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Egocentric Speech and Reflection in Self-Questioning

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Abstract

In the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) grammar education research, testing on student's achievement has been paid much attention in various exams within higher education as well as commercial exams. This study aimed to investigate the grammar exam in an EFL context with low achievement, night school college students and put the emphasis on the egocentric speech in the "Question-Asking-Answering" process. Based on Vygotsky's Cultural-historical theories, we examined how the egocentric speech mediates inner speech and social speech in a grammar exam. The results suggested that all the participants utilized egocentric speech at certain degrees. Participants read silently when seeking possible grammatic questions to ask; however, the sentence for answering is created before the question was made. The egocentric speech and reflection played a key role for participants to demonstrate their proficiency in grammar. Implications for EFL grammar education and testing design were drawn.

Keywords: *Question-Asking-Answering, EFL, Vygotsky, egocentric speech, ZPD*

Introduction

This study invested reflection of college EFL students on their self-questioning strategies when taking an exam. In an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, self-questioning strategy was implemented in an exam for low achievement, night school college students. In this contextual inquiry, this study is conducted for EFL researchers and teachers who want to make some meaningful alternative ways of assessing students' learning achievements. An alternative representation of knowledge is utilized in the form of self-questioning that reflects in the process of question making and answer upon their learned knowledge base of English grammar. It also helps the learners to create questions of their own from merely applied static grammatic rules; therefore, this self-questioning reflection provides students with their creativity along with criterion-based grammar exams.

In Taiwan, English Grammar classes are still required courses for first-year college students in some schools in Taiwan. Standardized tests are utilized for testing students' achievements; therefore, teachers of those classes often have drawn grammatic knowledge out of the textbook and apply them in exams. English grammatic skills can only be detected when they are being utilized in real-life communication (Chniti, 2018) and should be integrated with other English domains (Doğdu & Arca, 2018).

In this study, we investigated the student's grammatic innate and cognitive functions in their self-test writing and answering process. According to Ahmed (2019), Chomsky pointed out that foreign language learners learn English grammar of native speaker's competence, which is driven by the native speakers' cognitive system; thus, studying English grammar is closely related to studying their cognitive system. (Ahmed, 2019, p. 423) Therefore, grammar learning is mental and cannot be detected directly externally according to Chomsky's transformational generative grammar theory. (Azabdaftari, 2013, p. 100)

The proper use of grammar can make a non-native speaker communicate their ideas in a practical incident; In order to assess ESL or EFL students' grammatic proficiency by checking students' understanding of "rules to be build meaningful sentences and paragraphs with language" and is "a major part in the testing field." (Chniti, 2018, p. 312) Traditional approach – Language + philosophy – Grammar was a branch of logic Behaviorist theory of language learning – stimulus-response (S-R) – Thorndike (trial and error) following information: What is already known about the subject, related to the paper in question? What is not known about the subject and hence what the study intended to examine (or what the paper seeks to present)

In most cases, the background can be framed in just 2–3 sentences, with each sentence describing a different aspect of the information referred to above.

The purpose of the background, as the word itself indicates, is to provide the reader with a background to the study, and hence to smoothly lead into a description of the methods employed in the investigation.

For instance, language is structured in a way that is served for communicative purposes. The use of language is reflected by the language structure. (Azabdaftari, 2013) Grammar as the structure of language structure is constructed in a way that meaning can be transformed from symbols into a meaningful and useful message that is for communicating in one's mind as well as between people. Therefore, the inner speech and social speech that mediated by egocentric speech becomes a "linguistic problem that attracts attention and results in language-mediated reflection during interaction." (Ortega, 2014, p. 69) Words in the reflection process are related to the reality in contrasting the structure of language and social consciousness in various ways. (Van Der Veer & Zavershneva, 2018) Reflection in this process than become means of meaning construction for inner and social communication of reality.

Egocentric speech is in line with a descriptive reality and reflects feasible resolutions of the discrepancies, and becomes part of the result of the final product. In addition, Vygotsky's studies regarding the genesis of mind that we are wised up to the fact that man's mind itself is the by-product of social, cultural, and historical mechanisms. (Vygotsky, 1978)

Research Methodology

The methodology is in line with Vygotsky's Cultural-historical theories that has a dual function on student's self-questioning in an English grammar exam. The problems were generated and answered by participating students themselves.

Participants were selected from a freshman level night program class in a technology university in the central Taiwan. In Taiwan, according to the curriculum of the studied department, “English Grammar” is a required course in the Freshman level night program as a whole year, or a two-semester, course for academic reasons. Most Freshman level students in this night program were insufficient in grammatic proficiency at the entrance. Participants were not able to attend day program as most of them were low achiever in their academic performance. In the light of this background, one of the night program class was chosen for this study. Total 53 students were investigated from this class for future discussion.

