opinion on the test-oriented English class in Korea even before arriving in Canada. They thought learning detailed grammar was just for the test, that for communication basic grammar is enough, and that internalizing language by using is more important than developing more grammar knowledge. Three of them all were satisfied by not correcting detailed grammar errors. As for the method of teaching grammar, Bonghyun preferred to learn with more communicative way but he said it took more time. Yuhui emphasized to integrate with context using topics or themes. They all thought their thought about English learning were not much changed and satisfied with Carleton ESL class because it was meeting their expectation.

The cases of three Japanese learners

Satoshi

Satoshi has participated in the ESL course for one year as an exchange student, and he was almost finishing his 5th term at the time of the interview.

CARLETON PAPERS IN APPLIED LANGUAGE STUDIES

He majors in business at a private university in Japan, and he will become a senior after he goes back to Japan in April.

Satoshi was never serious about studying English in secondary school days. He does not remember what he learned in English classes. The only things he can recollect are that he sang a lot of English songs in junior high school, and he had a conversation class with a native speaker once a week in senior high school, both of which he didn't become interested in. He was a member of the baseball club, and just like the baseball club members all over Japan, he was too busy playing baseball to study. Satoshi says, "I didn't understand anything in the English class," so he used the "overnight cramming" strategy before the exam and forgot everything the day after the exam. Yet, he stresses that he "admired foreign countries a lot."

It was when he became a sophomore in university that the relationship between English and Satoshi changed. He decided to apply for the exchange program of the university because he wanted to become independent from his parents as he is an only child and he felt he depended on his parents too much. Another reason was that he had admired foreign countries since childhood. Even though studying English was not the reason for his decision, he had to pass the TOEFL to be chosen as an exchange student. He bought TOEFL preparation books and mainly studied the grammar part for half a year, and he successfully achieved the score 500 on TOEFL. He acknowledges that "I'm a kind of person who can concentrate on one thing when I decide to do so."

Satoshi came to Canada in April 2003, and it was his first stay in a foreign country. He says, "I was curious how much I could improve my English in one year from zero." He has been staying with a Canadian host family and he has taken 5 ESL courses: IC 10 once, IC 20 twice, and IC 25 twice. Although he could not achieve the CAEL requirement to become a regular student, which he has strived for a year, he has actively involved in studying English inside and outside the classroom.

For Satoshi, studying English was to memorize all the rules and words to pass the exams for a long time. When he studied for the TOEFL, too, he memorized grammar rules with the TOEFL preparation book and it worked for the TOEFL. He tried to use the same strategy to pass the CAEL. He confesses that as he did not bring a grammar book from Japan, he had his parent send him the grammar book right after he came to Canada. He says that his first class, IC 10, was too easy for him, so he felt he had to study by himself to pass the CAEL. However, he quit studying the grammar book in a few months.

Besides the diligent participation for the regular ESL classes, Satoshi has volunteered as a teaching assistant (TA) for one of the official Japanese courses for 2 semesters. He made many Canadian friends there, and he organized a Japanese conversation club himself for regular students who

wanted to study Japanese more, as well as for Japanese ESL students who rarely had chances to make friends with Canadian students. He says, “It was tough, but I enjoyed it a lot. I really like to teach something.”

He expresses, “Grammar was not that important any more.” Yet, he says he still needed grammar because he wanted to improve his English, and he wanted to be accurate. My understanding of this statement is that grammar rules in the grammar book became less important than other elements of language learning at this point as his English proficiency improved and he could communicate without consulting every grammar rules. By now, he has become a good communicator by practicing speaking a lot, and his perception of grammar has changed again. He says,

I want to communicate accurately. I want to convey the meaning with correct English. I wasn't worried about my grammar before, but I feel like I care more now, it's maybe because I have more knowledge about English. (Satoshi, April, 2004)

This comment seems contradictory to the former one, but it is not. What he tries to say here is that as his English competence has developed, he is perceiving grammar in more advanced level, i.e. communicative level. In other words, he first needed grammar in the grammar book to make basic sentences in English, and now he needs grammar to communicate his intentions as accurate as possible. Satoshi's beliefs about grammar are embedded with his beliefs about communication.

