

English Conditional Sentences: A Comparative Analysis of the structural and Communicative Approaches in Teaching to Non-Native Speakers

Hailom Banteyerga*

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An experimental study was carried out in 1982 to test the effectiveness of the communicative approach Vs the structural approach in the teaching of English to non-native speakers. 78 students were taught and tested in tasks that require the use of conditional sentences. Initially 102 first year students were randomly distributed into six groups. Three groups formed the study groups and the other three, the control groups. The study - groups were taught using the "Communicative Approach" and the control groups using the "structural approach". In the scores obtained, the study groups performed better at a significance level of .05. The study groups were observed developing interest, motivation, creativity, involvement and confidence as the experiment progressed. On the basis of the finding, it is recommended that the communicative approach is more appropriate for the teaching of English to freshmen students, here. To this end, intensive research should be done in discourse analysis and need specification to facilitate the designing of a communicative syllabus.

The Communicative Approach Vs the Structural Approach

The "communicative approach" to foreign language teaching is a resultant of current shifts in linguistics from language code to language use. The reaction today in linguistics and language teaching says Brumfit (p.3) "is a reaction towards a view of language as communication, a view in which meaning and the uses to which language is put play a central part." This, he adds is "Crystallizing itself in the "Communicative Approach" to language teaching" (p. 3). The structural approach on the other hand is a mending of structural linguistics and behaviorist theory of learning. The teaching of the structures of the target language is the central part in the teaching and learning process. The main ideas of the two approaches are summarized below.

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Structural Approach

- The structure of language is primary, use is secondary.
- Exercises should be structurally homogeneous, irrespective of their semantic aspects.
- Classroom situation should be made conducive for imitation and repetition to form correct habits.
- The teacher should be the best model to be imitated and should determine the process of learning.
- The learner should be taught the component parts (units) of the language from smaller units to greater wholes, through the use of partial experience.
- The learner should avoid mistakes; exercises should be limited and graded on linguistic basis in such way that the learner could be free from making mistakes.
- The language used in teaching is the idealized one - the variety used by the educated or high class.
- Foreign language learning is more of an analytic and intellectual process.

Communicative Approach

- The use of language is primary, structure is secondary.
- Exercises should be sementacally homegenous irrespective of their structural aspects.
- Classroom situation should be conducive for interaction in such away that learners could express their ideas and feelings.
- The teacher should stimulate the process of learning. but should not determine it; the society of language users is the best model to be imitated.
- The learner should be introduced to the language as used by its speakers; he has to experience it as a meaningful whole, using selected authentic samples.
- The learner should not be discouraged from making mistakes - mistakes are part of the natural process of language learning, slecting and grading should be based on the communicative needs of the learner.
- The language used in teaching should be the real language as used by its speakers in its varied forms.
- Foreign language learning is more of a synthetic and functional process.

- The psychology of a second or foreign language learner is different from that of the first. Emphasis should be given to the differences between the structural items of L1 (mother tongue) and L2 (target language).
- The psychology of learning L1 and L2 is basically the same. All languages are learned for their functional purposes i.e. Communication. And all languages are functionally the same.

The Experiment

102 first year students were randomly categorized into six groups using systematic sampling. 78 of them regularly attended and finished the experimental season which lasted two months. The three study groups were taught using materials prepared following the principles of the communicative approach as suggested by Leeson (1975), Widdowson (1979, 1981) Newmark (1981), Allwright (1981), Keith Johnson (1981), Candlin (1981), Wilkins (1981), Doss (1975), Trtm (1981), and Van EK (1981). The three control groups were taught using materials prepared following the principles of the structural approach as argued by Lado and Fries (1963), Lado (1984), Paul (1972).

Measurement was done by giving two tests: Test I (Communicative based) and Test II (Structural based). To determine the significance of the Means Difference, the t-test was used. Thus $U_1 - U_2 = d_0$ was based on the "t" distribution assuming that $\sigma_1^2 = \sigma_2^2 = \sigma^2$ and the population being normal. The reason for selecting this was because σ_1^2 and σ_2^2 were unknown and the sample sizes were small. The Common variance σ^2 was estimated by S^2_p where:

$$S^2_p = \frac{(n_1 - 1)S^2_1 + (n_2 - 1)S^2_2}{n_1 + n_2 - 2}$$

$$S^2_1 = \frac{(X_1 - \bar{X}_1)^2}{n_1 - 1}$$

$$S^2_2 = \frac{(X_2 - \bar{X}_2)^2}{n_2 - 1}$$

$$\text{and } t = \frac{(\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2) - d_0}{S_p \left(\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2} \right)}$$

$$S_p \left(\frac{1}{n_1} + \frac{1}{n_2} \right)$$

Validity and Reliability of Tests

Test I and Test II were found to be valid tests for differences in the groups were computed insignificant. The reliability of Test I and Test II was estimated in each group using the formula:

$$r_{tt} = \frac{N}{N-1} \left(1 - \frac{m(N-m)}{NS^2} \right)$$

The following estimates were computed for Test I and II.

