Grammatical Acquisition Of Present And Past Tense Verb Forms In A Communicative Setting

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GRAMMATICAL ACQUISITION OF PRESENT AND PAST TENSE VERB FORMS
IN A COMMUNICATIVE SETTING

by

Katherine N. Nelson

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in English as a Second Language

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CHAPTER ONE
Introduction
Setting the Stage

Verb tense proficiency remains a serious grammatical challenge among upper elementary English Learners (ELs). In this thesis, I will answer the question: “Does the communicative approach to teaching language increase 5th grade English Learners’ proficiency in their grammar acquisition of present and past tense verb conjugation?”

This chapter will highlight my personal experience with EL students having limited grammatical knowledge, share the significance of my research relating to other educators and stakeholders, as well as outline an action plan and rationale for completing my research project.

Personal Experience

I first discovered my students’ challenge in conjugating present to past tense verbs, when, as a budding ESL teacher during my practicum, I assigned a writing project to two groups of six middle school ELs to complete. Our class setting took place within a sheltered EL language arts class, with only EL students in attendance. Included in the items required for their project was a list of vocabulary words from our current reading that included verbs, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs. As my students started their assignment, I realized they were misusing the vocabulary words, confusing nouns and verbs, as well as not using the correct tense of verbs. Even though many of my students were fluent speakers, their ability to conjugate verbs was surprisingly inept. When asked to replace present tense verbs with past tense verbs in the sentence “Maria sings,” a
student wrote “Maria sing.” Here the student clearly didn’t know that the past tense of 
sing was sang. Also, this student replaced the word music with the word song, not 
realizing that neither of these words were verbs. Students also incorrectly substituted 
words like plays and claps with play and clap, instead of “played” and “clapped”.

As I have continued to teach ELs for the past four years, I have become increasingly 
aware of my students’ inability to use verb tenses appropriately. I have found this 
deficiency to be a hindrance which has the potential to negatively affect my students in at 
least three areas: their ability to comprehend age-level literature; their ability to create 
comprehensible original written works; and their ability to perform well on high stakes 
testing. Having noticed my students’ difficulties in this area, I am compelled to 
investigate strategies I can implement which will assist my students in successfully 
arriving at a proficient literacy level in the area of verb tense conjugation.

Verb Tense Understanding

Fifth grade texts include a substantial number of complex sentences with both present 
and past tense verbs. In order for students to comprehend the meaning of any given 
sentence, understanding the meaning conveyed by verb tense is fundamental. 
Comprehension of a given verb phrase impacts understanding at the sentence, paragraph, 
and finally the discourse level. The ability to use verb tenses appropriately is necessary 
for students to be able to create their own texts for various assignments, such as sharing a 
meaningful past experience, recollecting a childhood memory, or reflecting on a shared 
classroom experience. Using verb tenses correctly will allow students to better 
comprehend passages on high-stakes testing, which is vital to a school’s overall Adequate 
Yearly Progress (AYP) standing. Over the past four years, at a 5th grade urban Title I 
school in the upper Midwest, EL students’ reading scores on the MCA III high stakes test
have been below 20% proficient. In 2015, their scores only reached 9.1% proficient, and in 2016 only grew to 13% proficient on the reading section of the MCA III test. This is an important area of concern to me because I have witnessed my students struggling with their understanding and application of correct verb tense conjugation, which may be one reason for their low test scores.

Other Educators Concerned

Language touches every aspect of students’ learning, whether they are learning math, science, social studies, or language arts. Thus students’ verb tense proficiency is an important concern to mainstream content teachers. Comprehending verb tenses influences reading and writing proficiency in all subjects. Administrators, counselors, and media specialist teachers, special interest teachers such as band, choir, and drama teachers are also interested in the literary success of their student population. Ultimately, all educators who come into contact with ELs desire to help their students succeed in literacy, comprehension, and communicative competence.

Students communicating effectively have mastered the skill of interacting within authentic, meaningful discussions relating to their personal life and are able to demonstrate their understanding of a particular content skill. District stakeholders also share an interest in students’ literacy proficiency. District School Improvement Plan (SIP) goals outline the expected growth in literacy proficiency on high-stakes tests for all students, and offer either rewards or consequences for not meeting the expected goals. Verb tense conjugation plays a critical role in a student’s ability to show mastery on high-stakes tests.


Action Research Plan

In order to determine whether the communicative approach helps students learn when to use verb tenses, I will conduct a mixed methods action research study as the practitioner in a co-taught classroom which has between 15-20% EL students. I will administer a pretest, a series of explicit lessons using communicative language use which will focus on present and past tense verb conjugation, and a post-test. According to Hymes (1972), lessons using the communicative competence format will include students’ ability to comprehend content and express understanding in all four language domains: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. One main theoretical foundation of communicative language teaching is to cultivate authentic communication relating to the students’ life while demonstrating understanding of content-oriented lessons (Yuan, 2011). If the communicative approach elicits successful results, my students will be able to comprehend 5th grade texts, will apply correct verb conjugation to their own writing, and will possibly improve their high stakes test scores.

Summary

Verb tense proficiency remains a serious grammatical challenge which has the potential to negatively affect ELs in three areas: their ability to comprehend age-level literature; their ability to create comprehensible original written works; and their ability to perform well on high stakes testing.

A student’s ability to use verb tenses correctly remains an important skill necessary in the acquisition of communicative competence. As students learn how to use tenses appropriately, they will be better able to create authentic, meaningful communication within the four language domains: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Many educators within an EL student’s sphere of influence have a vested interest in their
literacy proficiency. School administrators, classroom teachers, English language teachers, media center specialists, and specialized arts, such as drama, choir, and music teachers are all interested in the success of their students.

If the communicative approach elicits successful results, my students will be able to comprehend texts, will apply correct verb conjugation to their own writing, and possibly improve their high stakes test scores. Thus, my question, “Does the communicative approach to teaching language increase 5th grade English Learners’ proficiency in their grammar acquisition of present and past tense verb conjugation?” will be answered as accurately as possible.

Overview of Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, Literature Review, I provide a literature review including references which will demonstrate what is and is not known about teaching language in a communicative setting incorporating verb tense conjugation. I will review research in the areas of communicative language teaching (CLT), fifth grade grammar proficiency, grammar acquisition, and correct verb tense conjugation. I will present analysis, synthesis, elaboration, and reflection on the work of theorists and practitioners in relation to each of the four noted areas. I will also share my perspective and interpretation of literature relating to communicative language teaching (CLT), fifth grade grammar proficiency, grammar acquisition, and correct verb tense conjugation.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Determining whether the communicative approach to teaching language will help 5th grade English Learners (ELs) become proficient in their grammar acquisition of present and past tense verb conjugation and answering the question “Does the communicative approach to teaching language increase 5th grade English Learners’ proficiency in their grammar acquisition of present and past tense verb conjugation?” seems to have a variety of related current and past research which could point to an answer. In this chapter I will review research in the areas of communicative language teaching (CLT), fifth grade grammar proficiency, grammar acquisition, and correct verb tense conjugation.

Communicative language teaching is hallmarked by the understanding that the primary units of language are not only grammatical and structural, but functional and communicative as well. During communicative lessons, students are dialoguing about authentic life experiences while simultaneously negotiating content-oriented meaning. Prior to students’ communication regarding real life experiences, language skills have been introduced and direction has been given to include specific language targets within their conversation. Acquisition of a target language can be traced to the unconscious development of a language as a result of using the language for real communication. (Krashen, 1979).
Because ELs’ writing and grammatical proficiency levels fall well below their native English speaking peers’ literacy levels, understanding the age-appropriate learning tasks which are expected of fifth grade students is important to keep in mind when considering how long it takes for school aged children to develop English proficiency. Researchers have found that students learning English as their 2\textsuperscript{nd} language achieve parity with their native English speaking peers in an average of 3.31 years, and that older ELs learn English faster than younger students (Valdez, 2012). In addition, ELs who arrived in the US between the ages of 8-11 were found to have the highest achievement rates on standardized achievement tests, compared to students who entered the US before age 8 or after age 11 (MacSwan & Pray, 2005). Since most fifth grade students are 10 or 11 years of age, this presents a promising outlook for fifth grade success in acquiring grammatical proficiency, given the appropriate teaching strategies.

A trend has emerged to reintroduce grammar into the teaching of English, due to evidence that ELs demonstrate substantial errors in tense, case, grammatical agreement, and other aspects of language structure within formative and summative assessments (MacSwan and Pray, 2005). Over the last four years, the dominant trend of ELs’ high stakes test scores has continued to decline. Preservice and professional teachers agree that universities should offer specific grammar methodology and grammar instruction classes to help them address ELs’ writing deficiencies (Kelleher, 1996). In addition, the amount of grammar-related input available to ELs in their writing classes, their meta-linguistic knowledge of grammar, and the level of transfer demonstrated by students from grammar instruction to their writing assignments and assessments should be explored (Amonette, 2001). The role of grammar in the writing curriculum, the effectiveness of processing
instruction in grammar acquisition, and the developmental stages in receptive grammar acquisition all play a part in exploring grammar acquisition.

In order for students to create comprehensible written works, they must have a working knowledge of present and past tense verbs. Knowledge of the past tense form of verbs is necessary for students in creating various writing assignments such as sharing a meaningful past experience, recollecting a childhood memory, or reflecting on a shared classroom experience. In order for students to comprehend and succeed on formal assessments such as high stakes tests, verb tense conjugation proficiency is necessary.