I think Satoshi is a communication-oriented learner. He has tried to talk as much as possible with his international and Canadian friends to improve his English. He enjoyed the communicative activities in the class, and he did well on the speaking test in the CAEL. He even took conversation lessons at a private institute in downtown to brush up his speaking skills. He says he will make foreigner friends after he goes back to Japan to keep up with his English. He looked very confident with what he has accomplished in a year and he also looked very independent. When I asked him, “Do you think you have become an independent person?” he answered, “My parents will decide. If they say I have changed, maybe I have.”

Hanako

Hanako has been a student in the ESL course for 7 months. She is an English major student at a private foreign language university in Japan. 9 students including herself from her university are taking the ESL here as exchange students for one year.

Hanako was in typical grammar-oriented English classes in secondary schools, which she did not enjoy at all, but she was fortunate that

CARLETON PAPERS IN APPLIED LANGUAGE STUDIES

she had a private English tutor, a Japanese, who had spent a long time in the United States. Hanako studied English, mainly grammar, with the tutor for 6 years. The tutor talked a lot about her experiences in the United States to Hanako and motivated her to study English. As a result, Hanako was always good at English in junior high school and senior high school, and she decided to study English more in university.

She became a student of a private foreign language university where they have classes A to Z with 60 students in each class for the English major alone. By the time she finished her 2nd year prior to studying abroad, she has taken courses in conversation, grammar, literature, and so on, but she soon realized that the conversation classes, which the university offered a few times a week, was not enough to improve her speaking skills. She says, "To tell the truth, as I did not have chances to talk in English, I did not even realize that my speaking was so poor until I came here." Since it is common for the students of that university to be on exchange programs for a year or so, she applied and came to Carleton with 8 other students to attend the ESL to improve her speaking skills.

Hanako seems to be content with her life and the development of her English skills here. She has been staying with a Canadian family and her host mother treats her just like her own child. She was in the IC 20 course last term with students from different countries. She enjoyed the cultural differences as she worked on various communicative activities with them. She comments, "Everyone was cheerful, and I loved my teachers. I didn't feel like I was studying." Now she is in the PPD course, so she has to make a lot of presentations. She says positively and cheerfully, "Everything is good experience." Outside the class, she has been watching a lot of movies to improve her listening skills.

It seems that Hanako's personality is playing an important role in her language learning. For example, she is not worried at all about making mistakes in speaking. She says, "As long as I can communicate, I don't worry that much about my mistakes." As she has a desire to express herself in fluent English, though she goes back to Japan soon, she says she will make friends with international students at her university. Hanako says,

Before I came here, English was the language of the United States. I didn't know much about people from different countries. But once we start to talk, people are not so different. I learned a lot about Japan as well as about other countries by communicating with my friends. I learned a lot from communication. For me, English is a means of communication. (Hanako, April, 2004)

CARLETON PAPERS IN APPLIED LANGUAGE STUDIES

In the construction of Hanako's beliefs, the tutor seems to have balanced Hanako's linguistic competence and the motivation to study English for communicative competence. Thanks to the tutor, she has gained a sufficient grammatical knowledge in the early stage, and she is now exercising the knowledge in the L2 environment.

Hanako's aim of studying English here is to become fluent in both speaking and listening. She perceives the role of grammar differently in speaking and in writing. She says, "I almost never think about grammar in speaking," although she admits that she needs her grammatical knowledge to make correct sentences in writing. When she first arrived here, she was more careful in speaking, thus she took a long time to make up a grammatical sentence before beginning to talk. However, since she was advised by her Canadian friend that native speakers just talk whatever comes up to mind, she is trying to speak as promptly as possible to gain the fluency.

It seems that Hanako is connecting grammar with accuracy in written English, and she is trying to ignore it when she is focusing on improving fluency in spoken English. I think her strategy will work in her case as 1) she is so motivated to speak like native speakers of English, 2) she is not afraid of making mistakes, and 3) whether she realizes it or not, she already has a sound grammatical competence to be able to "ignore" it in spoken English.

Chie

Chie has been in Canada for 7 months since last September. She took English classes at a private institute in Toronto for 4 months before she came to Ottawa. She has been in the ESL at Carleton for 3 months. She majors in Korean at a public university in Japan, and now she is taking a year off to study English.