	Test I	Test II
Group I	.88	.66
Group II	.87	.93
Group III	.57	.59
Group IV	.87	.88
Group V	.90	.90
Group VI	.79	.77
A.S.G. (Aggregate study group)	.86	.86
A.C.G. (Aggregate control group)	.85	.90

According to Heaton (1975), these tests are effective measures. The over all Average Facility Value (AFV) for Test I was computed .32 and .61 in pretest and post-test, respectively. The Average Discrimination Index (ADI) of the same test was computed .48 and .61 in Pre-test and Post-test respectively. The Average Facility Value (AFV) for Test II was computed .45 and .7 and the Average Discrimination Index was computed .41 and .4 in Pretest and Posttest respectively. This shows that both tests were fairly standardized making them to be taken as effective measures.

Findings

After the Post tests were administered it was found out that the study groups performed much better than the control groups. Means differences between the study groups and control groups are shown in Tables I, II, III, and IV. Significant Differences were observed throughout in the two situations treated: Situation I and Situation II.

Situation I

The significance of the Means Difference of each of the three Study Groups (I, IV, and VI) against their respective counter control groups (II, III, and V) as framed below was computed.

- Group I (S.G) against Group II (C.G) in Test I and Test II; the same instructor X.
- Group IV (S.G) against Group III (C.G) in Test I and Test II; the same instructor Y.
- Group VI (S.G) and Group V (C.G) in Test I and Test II; the same Instructor Z.

In these tests, the constants taken were:

- The same mother tongue, Amharic;
- The same instructor for each study group and its counter control group.
- The same amount of instructional time, 8 weeks (4 hours a week).

The variable tested was, other things being equal, the teaching approach: the "communicative Approach" vis-a-vis the "Structural Approach."

Aggregate Study Group (the three study groups, I, IV, and VI put together; instructors X, Y and Z respectively) against Aggregate Control Group (the three Control Groups, II, III, and V put together; instructors X, Y, and Z respectively). In this combinations personality difference in teaching was ignored.

Situation II

The significance of the Means Difference is computed in each possible combination between the Study Groups and the Control Groups as framed below. The effect of teaching approach is measured by comparing two groups (one Study Group against another Control Group) as instructed by different instructors. This is different from Situation I in that personality difference of teachers is not controlled but ignored.

- Group I (S.G) Vs Group III (C.G); instructors X and Y, respectively, in Test I and Test II.
- Group I (S.G) Vs Group V (C.G); instructors X and Z, respectively, in Test I and Test II.
- Group IV (S.G) Vs Group II (C.G); instructors Y and X, respectively in Test I and Test II.
- Group VI (S.G) Vs Group II (C.G); instructors Z and X, respectively in Test I and Test II.
- Group VI (S.G) Vs Group III (C.G); instructors Z and Y, respectively in Test I and Test II.

TABLE I: Hypothesis Test findings situation I. Test I

Case	S.G.	C.G.	S.G. \bar{X}	C.G. \bar{X}	S.G.S	C.G.S	S.G.S ²	C.G.S ²	S _p	t-comp. .05	t-tab .05	Significance
1	I n=14	II n=14	76.39	44.78	12.00	13.39	144.04	179.34	12.72	6.57	2.056	Significant
2	IV n=12	III n=12	74.85	43.72	10.93	7.51	199.52	56.37	9.38	8.13	2.074	significant
3	VI n=13	V n=13	71.20	39.27	9.58	14.71	91.84	216.40	12.41	6.56	2.064	significant
4	A.S.G n=39	A.C.G n=39	74.18	42.62	11.27	12.29	126.98	151.13	11.79	11.82	2.000	singnificant