Communicative Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching Identified.

In an article entitled “Communicative Language Teaching”, a British linguist, D.A. Wilkins states that communicative language teaching (CLT), encompasses the following components: language is a system for expressing meaning; the primary function of language is interaction and communication; the structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses; and the primary units of language are not only grammatical and structural, but exhibit functional and communicative features used in discourse, as well (Wilkins, 1972). Wilkins also advocates that language should not only be described through traditional concepts of grammar and vocabulary, but that students should be able to demonstrate the systems of meanings that lay behind the communicative uses of language. Students should be able to relate meaningful and understandable ideas through sharing informational, persuasive, or entertaining text. In the article “A Brief Comment on Communicative Language Teaching”, Fang Yuan states that communicative language teaching embodies allowing students to authentically
communicate about life experiences while negotiating content-oriented meaning. CLT is student-centered, rather than teacher-centered, and encourages active and independent communicative practice and competence (Yuan, 2011). As teachers provide opportunities for students to practice authentic communication mimicking real-life experiences within the classroom, students’ communicative competence will flourish outside of the classroom (Long, 1976). Also, students don’t only encounter words in isolation, but as part of purposeful discourse both inside and outside of the classroom (Schleppegrell, 2012).

Pedagogy of Communicative Language Teaching.

Schleppegrell points out that teachers need research based pedagogical approaches that enable teachers to focus on necessary scope and sequence goals, such as grammar benchmarks, while supporting English language development in the classroom (2016). Students need practice engaging in different kinds of tasks and activities in which academic language is taught and encouraged. In addition, when students are allowed social and interactive experiences with the target language, they are better equipped to develop a variety of genres and registers used in discourse. Blending genre—which provides the social context of an interaction, with register—which focuses on the grammatical and lexical choices students make in an interaction, adds new ways of learning a language, and is the goal of CLT (Schleppegrell, 2004). Being sensitive and accepting of the variety of genres and registers that students bring from their respective cultures creates an authentic, personal connection which increases interest in making meaning from discourse occurring during communication. Student to student talk is vital to helping students learn from and build upon other students’ understanding of content.
knowledge. Content learning is supported through “talk” about language, and language learning is supported through “talk” about content (Schleppegrell, 2014).

As students use language in ways which are valuable to them, they also are demonstrating new linguistic grammatical knowledge that will solidify the learning of new knowledge (Schleppegrell, 2012). Additionally, focus needs to shift from language classrooms supporting content-area teaching to content-area teachers incorporating a language focus in their respective classrooms. As teachers incorporate authentic assignments and projects which support Language Arts benchmarks within Math, Science and Humanities classes, students’ literacy proficiency will improve as they simultaneously master knowledge of content academic language.

For example, one of my colleagues, a fifth grade humanities teacher, incorporated a language focused project in his classroom at the end of a semester in which students were assigned the task of creating a Power Point presentation sharing their opinion on which college or university would be the best fit for the students’ educational and vocational goals. Student tasks included researching and reading multiple texts about local community colleges and universities, creating a list of pros and cons regarding attending the college, forming their personal opinion of the best school choice, and creating the Power Point script which the students used to present their information. Language benchmarks included in this assignment were: using details from texts to explain main ideas; summarizing text; locating reasons and evidence which support specific points in a text; providing logically ordered reasons that are supported by facts and details; linking opinion and reasons using words, phrases, and clauses; and writing informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly. Embedded within these language benchmarks is the need to know and understand
verbs and verb phrases, including present and past tense. Building on the knowledge that language learning is built upon “talk” about content, students were instructed to “turn and talk” and share ideas through “musical shares” throughout their lessons. As students shared various aspects of their findings about the colleges they were researching, they were able to practice communicating with their peers in a clear and understandable way. Being able to correctly demonstrate verb tenses was an important factor in creating their power point script. As students engage in communicating around meaningful content areas, their linguistic accuracy is as much a part of communicative competence as is getting their meaning across accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately (Amonette, 2001).

Functional Linguistics.

Functional Linguistics (FL) incorporates a functional approach which teaches students to use real language for real purposes such as sharing information, reflecting, expressing attitudes, entertaining, or arguing. FL is not merely used to teach a grammatical point through textbook exercises. Central to the functional linguistics approach is an emphasis on using language as a resource for making meaning (Derewianka, 1990). Additionally, FL supports small group work by stressing the importance of how students make meaning of language in conjunction with each other. Students discuss together meanings of words and application to overall sentence and personal meaning. FL also incorporates students writing texts for specific purposes and audiences. Additionally, identification of students’ strengths and suggestions for how students can create more effective texts can be made by instructors (Derewianka, 1990). Incorporating a functional approach will be demonstrated further in my thesis since small group work was the format I used for my data collection lessons. A functional approach also demonstrates how language operates
in all areas of the curriculum, not only teaching language for the sake of teaching language (Derewianka, 1990).

Michael Halliday’s theory of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) suggests that a meaning-based grammar provides a framework that researchers could use to look systematically at linguistic relationships between form and meaning in the language used in different social contexts (Schleppegrell, 2012). The form of language which is used varies depending on the social context and meaning aimed for. For example, the language used to purchase an item at a store is very different from language used to present a show and tell item to a classroom of peers. This difference is termed register variation (Schleppegrell, 2012). Teaching students a variety of registers used in various social contexts will allow students to use the correct grammatical form of language and create successful encounters inside and outside of the classroom. Additionally, SFL encompasses an approach to learning grammar in that grammar is not taught as a set of rules, but as resources for creating meaning in social contexts (Sadighi & Bavali, 2008). This concept aligns nicely with the CLT approach, which asserts that language is acquired through communication. It is important to note that although grammar is not taught as a set of rules, grammar does need to be taught within a meaningful and authentic environment, characteristic of a communicative setting.

Fifth Grade Grammar Proficiency

Achieving English Language Proficiency.

When ELs’ writing and grammatical proficiency levels fall well below their native English speaking peers’ literacy levels, understanding the age-appropriate learning tasks which are expected of fifth grade students is important to keep in mind when considering
how long it takes for school aged children to develop English proficiency (Valdez, 2012). WIDA Can Do Descriptors provide examples of what language learners can do at various stages of English language development in all four domains: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. According to WIDA, 5th grade students at level 5-Bridging, should be able to produce texts which have a variety of complex grammatical structures matched to their linguistic purpose and create narratives that connect personal experiences and content (WIDA performance Definitions, 2015). Conjugating verbs from present to past tense fall within the expectation of producing texts with a variety of grammatical structures. And writing a narrative about a family celebration memory, which is one of my communicative lessons used for this thesis, connects a personal narrative to grammatical content.

Researchers have found that students learning English as their second language (L2) achieve parity with their native English speaking peers in an average of 3.31 years, and that older ELs learn English faster than younger students. (MacSwan & Pray, 2005). In addition, ELs who arrived in the US between the ages of 8-11 were found to have the highest achievement rates on standardized achievement tests, compared to students who entered the US before age 8 or after age 11.

In a cross-sectional study of 1,548 ELs, it was determined that the students between the ages of 8-11 were the fastest achievers in reaching the 50th percentile on national norms on a standardized achievement test, within a 2-5 year period (Collier, 1987). On the other hand, both younger children, from ages 5-7, and older children, from ages 12-15, fell 1-3 years behind the 8-11 aged group, and experienced the greatest difficulty in learning English for academic purposes. Since most fifth grade students are 10 or 11
years of age, this presents a promising outlook for fifth grade success in acquiring grammatical proficiency, given the appropriate teaching strategies.

Language acquisition research has found that all children learn their native language effortlessly and without explicit instruction by the time they reach school age (MacSwan & Pray, 2005; Pinker 1994; Slobin & Bowerman, 1985). Chomsky (1981) coined the term Universal Grammar (UG) to convey the fact that grammar acquisition is attained through innate principals or an internal “bioprogram” which naturally occurs within the human species. In the case of a Second Language Learners (SLLs), school aged children learn their second language in a similar fashion to their native language growth which occurred during their preschool years (Crystal 1986; Milroy & Milroy, 1999; Newmeyer, 1986). However, because SLLs are learning a new language at an older age, it generally takes them approximately 3.31 years to become proficient in their second language.

Bilingual Versus English-only Approach.

Whether an English Learner receives instruction in an English-only setting or a bilingual setting is an important controversy potentially affecting the rate at which an EL attains English proficiency. Some states have passed anti-bilingual education measures prohibiting bilingual instruction in favor of Structured English Immersion (SEI) (MacSwan, 2005). Proponents of English-only instruction claim that EL children will become proficient in English in only one year’s time. On the other hand, those promoting bilingual education, maintain that allowing instructional clarification in a student’s native language is necessary for students to keep up academically in an all English setting (MacSwan & Pray, 2005; Crawford, 2004). It is important to consider these two opposing approaches when discussing the length of time needed for an EL to attain English proficiency.
BICS and CALP.

An additional view of the length of time needed for children to become proficient in English highlights the difference between two types of language development: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Cummins (1980, 2000) asserts that BICS, which is the ordinary everyday language used in social contexts is learned first in an EL’s early development, and that CALP is learned later as the student is exposed to the academic rigors of school. Also, researchers have discovered that language is acquired in specific stages, and that these stages cannot be skipped (Padrick, 2014). Therefore, it is important that educators scaffold their teaching in a specific order in which one learning task builds upon another.