Chie met wonderful language teachers in secondary schools, and they motivated her a lot to learn English. In the second year of the junior high school, she met an English teacher who was always cheerful and lively, and in the class, the teacher expressed how much she loved the language herself. Chie admired the teacher as well as the assistant language teacher (ALT) who often came to her school, and enjoyed studying English with the teachers. She thought she wanted to learn English more for communication. However, since she went to an academic senior high school, she had to study English for the entrance exam. Yet, she still made efforts to make it her best subject, and she was always making good grades. Besides studying English for the entrance exam, Chie was exchanging English journals with a Canadian ALT, and they became good friends. She read in English extensively by herself, as it was her strategy to learn English grammar, and she also listened to an English radio program every night to improve her

CARLETON PAPERS IN APPLIED LANGUAGE STUDIES

listening skills. Chie was really a smart and motivated learner. It was natural for her to choose to study language in university.

Passing the entrance examination to become a student at the best foreign language university in Japan, what struck Chie was that many of her classmates were already fluent in English, even though they majored in Korean (Chie says she majors in Korean because English was too popular to major in). For the first time in her life, her English was labeled as “poor.” Chie lost all her confidence in English and began to skip the required English courses. She says, “I just did not want to reveal my English ability in front of others.” Consequently, she failed the English course. She didn’t study English for two years since then.

Studying abroad was Chie’s dream for a long time. She was thinking about going to Korea, as her Korean was getting better than English, and she could have gotten a scholarship if she had chosen to go to Korea. Instead of that, she decided to go to an English speaking country. She talked with her parents. She comments, “I didn’t want to live with the complex for the rest of my life.” She took a year off from her university and came to Canada.

Chie first went to a private language school in Toronto for 4 months. The school had grammar-based classes and conversation classes, which now she recalls, “They followed the textbooks. It was just like the classes in Japan.” Although she had the two years’ blank, she soon remembered what she studied in secondary schools and did very well in the class. She tried to communicate with her international friends at school, and at home where she shared the huge basement with 7 other house mates.

She came to Ottawa in January, and now she stays with the ALT who she exchanged journals in senior high school days. She is very happy to stay with her family. She has made international friends as well as some Canadian friends here. She is in the PPD class, and is satisfied with the classes. She says, “I was studying English language in Toronto. But here, I’m learning how to use English.” She likes the content-based classes as “I’m not only learning English, but I can gain some knowledge on the topic itself. When I’m working hard, I don’t even think that I’m learning English.

After I finish the assignment, I realize that my English has improved.”

Chie seems to have gained her confidence in English back. I asked her, “What has changed you in 7 months?” She answered,

I met many people from all over the world. I could communicate with them without using Japanese. It’s not just the matter of English ability, but the communication skills. I

CARLETON PAPERS IN APPLIED LANGUAGE STUDIES

wanted to communicate with people, and that was the reason I liked to study English from junior high school days. Learning the language itself is not as important as communicating with people. (Chie, April, 2004)

Chie had the belief that English is there for communication from the very beginning, because of the influence of her teachers. Therefore, she strived to improve her English competence in the limited environment she was in. She says that she read and listened a lot on her own to improve her English proficiency. She says,

I think we easily forget the grammar rules which we learned from instruction. I think the important thing is to read and listen a lot. When grammar becomes intuitive, I can feel something's wrong when I find a mistake. Japanese students need grammar to get into universities, but I think they might not need it for communication. (Chie, April 2004)

I was amazed with this comment. She was not familiar with any theories about second language acquisition, but she knew what grammar should be intuitively, as early as in secondary school days.

At the university, where everyone judged each other's English by fluency, she was shocked because her perfect grammatical knowledge did not mean anything. She says, "If grammar is just grammar, that's really a waste." She emphasizes, "They should teach how to use English, not English." Her belief was confirmed by the content-based classes at Carleton; "I'm learning how to use English here." Chie believes that grammar should be introduced with its use. To my question, "Do you teach grammar if you were a teacher?" she answered,

I'd teach it in a context, not just grammar rules. When I study Korean, I sometimes discover a grammar rule by myself. It happens so naturally. I don't think students need much explanation. They can find it by themselves. (Chie, April, 2004)

In Chie's case, it was not the evolution of her beliefs, but the confirmation of her beliefs. She had the beliefs that "language for communication" as well as "grammar in use" while she was in Japan, but the environment did not provide the opportunities to exercise her beliefs. She says "living in an English speaking country" is the best way to learn English. However, at the same time, she comments, "I think it's possible to improve English skills no matter where you live. It's up to the person and

motivation.” I think English education in EFL contexts should not decline the beliefs of sincere learners like Chie.