TABLE II: Hypothesis test finding in situation I, Test II

Case	S.G.	C.G	S.G. \bar{X}	C.G. \bar{X}	S.G.S	C.G.S	S.G.S ²	C.G.S ²	S _p	t-comp 0.5	t-tab .05	significance
5	I	II										
	n=14	n=14	94.54	69.68	4.29	15.54	18.44	241.52	11.83	5.11	2.056	significant
6	IV	III										
	n=12	n=12	86.00	72.68	9.05	6.89	81.95	47.47	8.47	3.86	2.074	significant
7	VI	V										
	n=13	n=13	81.38	66.92	7.96	13.92	63.32	193.84	11.34	3.12	2.064	significant
	ASG	ACG										
	n=39	n=39	87	69.68	8.73	13.77	76.20	189.55	11.53	6.64	2.000	significant

TABLE III: Hypothesis Test findings in Situation II, Test I

Case	S.G.	C.G.	S.G. \bar{X}	C.G. \bar{X}	S.G.S.	C.G.S.	S.G.S ²	C.G.S ²	S _p	t-comp .5	t-tab .05	Significance
1	I n=14	III n=12	76.39	43.72	12	7.51	144.04	56.37	10.19	8.4	2.064	significant
2	I n=14	V n=13	76.39	39.27	12	14.71	144.04	216.4	13.37	7.21	2.060	significant
3	IV n=12	II n=14	74.85	44.78	10.93	13.39	119.52	179.34	12.33	6.20	2.064	significant
4	IV n=12	V n=13	74.85	39.27	10.93	14.71	119.52	216.40	13.04	6.82	2.069	significant
5	VI n=13	II n=14	71.20	44.78	9.58	13.39	91.84	179.34	11.72	5.86	2.060	significant
6	VI n=13	III n=12	71.20	43.72	9.58	7.51	91.84	56.37	8.65	7.94	2.069	significant

TABLE IV : Hypothesis Test Findings in Situation II, Test II

Case	S.G.	C.G.	S.G. \bar{X}	C.G. \bar{X}	S.G.S	C.G.S	S.G.S ²	C.G.S ²	S _p	t-comp 0.05	t-tab 0.05	Significance
7	I	III	92.54	72.66	4.46	6.89	19.86	47.47	5.7	8.88	2.064	significant
	n= 14	n= 12										
8	I	V	92.54	66.92	4.46	13.92	19.86	193.84	10.17	6.54	2.060	significant
	n= 14	n= 13										
9	IV	II	66.00	69.68	9.05	16.13	81.95	260.1	13.60	3.05	2.064	significant
	n= 12	n= 14										
10	IV	V	86.00	66.92	9.05	15.92	81.95	193.84	12.13	3.93	2.069	significant
	n= 12	n= 13										
11	VI	II	81.38	89.68	7.96	16.13	63.32	160.1	12.87	2.36	2.060	significant
	n= 13	n= 14										
12	VI	III	81.36	72.66	7.96	6.89	63.32	47.47	7.47	2.92	2.069	significant
	n= 13	n= 12										

Discussions

As can be observed from Tables I, II, III, IV, better results were obtained by teaching students through the Communicative Approach specifically using the Form-Function-Situation Model. It is felt that Communicative skills in foreign language are better developed by the learner himself like what a child does in learning his mother tongue. The process of acquiring a foreign or a second language is more or less like that of the first language. A child learns his L1 functionally to meet his own needs: material, social, or psychological. He never studies its structures as a foreign language learner does using the structural approach. The whole effort of the proponents of the Communicative Approach is based on this fact. The classroom setting though remains to be an artificial one, efforts could be done to bring it closer to the natural one whereby the foreign language learner could be stimulated to develop his personality, creativity, involvement, confidence and sensitivity to learn and use the language. Communicativists argue that this can be done by giving the learner ample experience in language use, using selected authentic samples. When the learner encounters the real situation of language use, the transfer from what he learned in the classroom would be positive.

As indicated in the study, some structures were consciously cued along their functions. But, the learners were given the chance to spontaneously assimilate the other structures used in the sample dialogues. This made the learning of successive materials easy and enjoyable for them like the child who enjoys to speak his language as he gradually masters it. This was conspicuously observed in the experiment.

It is thus felt that the "Communicative Approach" to the teaching of English in our University would be of great help. The presentation of structural forms devoid of their context of use is intransferable to real life situation. It is further felt that the use of appropriate methodology and approach in the teaching of English can drastically reduce our current illiteracy in the language, which is putting the educational standard of our country at stake. To this end, research should be carried out in discourse analysis and need specifications to design a Communicative Syllabus.

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