Differing views.

As is expected when various researchers investigate a literacy phenomenon, differing views arise as to the outcome of the research. Considering the time it takes for ELs to reach English proficiency benchmarks, the researchers listed in Appendix B share their results of the time it takes for ELs to reach English proficiency benchmarks and academic achievement benchmarks. As shown, the time it takes ELs to reach English proficiency falls within a range between 1.5 and 5 years (MacSwan & Pray, 2005). Thus, the average length of 3.31 years to reach proficiency as mentioned previously seems to be an accurate estimation.

Grammar Acquisition

Grammar Acquisition Defined.

According to Chomsky, (1995) language proficiency is a state of linguistic maturity in which an EL learner has acquired grammatical knowledge which is compatible with
the displayed grammatical production of a native language speaker. This knowledge encompasses a grammatical system which consists of rules and principals which govern word order (syntax), word formation (morphology), and pronunciation (phonology), within appropriate pragmatic interactions (Crystal, 1986; Milroy & Milroy, 1999; Newmeyer, 1986). Grammar acquisition, then, is the ability of a second language learner to know and use the correct grammatical forms within academic and social interactions in both written and discourse circumstances.

History of Grammar Instruction.

Over the past 50 years, professional educators in most Anglophone countries have debated the value of and the possible educational benefits of including grammar instruction in the EL’s curriculum. In 1966 at the Dartmouth Conference in the USA, a group of educators and educational researchers convened to discuss the importance of teaching grammar in a language arts curriculum. It was voted that formal grammar teaching should be removed from language arts curriculum, and was deemed a “waste of time” by those linguists attending the conference (Myhill, 2013).

Some educators feel anxious about teaching grammar, view the inclusion of grammar as “reactionary and restrictive” and place less value on the learning of grammar as opposed to teaching other literary aspects of English (Myhill, 2013). As noted by Maria Amonette (2001), research completed by Krashen (1982, 1992) supports the “anti-grammar” movement in favor of his “comprehensible input” theory. This theory rests on the idea that second language acquisition (SLA) can be attained by solely exposing the learner to authentic communication which is slightly above the student’s current level of proficiency, rather than wasting time on teaching form-focused grammar activities. Krashen also asserts that form-focused grammar instruction is not retained long-term by
the learner, even if the student demonstrates an initial positive performance (Krashen, 1992).

The grammar debate continues, however, as evidence has shown that a lack of attention to grammar has caused falling standards in language users. (MacDonald, 1995; Paterson, 2010; Truss, 2003; and Uttley, 2008). Linguists have since argued that grammar is a relevant and useful body of knowledge for ELs to possess (Hudson, 2004). Those researchers opposing Krashen’s theory counter that there are many forms of grammar instruction, and that grammar should be used as a resource which can be used in the comprehension and creation of oral and written discourse, rather than taught in isolation solely as grammatical terms (Celce-Murcia, 1991). In addition, proponents of including grammar in an ELs language curriculum state that when grammar is taught in a discourse context rather than at the sentence-level, students’ communicative competence is strengthened as grammar instruction encompasses meaning, social factors, and function (Celce-Murcia & Hiles, 1988; Larsen-Freeman, 1991). Evidence suggests that grammar taught with an exploratory approach is valuable in increasing student’s ability to correctly apply grammatical knowledge to their own writing creations (Myhill, 2013).

Consequently, as of 1990, there seems to be an emerging trend to reintroduce grammar in the teaching of English.

Need for grammar instruction.

The trend to reintroduce grammar into the teaching of English, seems to be due to evidence that ELs demonstrate substantial errors in tense, case, grammatical agreement, and other aspects of language structure within formative and summative assessments (McSwan and Pray, 2005). Over the last four years, the dominant trend of fifth grade EL students’ high stakes test scores at an urban Title I school in the upper Midwest has
continued to decline, with only 13% proficient on the reading portion of the MCA III in 2016 (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017). The question of whether students have been successful in transferring grammatical knowledge from the language classroom to other settings such as life away from school, high stakes tests, or other content classroom assignments seems to be affected by factors such as amount of instructional time, the degree to which learning is meaningful, and the extent to which concepts, rather than facts are learned (Ormrod, 1998, in Amonette, 2001). When grammar “facts” or rather explicit rules are taught separate from a meaningful context, students don’t retain the grammatical concepts that teachers are trying to convey. In order for a grammatical concept to be retained, grammar teaching should be taught within a meaningful and appropriate context. It is important for ELs to receive necessary grammar instruction in their English Language Arts classes in order to improve and apply their written language production in various content classes (Padrick, 2014). Teachers agree that all educators, regardless of specific content area, should be prepared to address the writing deficiencies demonstrated by their ELs, and also should be able to communicate successfully with few grammatical errors in their personal and professional interactions (Kelleher, 1996).

Additionally, preservice and professional teachers believe that grammar is a necessary component within a language curriculum and agree that universities should offer specific grammar methodology and grammar instruction classes to help them address ELs’ writing deficiencies. (Kelleher, 1996).

Developmental Stages of Grammar Acquisition.

Research in the 1960’s revealed that EL’s acquire second language word formation and word order in a relatively fixed order, and likewise go through similar stages as they develop knowledge of specific grammatical structures (Buyl and Housen, 2015).
According to Pienemann (2005, 2011), there are six stages of grammatical development which the L2 learner acquires as they are learning English. These stages are chronological, and understanding of one stage is built upon mastery of the stage before it. The developmental grammatical stages are shown in Appendix B.

Although the data found in appendix B was gathered from a single individual study conducted by Aafke Buyl and Alex Housen, and supported by the Processability Theory—a more detailed cross-sectional study conducted by Pienemann (1998, 2005), this information can be useful in teaching grammar to fifth grade ELs. The stages which most affect my thesis are stages 1: Word/Lemma- single words, and stage 2: SVO word order, Past tense, Plural, and Possessives. According to this study, ELs are able to learn the past tense verb ending forms in stage two, directly after learning single words and subject/verb/object order. This gives me confidence that my 5th grade EL students will be able to acquire verb tense conjugation in a timely fashion since stage two is a basic building block within grammatical proficiency. Additionally, although WIDA guidelines state that a 5th grade EL at an English proficiency level of 5 can learn and apply complex grammatical structures, I have found that with the appropriate supports, 5th grade ELs with English proficiency levels ranging from 2-5 are also able to master verb tense conjugation.

Grammatical Proficiency in Context.

In discussing the role of grammar in writing, Myhill found that the pedagogical rationale for the re-emergence of grammar is not fully clear. There is a lack of evidence to support the notion that even though a student may learn a grammatical concept through formal grammar teaching, application of grammatical knowledge applied to other contexts may be lacking (Myhill, 2013). The role of grammar instruction is being
introduced in England, Australia, and the USA through differing avenues. As of 2013, England has adopted a National Curriculum including a grammar annex, which outlined the specific grammatical terminology and structures which students are required to learn. However, since teachers were given the freedom to determine the necessary context in which grammar should be taught, the teaching of grammar became de-contextualized, and the learning of the particular grammatical features became more important than the relationships between grammar and meaning. This led to a disconnect in students’ ability to apply correct grammar in various contexts.

However, in Australia the inclusion of key grammatical knowledge within the newly created National Curriculum has been successful in helping students understand the English language and how it works. This curriculum highlights grammatical knowledge which is articulated, purposeful, and provides a conscious understanding of how students can incorporate a working knowledge of the English Language within differing contexts.

In the USA, the inclusion of grammatical knowledge has been mandated by all but five states through the Common Core Standards. The language standards include two specific grammar related standards which call for a curriculum which incorporates the “command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.” and “command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.” (Myhill, 2013, from Common Core Standards, 2012). In addition, the third language standard incorporates a contextual application of grammar related language “to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.” These standards allow for grammar to be an integral part of the four
domains of learning English: reading, writing, listening, and speaking, as well as allowing grammatical concepts to be embedded in various contexts.

The importance of processing instruction (PI). Processing instruction is a teaching technique which aims to improve EL’s grammar proficiency, and thus is important to mention, as well. It has been documented that ELs’ processing routines prevent them from paying enough attention to grammar structures and thus have difficulty learning and retaining grammatical knowledge (Dekeyser & Botana, 2014). For example, when an EL’s target language is fundamentally different from their home language in form or word order, ELs’ processing of new input is fundamentally challenging. Because ELs’ input processing tends to take more time because of the additional amount of information being processed, PI aims to alter learners’ processing mechanisms within three steps. First, learners are provided with explicit information (EI) regarding a specific grammatical form. The relationship between grammatical form and its meaning should be overtly explained. Secondly, incorporate processing strategies which prevent ELs from reverting to using default processing which results in incorrect form-meaning mappings, and lastly, provide meaning bearing activities, coined structured input (SI) which cause learners to actively process the correct grammatical form and connect it to its function (Dekeyser & Botana, 2014). One such activity could be to ask students to listen to or see a sentence and then associate it with the correct illustration of the sentence. To incorporate a personal connection, students could then be instructed to share what they like or don’t like about the activity. In this way processing instruction deepens the acquisition phase by making a meaningful connection while input is processed.
Verb Tense Conjugation

Creating comprehensible written works.

Fifth grade literature includes a substantial amount of complex sentences having both present and past tense verbs. In order for students to comprehend the level of the text, verb tense understanding is fundamental. Comprehension of a given verb phrase impacts understanding at the sentence, paragraph, and finally the discourse level.