This study is based on the case study research design along with standard tests, interviews, and classroom observations. There are two stages of stimulations. One is the question-writing process and another one is the self-answering process. All those two tasks were utilized as stimulations for students to create an interrelated event of inner speech and socialized speech that was mediated by the egocentric speech. In the process of question-making, the egocentric speech served as the basis for the inner speech for self-regulation and seek for a resurrection of making a test question. In the second process of self-answering, the egocentric speech turns itself in conjunction with the inner speech at the same time, express itself socially communicatively while problem-solving internally. In fact, the duo-processes is not separated in parts, but a synthesis of students utilizing their grammatic knowledge, as part of the language skill, served as a mediational function that imbedded with the egocentric speech. Therefore, grammar becomes the object of testing, but at the same time, is also the subject by itself.

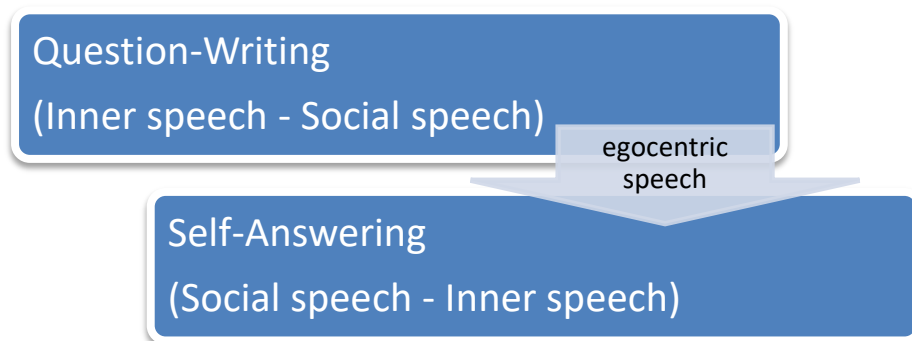


Figure 1: Stages of stimulation

1. It's the social speech getting inward. Students were asked to take a regular standardized test consisted with multiple choices, (test score)
2. Students were asked to create a test item for themselves to answer. (interview, Question-writing)
3. Students answered questions that created by them own. (answer to own question)

Results and Discussion

According to the interview, participants asked themselves questions on the following aspects of this “question-asking” stage. They inquired the grammatic knowledge to be asked by thinking of a sentence they thought it would most possible to be correct. After that they looked at parts of the sentence that could be blanked out, and create options to be a multiple choice, filling blanks (close), or others such as a simple one by one dialog. Contradictions of the known and unknown were in the core of this stage. Participants wanted find an easier way out, but got sucked in a spiral. Correlation between test score and self-question-writing (creativity). The form of

final copy of written speech. The results suggested that all the participants utilized egocentric speech at certain degrees.

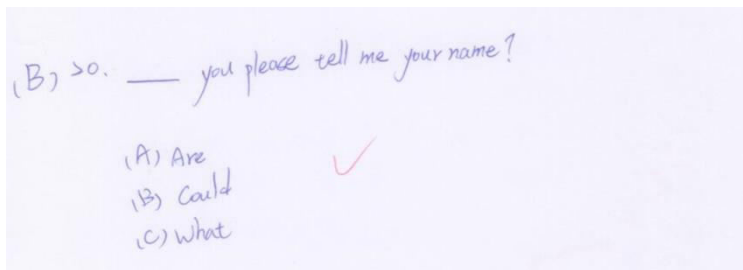


Figure 2: A sample of multiple-choice question

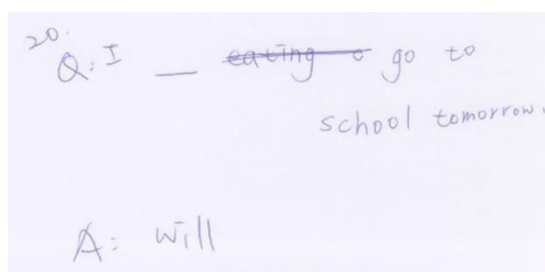


Figure 3: A sample of cloze question

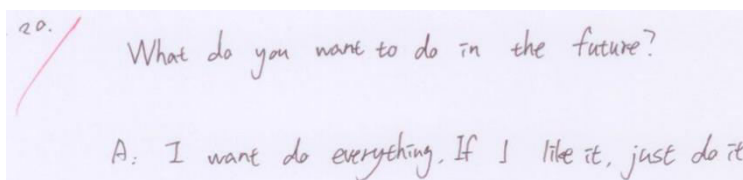


Figure 4: A sample of conversation question

Participants read silently when seeking possible grammatic questions to ask; however, the sentence for answering is created before the question was made. The order of problem-solving in the inner speech, which is mediated by egocentric speech, was the rule, the sentence of an answer, and the way of questioning. This form of the primitive product was still in its original form internally before it could be carried to the final external product of the question written and answers on the answer sheet. The primitive product of the final answer to "question-asking-answering" was carried out and mediated by the egocentric speech in the transactional process to the final answering.

Conclusion

The study observed and investigated that the final copy of the question-asking-answering was done back and forth between the use of inner speech and societal speech in the written form at least twice. The societal speech of the type of written final question was also affected by the social norm of a standardized exam. Participants used multiple choices and filling blanks (cloze) the most as they were forms of what they were used to; therefore, the egocentric speech played a key role for participants to demonstrate their proficiency in grammar. Egocentric speech can be a meaningful means for language learning.

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