

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents general information on the study. It consists of four parts:

1. Rationale
2. Purpose of the study
3. Significance of the study
4. Scope and limitations

1. Rationale

The communicative approach has been used by many language teachers worldwide for over twenty years. Language teaching has shifted from the traditional approach in which grammar is the center of the teaching to the communicative approach where language functions and communicative activities are emphasized. In the communicative approach, learners are taught to achieve a communicative goal, that is, they must be able to apply knowledge of target language forms, meanings and functions in negotiating meanings (Larsen-Freeman, 1986 : 123). As the communicative approach emphasizes language functions and communicative activities, the question of the role of grammar in such an approach has arisen. There have been conflicting ideas about the role of grammar in the communicative approach. Krashen (1988; cited in Thompson, 1996 : 10) proposed that grammar teaching is unnecessary because it cannot be taught in the form of storable rules, but can be acquired unconsciously through exposure to the target language. On the other hand, some scholars believe grammar teaching is necessary for communication to take place effectively. Li (1998 : 679), for example, points out that communicative language teaching does not exclude the teaching of grammar; however, he suggested that teachers should consider that the purpose of teaching grammar is to help learners

learn the language, and that teachers must beware of possible limitation in making grammar the end-goal of their language teaching.

The communicative teaching approach has been used in Thailand for over twenty years. In the 1978 English curriculum, communicative competence was emphasized. Learners were expected to use all four English skills effectively. Later, in 1996, the Department of Curriculum and Instruction Development revised the English curriculum for Thai primary and secondary schools which still based on the communicative approach. It aims to develop learners' communicative competence. English language teachers are, then, expected to teach English to serve communicative purposes.

Although the communicative approach has been adopted in Thai secondary schools for many years, English language teachers are still facing some difficulties in applying it for various reasons. For one, to achieve the communicative goal, students have to be given an opportunity to be exposed to real language use, but, in the Thai context, students do not have much chance to use English in their everyday lives. Moreover, English classes in Thai schools are quite large, consisting of about 40-50 students, which makes it difficult to do communicative activities. In addition, many English language teachers find it difficult to pay attention to both communicative activities and grammar, which seems to be important in language teaching. Students' motivation in learning English is another factor. Many students study English to prepare themselves for the university entrance examination where grammar is emphasized. Thus, we can understand some confusion among the English language teachers about the teaching of grammar in the communicative approach. Some emphasize explicit grammar to serve the students' purpose. Some try to incorporate grammar into their communicative teaching but they are facing some problems of how to teach it in order to serve the communicative goal.

It is necessary to investigate how Thai English language teachers view the role of grammar, how they actually teach grammar in the classroom where they are supposed to teach English communicative activities. In addition, the relationship

between the teachers' views on the role of grammar, their actual teaching and their learning experiences, will also be investigated. The investigation would provide insights into the problems in using the communicative approach in Thai schools.

2. Purpose of the Study

This study investigates English language teachers' views on the role of grammar in the Thai situation where English is taught to achieve the goal of communication, how they actually teach grammar in the classroom; and their problems in teaching grammar based on the communicative approach. Its main purpose is to determine answers to the following questions:

1. What are the English language teachers' views on the role of grammar in the communicative approach?
2. How do the English language teachers actually teach grammar in the classroom?
3. What is the relationship between the English language teachers' learning experiences, their views on the role of grammar and their actual teaching of grammar?
4. What are the problems of teaching English grammar in order to serve the communicative purposes?

3. Significance of the Study

This study will provide important information about how grammar is actually taught in the classroom and how the English language teachers perceive the role of grammar in the communicative teaching. It is expected that the information obtained from the study will provide some insight into the problems that the teachers are facing in teaching English grammar using the communicative approach, leading to the improvement of teaching and learning English grammar in the Thai context.

4. Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study investigates the English language teachers' views on the role of grammar in the communicative approach. Its intention is mainly to study the situation of grammar teaching in the Thai context where the need for communication is increasing each day in order to assist in finding what can be done to make English teaching more effective.

Only Thai English language teachers in government secondary schools in Educational Region II participated in the study and only four Matthayomsuksa 4 English classes are observed over a limited period of time. Therefore, generalization of the results must be made with caution.