According to Debra Myhill (2008), linguistic competence is important to both the cognitive and social aspects of writing. Students need to be adept at creating a grammatically correct sentence which also suits the audience and purpose of writing.

Myhill (2008), also shares that Kress (1994) critiques the discipline of linguistics in that it has not provided the necessary theoretical or methodological tools for students to understand the developmental process and stages of learning writing. In a study investigating the use of verb tense by ELs, cited by Bardovi-Harling (1992), it was discovered that 16 adult ELs incorrectly retold and rewrote a Hawaiian tale by using past tense to mark foreground clauses, and present tense to mark background clauses.

Conversely, when given the same retelling assignment, native English speakers did not rely on using tense to distinguish foreground from background. This is another indication that including verb tense conjugation instruction for fifth grade learners is important for application and understanding of written works. Teaching students the basics of sentence development, including verb tense conjugation is indeed a very important building block in creating comprehensible written works.
Past tense learning through grammatical metalanguage.

More current research has supported an instructional approach revolving around functional grammar metalanguage—a use of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) that incorporates student-to-student discussion about language and the meaning behind certain language structures. An overarching characteristic of grammatical metalanguage is that students learn grammatical concepts through conversing with each other about language and content. In a study completed by Schleppegrell (2014), teachers used a framework which focused on four different ways clauses present meanings and how the meanings are represented in verbs and verb phrases (Schleppergrell, 2014). Fifth grade ELs were asked to identify clauses as being either a doing, saying, sensing, or being clause. For example, rather than asking students to identify verbs in a sentence, they are asked to identify a meaningful segment of words which are either doing, saying, sensing, or being (Martin & Rose, 2003, in Schleppergrell, 2014) in sentences such as:

1. If the record player hadn’t been broken, he would have gone sooner.

2. Some kids in the back started snickering.

In the examples above, students identified the underlined portions by thinking about what the main character does, thinks, feels, and says. This provided opportunity for students to engage in academic conversations about the meaning of words in context, and coincidentally discuss the meanings of the verbs broken, gone, and snickering. Providing such grammatical metalanguage activities supports young writers’ need to grasp sentences as textual units carrying information and meaning, rather than identifying separate words in isolation (Myhill, 2008). Also, student writing will improve as grammar input is linked to the writing goals in context (Myhill, Jpnes, Watson & Lines, 2013) within such metalanguage activities.
Possible Uses of Past tense.

Knowing how to use verb tense is also necessary for students to be able to create their own sentences for various assignments, such as sharing a meaningful past experience, recollecting a childhood memory, or reflecting on a shared classroom experience. Verb tense understanding will allow students to better comprehend passages on high-stakes testing, which is vital to a school’s overall Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standing. Over the past four years, at an urban Title I school in the upper Midwest, 5th grade EL students’ reading scores on the MCA III high stakes test have fallen below 20% proficient. In 2015, their scores only reached 9.1% proficient, and in 2016 only grew to 13% proficient on the reading section of the MCA III test (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017). This is an important area of concern to me because I have witnessed my students struggling with their understanding and application of correct verb tense conjugation, which could be a factor in their falling test scores.

Rationale for Verb Tense Conjugation Research.

The gap which exists in my EL students’ learning has to do with the lack of basic grammatical knowledge, specifically present and past verb tense conjugation. Unfortunately, little research attention has been given to elementary ELs' mastery of basic grammar concepts. My primary objective in this thesis is to provide fellow elementary education teachers an important strategy for increasing their students' ability to use verb tense in developing their grammatical and English language proficiency. The question “Does the communicative approach to teaching language increase 5th grade English Learners’ proficiency in their grammar acquisition of present and past tense verb conjugation?” will be further discussed in this thesis.
Summary

In summary, the research reviewed provides a basis for my own investigation of communicative language teaching, fifth grade grammar proficiency, grammar acquisition, and verb tense conjugation, which I have determined to be necessary in students’ attainment of Verb Tense Conjugation.

In chapter 3, methodology, I identify the methodology and procedures used to carry out my research; present my data collection techniques, and discuss the protection of my participants’ identity. Mixed Methods Action Research is the best method of research to use with my students because this method purposes to address an immediate classroom problem or need, reflect upon my current teaching strategies, collect data on everyday practices, and finally determine the best instructional strategies to implement in the future. My participants consisted of two groups of five 5th grade ELs with varying English language proficiency levels, ranging from levels 2-5. My students’ setting took place in an urban Title I school in the upper Midwest. Data collection consisted of administering a pre and post-test and data analysis included tallying number of correctly identified and conjugated verbs on both the pre and post-tests. My participant’s rights and safety were protected by following the guidelines required by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) form.

In chapter 4, results, I share and analyze the data I collected, and finally, in chapter 5, recommendations, I conclude with my reflections and observations of my thesis as a whole.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Introduction

In this chapter I will introduce the necessary components which I used to answer my thesis question, “Does the communicative approach to teaching language increase 5th grade English Learners’ proficiency in their grammar acquisition of present and past tense verb conjugation?” These components consisted of my research paradigm and method and my data collection including participants, setting, procedure, and data analysis techniques.

Mixed Methods Action Research was the best method of research to use with my students because this method purposes to address an immediate classroom problem or need, reflect upon current teaching strategies, collect data on everyday practices, and finally determine the best instructional strategies to implement in the future. Mixed methods also incorporates both quantitative and qualitative characteristics. My study indicated quantification since I tallied correct verb tense conjugation in both the pre and post-tests. It was also deemed a qualitative study because I studied a small group of students in their natural environment. My participants consisted of two groups of five 5th grade ELs with varying English language proficiency levels, ranging from levels 2-5. My
students’ setting took place in an urban Title I school in the upper Midwest. The student population was very diverse with 82% of the families receiving free and reduced lunch.

Materials consisted of a pretest, a series of communicative style lessons including verb tense conjugation, and a post test. My procedure consisted of administering the pretest, followed by a series of communicative style lessons including verb tense instruction, and the post test. Data analysis criteria included determining whether student improvement took place by tallying the number of correctly identified verbs within student work and tallying the correct number of present to past tense verb conjugations.

The immediate need I saw in my 5th grade EL students, is that they were not previously successful in determining which words in a sentence were verbs and whether the verbs were in present or past tense. I had previously observed my students incorrectly conjugating verbs while creating written assignments. For example, a student may have written a sentence like “The bird eated all of the seeds.” (an urban Title I school in the upper Midwest, 2016). I would have expected this type of incorrect application of tense from a first or second grade student, but was surprised that a 5th grade EL student still had trouble with verb tense. By completing this study, I purposed to help my students become proficient in verb tense conjugation, and therefore become better readers of 5th grade texts and competent 5th grade writers.

Mixed Methods Action Research

My research method was termed Mixed Methods Action Research. Action Research is typically carried out by a practitioner and purposes to address an immediate classroom problem or need. According to Allwright & Bailey (1991) in Mackey & Gass (2016), action research usually stems from an instructional question or problem in which “the
teacher can reflect upon his/her own teaching, collect data on everyday practices, and
determine the best instructional strategies to implement in the future.” (Mackey & Gass,
2016, pp.268-9). The instructional concern is teacher-initiated and purposes to implement
a specific instructional strategy unique to a student’s needs. As such, this mode of inquiry
is directed more towards teacher and student development than to theory building
(Chaudron, 2000 in Mackey & Gass, 2016).

My study was also deemed a mixed methods study because it incorporated both
quantitative and qualitative characteristics. Mixed methods is an appropriate method of
study to use when both approaches are used within a single study (Mackey & Gass,
2016). My study indicated quantification since I tallied correct verb tense conjugation in
both the pre and post- tests. In an experimental quantitative study, determining whether a
causal factor is responsible for performance changes from a pre-treatment (my pre-test) to
a post-treatment (my post-test) demonstrates whether a manipulated variable is
responsible for the change in performance (Mackey and Gass, 2016). The causal factor,
also termed the manipulated variable consisted of my series of verb tense lessons taught
in a communicative setting.

My study was also deemed a qualitative study because I studied a small group of
students in their natural environment, while attempting to discover if the communicative
approach strategy would be successful in attaining certain results. Mackey & Gass (2016)
point out that qualitative research is often open-ended or process-oriented which begins
with “few preconceived notions followed by a gradual fine-tuning and narrowing of
focus.” (Mackey & Gass, 2016, pg. 216). Once I reflect upon this study, I am confident I
will be able to narrow my focus to specific teacher instruction and student interactions
which will prove whether the communicative approach is a beneficial strategy to my
students’ attainment of verb tense conjugation proficiency. Since I gathered both quantitative and qualitative data and implemented action research, mixed methods action research proved to be the best type of research needed for my study.

Data Collection

Participants.

The participants in my study consisted of ten 5th grade English Learners representing a variety of ethnicities and having various home languages. Four of my students were of Latino descent and spoke Spanish as their L1. Two of my students’ home languages were Hmong, and four students were of African descent whose L1 was Creolized English. Students were grouped together into heterogeneous groups of five 5th grade ELs with varying English language proficiency levels ranging from 2.4-4.7. I chose ELs with a variety of English language proficiency levels because I wanted to determine whether all of the ELs being studied would benefit from explicit verb tense instruction in a communicative setting, regardless of their proficiency levels.

Setting.