The cases of three Chinese students

At the time of the interview, all the three Chinese students studied in IC30 class, the highest level class. They all chose to answer the questions in English without hesitation.

Ivan

Ivan has stayed about 7 months since September, 2003. He came to Canada after he graduated his high school. He had been studied for 9 years in China since he was grade 4. When he came to Canada, he expected of ESL class to be different somehow from the class in China but he didn't have specific idea.

I think it will be different than in China but I had never think about what style it would be. (Ivan, April, 2004)

What he realized while he studied in Carleton was that English is not just knowledge but a tool to be used. He described his EFL experience in China that he learned grammar a lot but almost forgot because he didn't use them often. For him, learning grammar is opposite to using language.

In China, we pay more attention in grammar, but here, teachers pay more attention in how to use English, but not much grammar.

Not just his classes, all environments around him confirmed this belief through his daily life. He couldn't help using English everyday and every moment and found this is a good way to learn English.

I have to read, listen, write English everyday. I can't escape it. That's like, they force me to do and to read English. Then I live in a homestay family. So I can speak English everyday rather than some other students live with their friends in an apartment. This is a good way to learn English when first arrived in Canada. (Ivan, April, 2004)

Another thing that he realized was that there exists academic English. In the interview, when we asked him how he likes his English course in Carleton, the first answer was that he was satisfied because Carleton teaches academic English.

CARLETON PAPERS IN APPLIED LANGUAGE STUDIES

Here is very good. Much better than in China because here, it is more academic. (Ivan, April, 2004)

It is interesting that he focused on academic English that much. ESL classes are different in many ways: They have native teachers and students from all over the world. They are more communicative and possibly freer to speak. Not every ESL classes are academic in Canada. The reason Ivan is interested in academic English is related to his purpose of English. He just graduated his high school and now he is planning to study in English speaking country. For him academic English is very authentic.

The three classes are all good and I learn more from writing class, how to write academic essay. The style I learn here is different than I learned in China. Technically, English essay is different than Chinese essay. In oral class, I learn how to note taking. It is very useful for me to study in university, and in core class, I do many readings and I also do some note-taking. (Ivan, April, 2004)

For Ivan, reading, listening, speaking is rather related with communication and his learning strategy is also applying communicative way. For just communication in the daily life, he doesn't think grammar is very important. He said grammar knowledge helps him to learn English somewhat but he uses some simple grammar but doesn't concern much in daily life. However, writing is closely related academic English and this need intensive effort to improve the skill. For the question of what is the most difficult thing in his English study, he said writing is most difficult and he noticed that writing is not improving without deliberate effort.

For reading or speaking, you can practice everyday, anytime you want. You just speak to others in English. You just read an article. For writing, it is hard to practice. If you want to see the process, it is a long period. (Ivan, April, 2004)

The role of grammar is different according to types of English. He said spoken English and written English is different. He said grammar is more important when writing than when speaking.

He think the teacher has to correct his errors in both speaking and writing but not very sure if the teacher has to teach grammar. For him, he studied grammar in his country enough and now it is time to use it.

I already knew all of them (grammar). Here, I just use them. (Ivan, April, 2004)

Maggie

Maggie had been in Carleton ESL program for 1 year. Her learning experience in China was also similar to Ivan memorizing words, learning lots of grammar rules, and translate English to Chinese or vice versa. She said she played games in her elementary school English classes but generally speaking, all curriculums in China were focused on tests rather than communicative.

She came to Canada right after she graduated her high school and probably she was expecting similar class to Chinese one at the beginning. She found some difference in ESL class. She thought teachers didn't teach enough grammar and should teach more grammar but she found teachers teach grammar in a different way. She explained this "teach how to use" comparing to "really teach grammar." The purpose of doing this was to make it "a part of her own language" not to pass the exam.