My research took place in an urban Title I elementary school located in the upper Midwest which had an 82% free and reduced lunch population. My classroom setting consisted of a co-taught 5th grade classroom with myself- the EL teacher and a Language Arts teacher. Instruction was co-taught using the Daily 5 model, where students self-selected the learning activity in which they took part. Some students were busy reading, writing, or working on independent seat work, while other students worked in small groups with either myself, or the content area teacher.
Data Collection Technique #1 Pre-test.

The pre-test consisted of a 5th grade text, one paragraph in length, which I wrote. I used various online reading sites for ideas in paragraph length, topic, and grade level text. Student directions for the pretest consisted of finding and underlining all verbs, and then changing verb tense from present to past tense. The pre-test was administered before students received any instruction on verbs or verb tense.

Data Collection Technique #2 Post-test.

The post-test used was exactly the same as the pre-test. The post-test was administered after three weeks of explicit instruction on verb tense conjugation taught in a communicative setting. The pre/post-test can be found in Appendix A.

Procedure

The procedure I used to collect my data included a pre-test, three weeks of verb tense lessons taught within a communicative setting and a post-test; a detailed description of my procedure; my data analysis method; and a description of the ethics necessary to protect my participants’ privacy and rights.

Materials.

Materials consisted of a pretest, a series of communicative style lessons, and a post test. Both the pre and post-tests were identical, teacher constructed, and were graded by myself. The pre-test consisted of a paragraph written in present tense, in which the students were first be directed to identify which words were verbs, and subsequently were instructed to change all of the present tense verbs to the past tense. The paragraph contained both regular and irregular verbs. This test gave me an idea of my students’ knowledge level of present and past tense verbs prior to any instruction on verb tenses.
Materials used for the three week lesson on verb tense conjugation consisted of: a Visual Thinking strategy paired with a close sentence paragraph writing assignment, a verb identification and conjugation table, rewriting the initial paragraph using past tense verbs, a present and past tense listening activity, and writing a personal paragraph about a past family celebration.

Procedure.

My procedure consisted of administering the pretest on May 8th, followed by a series of communicative style lessons containing explicit verb tense instruction three days a week for three weeks, followed by the post test.

My Communicative style lessons followed a gradual release model using the “I do, we do, you do” approach. In this approach, I modeled a strategy first, then instruct students to work with me in completing an activity, and finally students independently created their own authentic written work. Their final creation consisted of an authentic, meaningful paragraph, identifying both present and past tense verbs. Students shared their paragraph with a peer, who identified all known present and past tense verbs within the paragraph. After peer editing was completed, students had an opportunity to correct any errors, and finally shared their completed work with their peer group by reading it out loud. As students read, listeners were instructed to listen for and record verbs, on a piece of paper. Discussion followed, identifying both present and past student recorded verbs. As a final summative assessment, I administered the post test, using the same pretest which students took before the lessons, to determine if any growth had taken place.

Data Analysis.

The criteria I used to determine whether student improvement took place was by tallying the number of correctly identified and conjugated verbs from present to past
tense within the pre and post-test. According to Mackey & Gass (2016), using pre and post-tests as a data analysis technique is considered a type of reliability testing. Using a test-retest method to determine reliability includes administering the same test to the same group of students at two different points in time (Mackey & Gass, 2016). This criteria was met since the data I collected from the pre and post-tests was gathered three weeks apart.

Possible strengths of using the pre and post-tests to gather data include objective scoring, broad coverage of testing subjects, and easy to score tests. Possible weaknesses of this data collection technique could be that students will guess at answers and therefore not give a true indication of their knowledge of verbs and verb tense conjugation, An additional weakness could be the possibility of the test being difficult to construct. In my case the test was not difficult to construct since I drew from various 5th grade resources to create text for the pre and post-test.

My analysis also took into account whether the Communicative Teaching style was helpful in students’ improvement of verb tense conjugation, based on the fact that prior to the pre-test, students did not receive lessons in a communicative setting.

Ethics.

As required by my submitted Institutional Review Board (IRB) form, protecting my research participants’ rights and safety and facilitating my research activities was of utmost importance. The specific precautions below were implemented to ensure my participants’ privacy and rights were maintained throughout my study and publication of my study. These precautions were:

1. Participants’ anonymity will be protected, and student names will not be used.
2. Participants will be taught in a private classroom with no video or audio taping.
3. Data will be stored on a password protected computer.

4. Participants and their parents or guardians will sign an informed consent letter before any data collection will be taken. This permission letter will include the following information: A statement about the purposes of the research, to the extent that such a statement will not bias participants, the expected duration of the subjects’ participation, a description of the procedures and tasks, a statement describing how the confidentiality of the participant will be protected and how data will be protected, contact information for both the investigator and the Hamline advisor, and a statement that participation is voluntary and that refusal to participate or to discontinue ongoing participation will incur no penalties (Hamline IRB form, 2017). The informed consent letter can be found in Appendix B.

Summary

Each step in this methods chapter was vital to determining whether the Communicative Teaching style would further student grammar acquisition by becoming proficient in verb tense conjugation. The Research Method, Participants and Setting, Materials, Procedure, and Data Analysis all provided important components of this study.

Mixed methods action research proved to be the best type of research needed for my study because action research considered an instructional concern which was teacher-initiated and purposed to implement a specific instructional strategy unique to my ELs needs. Mixed methods was used because it incorporated both quantitative and qualitative characteristics.
My participants consisted of two groups of five 5th grade ELs with varying English language proficiency levels, ranging from levels 2-5. My students’ setting took place in an urban Title I school in the upper Midwest. The student population was very diverse with 82% of the families receiving free and reduced lunch.

Materials consisted of a pretest, a series of communicative style lessons including verb tense conjugation, and a post test. My procedure consisted of administering the pretest, followed by a series of communicative style lessons including verb tense instruction, and the post test. Data analysis criteria included determining whether student improvement took place by tallying the number of correctly identified verbs within student work and tallying the correct number of present to past tense verb conjugations.

In chapter four, results, I will give more detailed information, evidence, and data to support my claims. I will synthesize and interpret the data I have collected in light of my research question, “Does the communicative approach to teaching language increase 5th grade English Learners’ proficiency in their grammar acquisition of present and past tense verb conjugation?” This chapter will highlight my data collection techniques, discuss verb identification and conjugation implications, and will discuss the specific grammar lessons set in a communicative setting which were taught to my 5th grade English Learners.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Introduction

In this chapter, I will synthesize and interpret the data I have collected in light of my research question, “Does the communicative approach to teaching language increase 5th grade English Learners’ proficiency in their grammar acquisition of present and past tense verb conjugation?” This chapter will highlight my data collection techniques, discuss verb identification and conjugation implications, and will discuss the grammar lessons set in a communicative setting.

My data collection techniques consisted of a pre and post-test measuring whether ELs grew in their ability to identify and conjugate verbs. In order for ELs to conjugate verbs correctly, they needed to be able to identify a verb from a non-verb. I provided careful analysis and discussion of verb identification and conjugation results in this chapter. I also provided thorough analysis of the specific grammar lessons presented in a communicative setting. Reviewing these lessons aided in determining whether the grammar lessons influenced students’ achievement of verb tense identification and conjugation.

This study was intended to research whether 5th grade English Learners would become proficient in their grammatical acquisition of present and past tense verb conjugation within a communicative setting. On May 8th, 2017, I began my data collection by
administering a pre-test on verb identification and conjugation to my participants. My participants consisted of ten 5th grade ELs representing various ethnicities with English proficiency levels ranging from 2.4-4.7. Table 1 displays student ethnicities and English proficiency levels. My ELs’ setting took place in an urban Title I elementary school located in the upper Midwest which had an 82% free and reduced lunch population.

Data Collection Techniques

Both a pre and post-test were administered and data collected to determine if growth in number of items correct was demonstrated. The pre-test was administered on May 8th, 2017, and consisted of a 5th grade text, one paragraph in length, which I modified, using a pre-existing sample paragraph. I used various online reading sites for ideas in paragraph length, topic, and grade level text. Student directions for the pretest consisted of identifying and underlining all verbs, and then changing verb tense from present to past tense. After three consecutive weeks of verb tense lessons for three days each week, the post-test, which was identical to the pre-test was administered. Lessons were instructed within a communicative setting.

Results from pre and post-test data showed that all ELs demonstrated at least some growth in correctly identifying and conjugating verbs from the pre-test to the post test. Out of a total of 24 points, the student who demonstrated the highest growth, grew from one point correct on the pre-test to 20 points correct on the post-test, with an overall growth of +19 correct. The lowest score from one point correct to four points correct showed an overall growth of only +3 correct by one student. Table 2 displays the pre and post-test scores for each student, as well as their overall growth from pre-test to post-test.
The fact that all ELs demonstrated at least some growth from the pre-test to the post-test exhibits multiple connection points from my literature review. For example, student to student talk when negotiating the meaning of a past tense verb helped ELs learn from and build upon other ELs’ understanding of content knowledge. In creating their personal paragraph, ELs used language in ways which were valuable to them, and also demonstrated new linguistic grammatical knowledge that solidified the learning of new knowledge, as demonstrated by their post-test growth. Because ELs personal paragraph was meaningful to them, the meaning-based verb tense grammar provided an opportunity to use real language for real purposes. The post-test results supported my literature review by demonstrating positive growth from the pre-test to the post-test.

Verb Identification.

In analyzing students’ pre-test scores, I discovered that nine out of ten ELs had not had any prior knowledge of verb identification. Most of my students indicated that they did not know what a verb was, since they incorrectly underlined non-verb words such as assembly, teacher, and pleasure. Table 3 displays students’ correct identification of verbs versus their identification of non-verb words on their pre-test. Most students (nine out of ten) could only identify either one or zero verbs in the whole pre-test paragraph and incorrectly selected from four to ten non-verb words. This suggests ELs did not have any prior understanding of what a verb was.

In analyzing post-test data, it is important to note that only four students incorrectly underlined non-verb words, with three non-verb words being the highest amount. Table 4 displays students’ correct identification of verbs versus their identification of non-verb words on their post-test. Therefore the growth in test score points from the pre-test to the
post-test reflects an accurate increase in verb understanding and identification. Students’ growth in points as shown in Table 2 reflects the number of correctly identified verbs. One theme I can draw from this data, is that even if students’ post test scores were lower, it still demonstrated a true growth in verb identification.

Verb Tense Conjugation

As stated earlier, all students displayed a growth in verb identification knowledge, but not all students were successful in conjugating the identified verbs from present to past tense. Seven out of ten students were able to correctly conjugate at least one verb, with three of those students correctly conjugating six, seven, and eight verbs, respectively. Table 5 displays the number of correctly conjugated verbs for each student.

The three students who were not successful in changing a present tense verb to past tense were at least able to identify verbs, as their post-test scores were +6, +6, and +7. This showed that these students at least recognized verbs, but weren’t able to conjugate them into past tense. I am surprised that these three ELs were not able to demonstrate success in verb conjugation because they have English proficiency levels of at least 4, and demonstrated knowledge of past tense verbs in writing their personal paragraph. Perhaps they have trouble during a “testing” environment as opposed to the communicative setting lessons.

Even though all ELs demonstrated growth from the pre to the post-test, I am also surprised that most students’ growth was minimal. The highest growth from one student was 79% correct on her post-test. All other students received 58% correct or lower. The pattern I see emerging is that 70% of my ELs grew in their knowledge of verb conjugation, albeit some minimal growth.
Grammar Lessons in a Communicative Setting.

My students benefited from our small group lessons on verb conjugation and now have a greater probability of understanding grade level texts more adeptly and becoming more literate in reading and writing at a 5th grade level. Determining whether the grammar lessons presented in a communicative setting influenced students’ achievement of verb tense conjugation warrants a thorough analysis of the specific lessons administered to ELs for my research.

Lesson 1. Family Celebration Paragraph writing.

For this lesson, students viewed a picture of a family celebration and discussed the following questions in a small group: “What do you see in this picture?”, “What do you think is happening?”, and “What do you see that makes you say that?”. These questions comprise a portion of a strategy known as Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS). VTS is an inquiry-based pre-writing activity which encourages students to “think out loud” as they discuss aspects that they see and think about in a picture. This type of discussion promotes communication regarding real life experiences, helps students express meaning, and promotes interaction, which, according to Wilkin’s Communicative Language Teaching (1972) is the primary function of language. After discussion, students wrote a paragraph using close sentences about what was happening in the picture.

Lesson 2: Changing Verbs from present to past

Building upon the previous lesson, students were explicitly taught what a verb is by identifying what was happening in the picture. In order for students to discover which words are verbs, they answered the following questions: “What are the people doing in
the picture?” and, “When did the activity occur?” Discussion regarding present and past
tense verbs ensued, as together we completed the verb tense table (Appendix A). Students
then rewrote the paragraph they completed yesterday, exchanging past tense verbs for the
present tense. Students each read their paragraph out loud as peers recorded and
discussed the verbs and verb tenses that they heard.

Lesson 3: Listening Activity- Present and Past Tense Verbs

For this lesson, students listened to sentences containing verbs and recorded verbs on
a T-chart in either the “present” or “past” tense column. Students then compared answers
with each other focusing on answering the question “How do you know that a verb is
present or past?” Rich and engaged discussion ensued as students negotiated the meaning
of verbs in a sentences. This discussion supports a communicative setting because when
grammar is taught in a discourse context rather than at the sentence-level, students’
communicative competence is strengthened as grammar instruction encompasses
meaning, social factors, and function (Celce-Murcia & Hiles, 1988; Larsen-Freeman,
1991). This lesson also supported a communicative setting by allowing students to
authentically communicate about life experiences while negotiating content-oriented
meaning. CLT is student-centered, rather than teacher-centered, and encourages active
and independent communicative practice and competence (Yuan, 2011).

Lesson 4: My Family Celebration- Personal Paragraph

For my EL’s last lesson in a communicative setting, students were instructed to think
back to a time when they participated in a family celebration, and create a personal
paragraph using past tense verbs where appropriate. Verbs were identified and underlined
by students. This activity combined utilizing authentic communication about life
experiences with using language as a resource for making meaning.
Before students began writing their personal narrative, I gradually released student paragraph writing by sharing a personal family celebration paragraph of my own. ELs were instructed to underline and discuss verb tenses with peers. This supported the systemic functional linguistics theory as students learned from and built upon other students’ understanding of content knowledge. Once student paragraphs were complete, students listened to each other’s paragraphs and identified present and past tense verbs. This lesson also allowed students to authentically communicate about life experiences while negotiating content-oriented meaning (Yuan, 2011). I was very pleased with my EL’s final product. They seemed to have grasped their new understanding of verb tenses and enjoyed sharing their personal culture and experiences with their group of peers. Sample communicative lessons and student paragraphs can be found in Appendix A.

Summary

The overall theme which emerged from my research is that teaching language in a communicative setting does help 5th grade English learners retain grammar acquisition of verb tense conjugation. My ELs’ success in creating their final personal paragraph in past tense seemed to be a better indicator of verb tense proficiency than the given post-test. If I were to use their paragraph as an indicator of verb tense proficiency, I think their test scores would have shown more growth. Based on other formative assessment of communicative lessons throughout the three week teaching period, students demonstrated a growth in knowledge of verb tense conjugation.

My data did support the theory that the communicative approach helps ELs become proficient in verb tense conjugation as 70% of my students displayed growth from the pre-test to the post test in verb conjugation, and 100% of my students were able to show
growth in verb identification. In looking at the number of non-verb words students identified in the pre and post-tests, nine students incorrectly identified non-verb words as verbs on the pre-test, as opposed to four students incorrectly identifying non-verbs as verbs on the post-test. Table 6 shows the total number of non-verbs selected by students on both the pre and post-test. This displays a 50% growth in ELs being able to correctly identify verbs as opposed to non-verbs.

Evidence that the communicative setting was successful in promoting verb tense conjugation proficiency for 5th grade ELs is apparent throughout my literature review. My ELs were able to relate meaningful and understandable ideas through sharing an entertaining personal paragraph. They dialoged about authentic life experiences while simultaneously negotiating verb tense meaning. They were allowed social and interactive experiences with the target language, and they became equipped in listening to and developing a variety of genres and registers from their respective cultures. This created an authentic, personal connection which increased their interest in making meaning from discourse occurring during communication.

Functional Linguistics (FL) was incorporated by teaching students to use real language for real purposes and integrating verb tense was used as a resource for making meaning (Derewianka, 1990). Additionally, FL supported small group work by stressing the importance of how students make meaning of language in conjunction with each other.

In chapter five I will discuss my major findings, revisit my literature review, consider the possible implications and limitations of my study, and suggest further recommendations for future research.
My major findings will include the data collection results, analysis of verb identification and conjugation, and considerations of grammar taught in a communicative setting. In revisiting my literature review I will discuss connections and understandings I have made and highlight the most important parts of my literature review. The possible implications will include this study’s effects on teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders. Possible limitations which will be discussed are time frame limits, student grouping, and alternate assessment criteria. Finally, I will present my plan for communicating results, and my recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE

Recommendations

Introduction

In this research project I attempted to answer the research question “Does the communicative approach to teaching language increase 5th grade English Learners’ proficiency in their grammar acquisition of present and past tense verb conjugation?” In this chapter I will discuss my major findings, revisit my literature review, consider the possible implications and limitations of my study, and suggest further recommendations for future research.

My major findings will include the data collection results, analysis of verb identification and conjugation, and considerations of grammar taught in a communicative setting. My data collection results indicate that all 5th grade English Learners in my study demonstrated an increase in the number of correctly scored items from their pre-test to their post-test. When considering my ELs growth of verb identification, my data revealed that all ten students were successful in identifying verbs. Seven out of ten ELs were successful in conjugating verbs and three were not. Although these three ELs could correctly identify verbs, I am surprised that they were not able to demonstrate success in verb conjugation. I learned that the communicative setting provided an authentic and interesting atmosphere in which my students could learn.
In revisiting my literature review I will discuss connections and understandings I have made and highlight the most important parts of my literature review. The possible implications will include this study’s effects on teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders. Possible limitations which will be discussed are time frame limits, student grouping, and alternate assessment criteria. Finally, I will present my plan for communicating results, and my recommendations for future research.