Teachers don't really teach grammar. But like if I write something, not every essay, some essays, teacher will correct my grammar mistakes. My core teacher has teach a lot like the word, the grammar of vocabulary, like how to use a word because that's important to make this word become a part of your language. (Maggie, April, 2004)

She was aware that knowing and using are different. She thought knowing is helpful for receiving process but not enough for producing language such as writing or speaking.

If you only know this word, maybe in your reading you can understand what the reading said, but if you are talking to somebody or want to write something, you still can't use it. So I think that's important to make a sense of learning become a part of your language. (Maggie, April, 2004)

She thought her receiving process was better than producing process and wanted to have more challenging environment for developing her receiving level more. She was living with a Canadian family but they were concerning too much about her language skill and spoke only simple language so that she could understand them though she could understand more.

I prefer to talk to young people because I find they think I am an international student, my speaking is not very fluency something. They are trying to speak slowly, use some simple

CARLETON PAPERS IN APPLIED LANGUAGE STUDIES

words. That is not very help me. A language learner, especially at the beginning, you understand more than you can say. Mostly I understand them, just a little bit hard to say by myself. So I find young people the same of my age, they are speaking like more fast, I think they are more helpful to me. (Maggie, April, 2004)

As she was planning to study in Canadian University, she was also very much aware of academic English. The role of grammar in academic English is more important than in communicative English.

This kind of talking is not so hard, like talk about something that, it is a sort of part of my language. I don't think about (grammar) too much. But like if I am doing a formal presentation, I have to be prepared. I have to really think about (grammar). (Maggie, April, 2004)

For her, grammar is very important in learning English. When I asked her how important she thought grammar is, she said it was one of the most important things. However, this grammar is different from the one she had before. The concept of grammar changed from “memorizing” to “how to use.” She didn't deny that grammar knowledge is helpful but she believed that grammar knowledge should be attained by using it until it becomes a part of her own language.

On the other hand, she wanted her teacher correct her mistakes while she was speaking or writing. She wanted to use language more correctly.

I think teacher should pay some more attention like in the courses I am taking to students' grammar. Maybe because my grammar is so poor, I'm saying that. I think it is more important. (Maggie, April, 2004)

Dinny

Dinny had different learning experience from her Chinese classmates at Carleton though she has been learning English in Carleton ESL program for only 3 months. Before she came to Carleton, she had had a one-year high school experience in the United States as an exchange student from a very good high school in Kunming in China. Dinny was obviously proud of it and her “American accent those native speakers can figure out” (Dinny, April). Actually, she usually responded each interview question with a long paragraph in fluent English while the other two students preferred to give brief answers in a couple of sentences. She looked more comfortable in using

CARLETON PAPERS IN APPLIED LANGUAGE STUDIES

English both in her class and in the interview, and she regarded herself as an automatic speaker of English though she also admitted making mistakes. However, she was not bothered by these mistakes. She said, “[s]ince I talk to a lot of native speakers, they make a lot of mistakes, too”. Before she went to U.S. for her last year high school education, she was an honor student in the high school where she studied in China, which means that she had achieved remarkable academic record in English. As Dinny claimed, “Before you go there (U.S.), you have to be really good in English”. This also made Dinny different from the other two interviewees, who confessed having forgotten the grammatical rules they learnt in China. Dinny admitted that she still remembered what she had learnt in China and used it in writing more consciously than in speaking. Obviously, she had a more positive attitude towards her learning experience in China and saw herself as a successful learner of the language both in China and in North America.

Everyone thinks my English is good. So they think I learned English in America. Sure I learned a lot and improved my English, but I didn't mean I start everything of learning in America because I was a representative of Chinese students. If I had the honor to go to America, it means you had paid a lot of work to English in China.

In fact, Dinny achieved high scores in most English tests in middle school and high school, being the teachers', especially high school teacher's favorite student. She was a good student from the traditional perspective of teaching and learning English in China, which emphasized memorization of “forms” such as grammatical rules, vocabulary, sentence patterns and so on. As Dinny revealed, however, she started to “go different way” as soon as she realized “[her] A+, [her] 100 percent marked papers doesn't mean anything” because she found herself “totally out of place” in an English corner she was brought to by her friend.