Major Findings

Major findings in this section will include my data collection results, analysis of verb identification and conjugation, and considerations of grammar taught in a communicative setting. My data collection results indicate that all 5th grade English Learners in my study demonstrated an increase in the number of correctly scored items from their pre-test to their post-test. Test scores consisted of 24 possible points, with 13 points possible for correctly identifying a verb, and 11 points possible for changing a present tense verb into past tense. Two of the verbs were already in past tense, so no additional points needed to be given for those two verbs, hence the difference in points possible between verb identification and verb conjugation. Although all EL scores improved from the pre-test to the post-test, not all ELs were successful in conjugating verbs from present to past tense. Seven out of ten ELs were successful in conjugating verbs and three were not. Although these three ELs could correctly identify verbs, I am surprised that they were not able to demonstrate success in verb conjugation. They have English proficiency levels of 4.3, 4.2, and 4.7, and were able to complete their personal paragraph using past tense verbs, with fidelity. Therefore, I expected a higher verb conjugation score from them. However, since 70% of my ELs were successful in learning
to conjugate verbs in a communicative setting, I learned that this strategy can be considered a beneficial learning technique to implement with ELs.

When considering my ELs growth of verb identification, my data revealed that all ten students were successful in identifying verbs. All but one EL student received either a score of one or zero correct on the pretest, and all ten ELs correctly identified verbs on the post-test., with the least growth being +3, and the greatest growth being +19. This demonstrated positive growth in all student scores from the pre-test to the post-test. From collecting this data, I have learned that given a series of explicit lessons taught in a communicative setting, ELs can be successful in grammatical acquisition of verb identification.

I also found that teaching students in a communicative setting was highly engaging and interesting for my ELs. They enjoyed being able to discuss how they knew a verb was in the past or present tense, whether a verb was regular or irregular, and how they knew. They also were excited to share a personal family celebration from their culture which encouraged learning new ways of using words to describe real events from their lives, while almost unknowingly applying a new grammatical structure. Since my participants created a written work describing a past event, past tense verb usage was needed and used. This allowed use of the correct grammatical form of language and created successful encounters inside of the classroom. Additionally, ELs were exposed to an approach in which grammar was not taught as a set of rules, but as a resource for creating meaning in social contexts. Therefore I learned that the communicative setting provided an authentic and interesting atmosphere in which my students could learn. My
next section will revisit my literature review and discuss connections and understandings I have made in regard to my literature review.

**Literature Review Revisited**

In revisiting my Literature review, many learnings stand out which support my thesis question “Does the communicative approach to teaching language increase 5th grade English Learners’ proficiency in their grammar acquisition of present and past tense verb conjugation?” and provide a basis for answering this question. I will highlight what I feel are the most important learnings from each of the four sections: communicative teaching, fifth grade grammar proficiency, grammar acquisition, and verb tense conjugation, and share my connections and understandings of each.

**Communicative Teaching.**

The use of teaching in a communicative setting allowed ELs to authentically communicate about life experiences while negotiating content-oriented meaning and encouraged active and independent communicative practice and competence (Yuan, 2011). Student to student talk was also vital to helping students learn from and build upon other students’ understanding of content knowledge. Two functional linguistics components which were evident building blocks of my data collection lessons were placing an emphasis on using language as a resource for making meaning and stressing the importance of how students make meaning of language in conjunction with each other during small group work (Derewianka, 1990).

**Fifth Grade Grammar Proficiency.**

WIDA’s performance definition for 5th grade ELs at level 5-Bridging, revealed that students should be able to produce texts which have a variety of complex grammatical structures matched to their linguistic purpose and create narratives that connect personal
experiences and content (WIDA performance Definitions, 2015). Conjugating verbs from present to past tense fell within the expectation of producing texts with a variety of grammatical structures. And writing a narrative about a family celebration memory, which was one of my communicative lessons used for this thesis, connected a personal narrative to grammatical content.

Grammar Acquisition.

In citing the grammatical acquisition debate, evidence had shown that a lack of attention to grammar had caused falling standards in language users (MacDonald, 1995; Paterson, 2010; Truss, 2003; and Uttley, 2008) and linguists have since argued that grammar is a relevant and useful body of knowledge for ELs to possess (Hudson, 2004). Therefore grammar should be used as a resource which can be used in the comprehension and creation of oral and written discourse, rather than taught in isolation solely as grammatical terms (Celce-Murcia, 1991). This is important to my study because my students did use grammar as a resource to create a written discourse and it is important for ELs to receive necessary grammar instruction in their English Language Arts classes in order to improve and apply their written language production in various content classes (Padrick, 2014).

Verb Tense Conjugation.

Comprehension of a given verb phrase impacted understanding at the sentence, paragraph, and finally the discourse level and according to Debra Myhill (2008), linguistic competence is important to both the cognitive and social aspects of writing. Teaching students the basics of sentence development, including verb tense conjugation is indeed a very important building block in creating comprehensible written works.
Additionally, since more current research has supported the instructional approach of systemic functional linguistics (SFL) which incorporates student-to-student discussion about language and the meaning behind certain language structures, my EL’s discussion about how they knew a verb was in past tense impacted their understanding of verb tense. An overarching characteristic of grammatical metalanguage is that students learn grammatical concepts through conversing with each other about language and content (Schleppegrell, 2014).

From the connections I have cited here, I believe my data did agree with the findings in my literature review, and that the communicative setting does help ELs improve their grammatical acquisition proficiency. My next section will discuss implications and effects on teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders within my district.

Implications

A variety of implications from my study affect teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders in my school district. Because I teach in a school that has 32% English learners, it would be advisable for all teachers to teach within a communicative setting. Recent professional development has revealed that EL teaching strategies would benefit all students, therefore instruction in a communicative setting would be a positive implication schoolwide. Fortunately, our district implements multiple strategies which foster a communicative setting such as Culturally and Linguistically Responsive (CLR) teaching, Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration and Reading (WICR), and Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS). I believe my co-workers and co-teachers would be capable of merging the main components of any of these strategies within a communicative setting. Based on the success I have experienced with implementing
instruction in a communicative setting, all teachers who implement teaching in a communicative setting would experience positive growth with their students as well.

My administrators at my urban Title I school in the upper Midwest would be supportive of encouraging instruction within a communicative setting since, as mentioned earlier, many teachers currently use teaching strategies which foster similar characteristics. An additional teaching model which my administrators are currently encouraging, Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD), would merge successfully within the communicative setting as well. While GLAD was originally developed for ELs, it would benefit all students through the use of high-level thinking and academic language, as well as implementing cross-cultural skills. The main GLAD characteristics of delivering academic content and language while using an integrated, balanced literacy approach is similar to using a communicative setting in that language is taught as a system for expressing meaning and the primary units of language are not only grammatical and structural, but exhibit functional and communicative features used in discourse, as well (Wilkins, 1972).

Stakeholders in our district would also be supportive of teaching grammar acquisition within a communicative setting since EL’s success in comprehending age-level literature, creating comprehensible original written works, and performing well on high stakes testing will be affected positively. In the next section I will discuss various limitations which may have had an effect on my study.

Limitations

As with any research project, various limitations can affect a study and ultimately change the desired outcomes. In my study, although I met with ELs at least three times a
week, the length of our class time together was sometimes cut short. End of the year fieldtrips, activities, and assemblies shortened some of our designated class periods and also caused some classes to meet during the afternoon rather than in the morning. Students’ concentration may not have been as acute in the afternoon as it could have been during a morning class period. Another consideration could have been lengthening the time period from three weeks of lessons to four or five weeks, which would have given more time for student learning to sink in. My study was also limited by the number of students participating. Although I actually met with about twenty ELs total, I was only able to collect data on ten students because they were the only ones who returned the parental permission letter.

Recommendations

I plan to communicate my thesis results with my grade level team co-workers and my administrative team by first of all sharing my thesis electronically. Then I plan on discussing my results from my research with my grade level team and EL coworkers at my school and district EL Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). I feel the teachers I work with will concede in utilizing this approach because many of my colleagues already do use some form of communicative teaching in their classrooms. There are many other strategies which can be implemented within a communicative setting such as Culturally and Linguistically Responsive (CLR) teaching, Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), Writing, Inquiry, Collaboration and Reading (WICR), and Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS).

Future research could tweak my current study by conducting data collection at the beginning or middle of the school year versus the end of the year; allowing data collection
to last four or five weeks while meeting at least four days a week; allowing more time for students to return permission slips, thereby having more participants take part in the study; and teaching different grammatical skills within the communicative setting.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I have learned that teaching grammar in a communicative setting allows students to participate in meaningful discourse while negotiating content learning and enjoying the learning discovery process. I found that when my EL students shared authentic personal experiences, their interest and passion to learn increased. I am happy to know that my EL students now have an understanding of verb tense conjugation, and have been able to use this knowledge to create a meaningful written work. I expect that ELs’ future understanding of verb tense conjugation will be a building block which will help them comprehend age-level literature, create comprehensible original written works, and perform well on high stakes testing.
REFERENCES


doi 10.1017/S0261444814000093

Pre and Post-Test: This test was administered to 5th grade ELs for data collection. The Pre-test was administered before verb tense lessons, and the post-test was administered after three weeks of verb tense lessons.

Pre and Post Test

Name________________

Directions: Read the paragraph below. Then read a second time and underline the words that are verbs. Finally change the verbs from present to past tense.

The school cafeteria is usually crowded, but the other day things were worse than usual. A visiting band plays for the morning assembly and our band teacher invites the students in the band for lunch. Forty more people isn't much more when you are in a large auditorium but when you bring more people into an already crowded cafeteria something has to give. It did! The moveable wall which separates the teacher’s lunch room from the student section is taken down. For one day at least we have plenty of room and the teachers have the rare pleasure of student guests at lunch.