I was so depressed and got hurt. What I was learning? You know, I started... At the time, I was a teenager, 14, 15 years old. I started to be interested in songs like foreign countries' pop, like fashion. Fashion stuff. You started to watch like MTV, listen to those English songs and everything. I started to watch Hollywood products. And I figured out how come the way they speak is totally different from the way my teacher taught. Because most English books are published by Longman. (Dinny, April)

Obviously, what Dinny meant by going different ways was to learn and practice real life English rather than focus on rules about English in textbooks only. “I started to listen to music and watch Hollywood products and try to simuli¹”. She also expressed her appreciation for her high school teacher’s encouragement and support to her, for the teacher gave her every chance--though limited--to use English, for example, in classroom question-answer sections, English speech competitions and so on. Like Maggie, Dinny considered it important to apply grammar knowledge into practice, and she regarded her solid knowledge as “foundation” on which her English skills had been built up.

*Because I am not a native speaker. If I don't have the **foundation** of how you go nice this kind of sentence to a whole bunch of conversation with grammar, how you can start to simuli those accent and everything. So I think, grammar, because China is not America; you have the circumstances to speak English a lot. Plus, you have to take the test. Ok, I don't really worry about the test. But I think grammar is also necessary. For those students who don't have the circumstances to speak English, but also have to understand why they speak in this order rather than your mother language, so only grammar can explain this way. But the bad thing is students may be good at grammar and even better than some American students, but...*

*If I go to America or ESL program in Canada without any grammar **foundation**, any vocabulary **foundation**, I don't really think it's good, too. ... I do think China study really gave me the **foundation**. I don't really care its negative point or positive point, but from that on I started to simuli, try to learn more out of class with my knowledge that I learned in class.*

*If you want to learn, you want to start learning English in Canada or in America, in other foreign countries, you'd better not come because I think it take you more time to really use its language to fit in this culture. You really have to have some **foundation** of both a little bit talking and grammar in order to you come here and you don't really to worry about it. You can let yourself communicate. You can start something further...*

¹ By “simuli”, Dinny means imitate as she obviously knows something about the word “simulate”.

Therefore, Dinny, as a good student of grammar learning and user from China, seems to have experienced a process of realizing the limitation of knowing grammar knowledge to using her grammar knowledge consciously in speaking and then subconsciously or automatically with mistakes persisting. Her strong belief in grammar knowledge as a necessary basis for further exploration of the use of the language is largely decided by her intentional effort to test the knowledge in practice and the positive effect it has achieved.

Perhaps it should be mentioned that all the three Chinese students passed CAEL while they were studying in IC30 class. Based on their CAEL scores, Ivan was placed in 1300 credit English class while Maggie and Dinny in 1500. However, Ivan and Maggie took the test twice while Dinny took it once and got a score that she was satisfied with. Dinny did not actually score a mark high enough to make her into 1500 class, but as she scored 570 in TOEFL, only 10 marks short for being a regular Carleton student, she was allowed to be in 1500. Dinny claimed that she did not study very hard at TOEFL before she took it in China, but her previous learning experience of grammar made it easy for her. Ivan and Maggie expressed the same belief in TOEFL as a test of grammar knowledge and good preparation can lead to high scores and CAEL as a test of ability to use English, especially in academia. Ivan also claimed that he was too lazy to spend time on the preparation for TOEFL, and Maggie talked about TOEFL and CAEL as follows,

... actually if I am going to take TOEFL, I am able to prepare it because a lot of people have experience. I can buy a lot of books. But I think the difference is TOEFL testing how do I know about this language, how much do I remember like some vocabulary, grammar, and some words we don't really use in our daily life or even in university. But CAEL is sort of testing how much can you use this knowledge. I want to take Credit English. I think I must learn a lot from 1500, 1900.

So it is evident that their living and studying experience in Canada has strengthened their belief that good grammar knowledge does not guarantee good use of the language. However, even Ivan and Maggie did not deny that grammar is useful for their language learning, especially for writing though they cannot describe its usefulness as clearly as Dinny does.

The evolution of Asian learners' beliefs about grammar

Three countries' (China, Japan, Korea) English education systems have a lot in common: following textbooks, test-oriented, memorizing, focus on

CARLETON PAPERS IN APPLIED LANGUAGE STUDIES

reading, a lot of grammar instructions, and few speaking chance. Their evaluation on their EFL experience was not very different from country to country. One student of each countries said they studied English for exam. One Korean and one Japanese said they wanted to communicate in English. Two Japanese said they concerned too little things. We studied their change of perception on grammar based on their interviews. This section is going to compare students' perception according to their duration of studying in Carleton: 3 months (1 Korean, 1 Japanese, and 1 Chinese), 6-7months (1 Korean, 1 Japanese, 1 Chinese), 9-12 months (1 Korean, 1 Japanese, 1 Chinese) and discuss some other issues on this.

3 months

For the first three months, they enjoy more communicative way in learning English. Bonghyun (Korean) and Chie (Japanese) tried to practice more English through making friends. They more focus on using their grammar knowledge they already acquired while they are speaking and writing rather than learning new grammar. Bonghyun said he didn't learn grammar in Carleton but they taught very useful grammars in the real communication. Chie studied at Toronto for 4 months before and she compared her class in Toronto and Carleton. She said she had been studying English language there (in Toronto) but here (in Carleton), she was studying how to use English.

As for error correction, they did not want teachers to correct detailed grammar errors but want to correct global or communicative mistakes.

6-7 months

All three students expressed speaking and writing needs different level of grammars. They all said grammar is more important in writing than speaking. However, overall, they don't think grammar is core element but still important especially in writing and academic purpose. When they speak two of them (Ahram, Korean and Hanako, Japanese) said they cared about grammar but not as much as before. However, Hanako said she was still careful when she was writing journal and learned from her teachers' feedback. Ivan (Chinese) said teachers in Carleton correct ed errors in speaking and writing but paid more attention on how to use English not just grammar knowledge. They all think the best way to learn English is communication. Ahram emphasized chances of conversation, Hanako making friends, and Ivan using English everyday.

9-12 months

Yuhui (Korean) stayed in Canada for 9 months but she took Carleton ESL only 18 weeks in total. Also, she didn't have academic purpose in studying

English being different from other two students. It might be difficult to put her in this group. She thinks internalizing basic grammar with context is the most important thing in learning English. Experiencing English is the good way to improve English skills for her. As time goes on, she came not to concern about grammar much while speaking. In writing, she thinks correcting paragraph organization is prior to grammar errors. However, both are necessary in the end.

Satoshi (Japanese) started from IC10 which is beginner level. She studied grammar book by herself at the beginning. She thought this was the fastest way to improve her English and it was helpful. She could understand better. However, as her English was improving, she found grammar was not very important anymore. Grammar is not the first priority but still she thinks grammar is important to improve every skill.

Maggie (Chinese) thinks grammar is most important and teacher should teach explicitly. However, it doesn't mean the traditional grammar teaching. She found another important thing is that grammar should be how to use English not memorizing discrete elements.

Satoshi and Maggie focused on more accuracy than other students. Satoshi said "I care more (grammar) now because I have more knowledge about English." Maggie said "I need somebody to correct me. Teacher should correct errors."

Discussion

It is difficult to generalize the change of students' perception on grammar according to their duration of studying in Carleton as they have different purposes, personal educational background, and the level of English proficiency. However, we could find some interesting elements influencing on students' perception on grammar.

Influence of previous grammar learning

As Savignon & Wang's findings (2003), the learners who began to learn English at private institutes with native speakers prior to the formal school instruction expressed stronger negative attitudes on the form-focused instruction. For example, Aram went to the private language school before starting English class in public school. He experienced communicative language class there and he consistently complaining that the English class in his school in Korea didn't give a chance to have conversations in the class. On the contrary, Yuhui didn't have any chance to go to private language school before had less negative opinion on her EFL experience in her country. She felt that discrete knowledge she studied in her country connected in the English speaking country by using it. Chie had a native assistant language teacher in her junior high school. She enjoyed her class at

CARLETON PAPERS IN APPLIED LANGUAGE STUDIES

that time but she disappointed about test-oriented English class in her senior high school. As Aram did, she didn't enjoy the class at all.

Of course, few students can enjoy test-oriented or rote-training style English class. However, some students who had previous experience of communicative language learning express their negative points about their EFL learning experience more explicitly.