Source: https://prezi.com/j5elnngokqjf/the-school-cafeteria-is-usually-crowded-but-the-other-day-t/ (modified by Katherine Nelson, 2017)
Lesson 1: ELs completed this Visual Thinking Strategy (VTS) by viewing picture on the following page, and answering questions below. This is a pre-writing activity designed to encourage thinking for creative writing. Source: Katherine Nelson, 2016

Family Celebration Paragraph Writing
Directions: Answer the questions below, and then create a paragraph using the sentence frames below.

1. What do you see in this picture? __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

2. What is happening in this picture? __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

3. Is there a sister or brother in the family? If yes, what are their names and how old are they? __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

4. How many aunts, uncles, or cousins are there in the family? What are their names and how old are they? __________________________________________
   __________________________________________

5. Who are some of the other family members you saw? What are their names and how old are they? __________________________________________

   __________________________________________

This is a picture of a family __________________________________________.
The family is (doing what?) __________________________________________
because __________________________________________.
There are (number) ________ family members attending this gathering. They are: (names and ages) __________________________________________
I think this looks __________________ because __________________.
Lesson 1 Picture: This picture was used for the VTS strategy.

**Family Celebration Picture- Verb Activity**

![Image of a family celebration](http://www.bennett4art.com/Paine_PR/2008-08/Latino_Mural.jpg)

Source: [http://www.bennett4art.com/Paine_PR/2008-08/Latino_Mural.jpg](http://www.bennett4art.com/Paine_PR/2008-08/Latino_Mural.jpg)
Lesson 2: Using the paragraph created in lesson one, ELs used the table below to record identified verbs, and change them from present to past tense. Explicit instruction on verbs and verb tenses occurred prior to completing this lesson. Source: Katherine Nelson, 2016.

**Changing Verbs from present to past:**

1. Identify each verb in the paragraph.
2. Fill in the table below with the present and past forms of each verb.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Present (Now)</th>
<th>Past (Sometime in the past)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now rewrite the paragraph, changing the verbs from present to past.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
Lesson 3: ELs listened for verbs while sentences were dictated, and recorded verbs in either the present or past tense on their T chart. Source: Katherine Nelson, 2016.

Listening Activity: Present and Past Tense Verbs

Directions: Draw a T chart with the word “Present” written on one side, and the word “Past” written on the other side.

Listen to your teacher read the sentences, then write the verbs you hear in the correct column on your T chart.

Sentences (dictated by teacher):

1. Maria sings.
2. Alex danced all night at the party.
3. She sang happy birthday to me.
4. He is on the dance team.
5. They clapped their hands to the beat of the music.
6. They perform twice a week.
7. He was sleeping on his desk.
8. The choir performed songs in Spanish and English.
9. They also danced to an African song.
10. I like to eat foods from different cultures.

After students have recorded verbs, they should turn and talk to a partner about their results. Group discussion to follow.
Lesson 4: For the culminating lesson, ELs created a personal paragraph of a past family celebration. Correct use of past tense verbs was demonstrated by students. Source: Katherine Nelson, 2017.

My Family Celebration

Directions: Think back to a time when your family had a fun celebration. Create a paragraph of at least 5 sentences describing the celebration. Make sure to use past tense verbs. Underline all verbs. Your paragraph should include:

1. The type of family celebration.
3. Who were the people who attended, what were their names and their approximate ages?
4. How did you feel about the celebration and why?

- You will be writing a rough draft and a final copy of your paragraph.
- When you are done writing your rough draft, you may draw a picture of your family celebration.
- You will be sharing your paragraph with the group when completed and listeners will listen for and identify verbs.
Sample Paragraph. This is a teacher created sample paragraph used as a model for lesson 4. Identification and discussion of verb tenses took place as paragraph was read. Source: Katherine Nelson, 2017.

The 4th of July

When I was young, a favorite family celebration occurred on July 4th, at my family’s lake cabin.

In the morning, I helped my mom prepare the food. We sliced buns, ham, and cheese for sandwiches. We sliced watermelon, and poured lemonade.

Then our whole family came over: aunts, uncles, cousins, and grand parents. We ate food, played games, and swam in the lake.

When the sun went down, we cuddled up on the lawn in blankets and watched my dad light fireworks for an awesome fireworks show. This was one of my favorite family celebrations.
Student Paragraph

My Christmas celebration

On Christmas day, my mom prepared food, and then we went out to play games.

I won points and I bought candy with my points. I got a toy car. It was in my present. We ate Geerlys rice which is a favorite African dish. I got a new game and we ate cookies and I played in the snow and had a snowball fight.

I like Christmas because it's fun.
Eid ul-Adha & al-Fitr

Twice a year my family celebrates Eid.

Eid al-Fitr is long but Eid ul-Adha is not. Eid ul-Adha is not because Ramadan is only 3 or 4 days. Eid al-Fitr is long because Ramadan is month long.

What we do that day is, in the morning we put our new clothes on. Then we eat halo. Halo is sweet and red.

Then my sisters and me got our jewelry on. While me and my sisters were putting on our jewelry my brothers and my dad went in the car. Then me and my sisters went in the car.

My dad drove us to the Covenen Center. While we were eating candy my mom was calling my aunts and uncles to come to the Covenen Center. After praying we went to Nail of America and ate.
The 4th of July

When I was young, my favorite family celebration occurred on July 4th, at Minneapolis. My whole family went to see the fireworks. In the morning, I helped my mom prepare the food so when my family came everything was ready. So when they got there we went to the games and I got on this game that spins it was fun. After that we went back to where my family was and we ate food then we ate our dessert and it was time for the fireworks. We layed down and then the other people went to where their family was. Then the fireworks started to shot.
Appendix B

Informed Consent Permission letter- this letter was signed by parents/guardians of all participants. Source: Katherine Nelson, 2017

Dear ESL parent/guardians,

I am currently studying at Hamline University to attain my master’s degree. In order for me to complete my degree, I need to complete research in your child’s 5th grade Language Arts classroom. Completing research in our classroom will not be any different from my regular English language instruction that I already teach, and will benefit students by helping them learn additional language skills.

During a three week period in class, we will be learning about how to identify and learn present and past tense verbs. I will also give students a verb test before and after our lessons. I will report the students’ test scores in the paper I am writing for Hamline University, but I will not use any student names in my paper. The research will also be published in a book and online. The information I collect will be stored on a locked computer.

Hamline University and our school, XXXXX Elementary, have given permission for this research. In order for me to include your child’s scores in my paper, I also need your permission.

Please sign ONE copy of this letter, indicating whether you agree to allow your child to be included in this research project or not and return it to me by April 17, 2017. You may keep the second letter for yourself.

If you have questions, please contact me at 763-504-7818. You may also call my principals Mr. Rowe or Mrs. Estrada at XXXXX may contact Mrs. Manikowski, my advisor at Hamline, at 952-913-7862, if you have questions.

Thank you very much for your help in finishing my research project.

Sincerely, Mrs. Katherine Nelson
ELL teacher, XXXXX Elementary

Please check ONE below:

_________ YES, I give permission for my child’s testing information to be used in this paper.

_________ NO, I do not give permission for my child’s testing information to be used.

Parent/guardian Signature ___________________________ Date _____________

Student Signature ___________________________ Date _____________
Differing Views

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Time to English proficiency benchmark</th>
<th>Time to academic achievement benchmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Snow &amp; Hoefnagel-Hohle (1978)</td>
<td>More than 1.5 years</td>
<td>Not investigated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cummins (1980), Wright &amp; Ramsey (1970, 1974)</td>
<td>2 to 3 years</td>
<td>3 to 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collier (1987)</td>
<td>Not investigated</td>
<td>2-8 years, depending on age of arrival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakuta, Butler, &amp; Witt (2000) Klesmer (1993)</td>
<td>2 to 5 years</td>
<td>4 to 7 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table displays the amount of time it takes for ELs to achieve English proficiency according to the researchers listed.
The Developmental Grammatical Stages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Processing procedure</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Word/Lemma</td>
<td>Single words (How are you?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Category Procedure</td>
<td>SVO word order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Past tense (ed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Plural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Possessives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Phrasal Procedure</td>
<td>Plural agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>VP- procedure</td>
<td>Tense agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>S-procedure</td>
<td>Subject-verb agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(He eats; They eat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Subordinate Clause</td>
<td>Cancel Inversion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>procedure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 Student Ethnicities and English Proficiency levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student #</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>English Proficiency Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hmong</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Hmong</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table displays student ethnicities and English proficiency levels.
Table 2 Results: Pre/Post-Test Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student #</th>
<th>Pre-Test</th>
<th>Post-Test</th>
<th>Change in Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>+19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>+11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>+7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>+14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>+6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 displays the pre and post-test scores for each student, as well as their overall growth from pre-test to post-test.
Table 3 Results: Pre-test verb identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student #</th>
<th>Verb ID number correct</th>
<th>Non-verb number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 displays students’ correct identification of verbs versus their identification of non-verb words on their pre-test.
Table 4 Results: Post-test Verb Identification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student #</th>
<th>Verb ID number correct</th>
<th>Non-verb number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 displays students’ correct identification of verbs versus their identification of non-verb words on their post-test.
Table 5 Results: Verb Tense Conjugation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student #</th>
<th>Number correct</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 displays the number of correctly conjugated verbs for each student on their post-test.
Table 6 shows the total number of non-verbs selected by students on both the pre and post-test. This displays a 50% growth in ELs being able to correctly identify verbs as opposed to non-verbs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student #</th>
<th>Pre-test/Post-test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>10/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>4/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>7/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>6/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5/4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>