Prescriptive vs. descriptive grammar

Some of the students we had interview with explained the difference between the ESL class and English class in their own countries. Among them, Bonghyun described ESL class in Carleton as follows:

In Korea, they teach grammar and give examples. Here, while the class goes on, if they meet grammatical elements, they teach it. But we didn't learn that much about grammar. (Bonhyun, April, 2004)

He realized that his teacher doesn't give prescriptive grammar first but rather give the descriptive grammar instruction whenever they meet difficulty in using English in his class in Carleton. Yuhui also had a similar notion that she thought grammar should be taught in context.

Connecting with one topic is very good approach. When we teach reading, children can have some new words. Sometimes, we should teach grammar while reading about that topic. If you want to teach some specific grammar, you'd better bring some reading which is including that element or some songs which is repeating that element..... (Yuhui, April, 2004)

Similarly, Chie, Ivan and Maggie also mentioned about "learning how to use English" as apposed to "memorizing grammar rule." They all think this is very important difference between their EFL experience and ESL in Carleton and accept this way of learning quite positively.

Learner perception on grammar according to the level of English

When they feel desperate because they don't have basic grammar knowledge, their first choice is studying grammar books. In our interviews, Bonghyun and Satoshi didn't have basic grammar knowledge. Bonghyun repeated a grammar book 20 times and Satoshi studied her grammar book at the beginning because she thought it was the fastest way to improve her English.

As Dickins and Woods (1988) said, communicative competence presupposes linguistic competence, whereas the converse does not hold. They might need basic linguistic competence before moving on to the

CARLETON PAPERS IN APPLIED LANGUAGE STUDIES

communicative competence. After they get the basic grammar or vocabulary knowledge, they enjoyed using those in communicative situation. In this step, they care about grammar less than before.

Another interesting thing is that they need more grammar as they studied longer. Satoshi said “I care more now because I have more knowledge about English.” And Maggie wanted somebody to correct her errors. She also said grammar is most important. Satoshi said grammar is not the first priority but still important. Both studied for 1 year in Carleton. In addition, it seems that the better they did in previous grammar learning, the more positive attitude they hold towards grammar, as the interview data gained from the three Chinese students have demonstrated.

The role of grammar according to the purpose of studying English

Their perspective was different according to their purpose of studying English. Grammar is not important for general communication but important for academic purpose (compare Yuhui, Maggie, Satoshi). Grammar is not important for speaking but important for writing (Ahram, Hanako, Ivan, Maggie). According to the purpose of learning, their needs of error correction level also different. For example, three Korean students who were in PPD class which is not academic class didn't want to be corrected. On the other hand, the three Chinese students who were in IC program which is for the students who are planning to study in Canadian university wanted to be corrected by teachers. We could find that students think they want to be more correct when they use English for academic purpose and especially in writing.

Institutional influence

Even though some of them think they didn't change their perception on English learning or grammar, it doesn't seem coincident that many of them have similar perception on grammar regardless duration of studying in Carleton and other backgrounds: Bonhyun-communicative grammar learning, Chie-how to use, Ahram- through conversation, Ivan-how to use, Yuhui-grammar in context, and Maggie-how to use. Besides, most of them got to think writing is very important and aware of academic English. It is assumed that some of Carleton teaching method influenced students' perceptions on their perception on language learning.

Conclusion

As mentioned before, it is hard to reach a general conclusion as to the change of ESL students' perception of grammar. It seems that no student holds positive views on passive grammar learning and knowledge even when they had to face it for some reasons back in their own countries. Their totally different learning experiences in ESL situations has strengthened this belief

and provided enlightenment for some of them of how to use their previous grammar knowledge or acquire more knowledge to their own advantage. Previous solid grammar knowledge may add to students' confidence in using the language communicatively while the lack of it may lead to students' desire for it at certain stage of learning. In sum, all students expect that grammar learning provides them with "flexibility" of using the language instead of "a straightjacket" (Larsen-Freeman, 2002) they find useless except in high-stake testing situation like TOEFL. This will definitely pose challenge to both teachers and researchers in that they have to pay due attention to the role of grammar even in communicative approach. They need to lead the students to explore how to approach the "flexibility" grammar is capable of.

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