THE ROLE OF CERTAIN TYPES OF EXERCISES IN REMEDIAL TEACHING. A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

As teachers of Romanian for foreigners in the Petroleum – Gas University of Ploiesti, we noticed that certain types of exercises are a very useful tool in improving students' acquisition of Romanian.

The purpose of the paper is to show the results of a study consisting in analyzing errors made by Turkmenistan students after the remedial teaching stage and the usefulness of certain types of exercises in the teaching process.

We recommend applying remedial teaching progressively, during the whole teaching process, being easier for both students and teachers to correct errors as they gradually occur.

KEYWORDS: remedial teaching, exercises, error analysis, teaching Romanian

1. INTRODUCTION

The Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiesti has had the opportunity to organize, for some time now, courses of Romanian language as a second language. The necessity of these courses has been imposed by the willingness of many foreign students to mainly attend the technical faculties of our university (i.e. drilling, petro-chemistry and drilling equipment). In order to achieve standard Romanian language, due to the fact that these students have to attend courses held in Romanian, they have to take part in intensive Romanian language classes during their preparatory year, before getting enrolled in any faculty. They have to reach at least B1 level (CEFR) at the end of the preparatory year and this level can be achieved by attending 24 hours of Romanian per week during the first semester and 8 hours/week in the second semester. This preparatory year helps students in further obtaining a Bachelor's and a Master's Degree.

The teaching of the Romanian is done through English. Special mention should be made of the fact that the present foreign students do not have good knowledge of English, compared to the ones that attended the Romanian classes in the past.

Our research on the role of remedial teaching had as a starting point the situation we have faced during the past years, when we noticed that besides teaching, we had to counsel and re-teach the slowers, to stimulate the middlers and to ensure that the advanced students will not only maintain their advantage, but will even improve their knowledge. We started from the assumption that 'remedial instruction is a type of clinical teaching. It is a spiral process of assessment – instruction – re-assessment'(Tseng, 2008, p.9), a process in which teachers 'may constantly revise, vary and modify teaching/learning procedures on the basis of the performance of the learners' (Mercy Gnana Gandhi, 2011, p. 69).

2. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

2.1. PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY

The participants in the study were 30 Turkmen students, who were enrolled in the Petroleum – Gas University of Ploiesti on the basis of the existing bilateral agreement between the Romanian state and the Turkmen state. During the Romanian courses, all of them proved to be very motivated since they are receiving scholarships from the Romanian state.

What we noticed when starting the courses was the fact that they have a different level of English knowledge and this made our work even more difficult. About the middle of the first semester we were able to

identify three layers in the target group: the advanced ones, the middlers and the slowers, and this made us take into consideration quick measures of improvement.

2.2.   STAGES OF THE RESEARCH

We based our procedure on the following approach: test, teach and retest. The first stage consisted in teaching the students for about four weeks and after that we administered a test to determine the common errors students made, as we intended to classify them into categories to be able to further focus on the areas of the language that needed re-teaching.

The second stage was the remedial teaching stage based on the data we collected at the end of the first stage. During this stage, which lasted for 3 weeks, the teaching mainly focused on those areas of the language for which numerous errors were identified. Out of the ways of conducting remedial teaching in the literature in the field (Chiu-Ping Huang, 2010) we focused on the basic skills instruction by using supplemental exercises and tutorial activities aimed at improving vocabulary and basic grammar.

We found it really useful to apply types of exercises such as multiple choice, matching and true/false, as their concreteness helps the students in being more successful, as compared to fill in the gaps or vocabulary exercises which require not only recognizing the structure, but also making use of the knowledge inventory that they had received. The errors students made in the initial test were classified into categories using the taxonomy developed by Dagneaux*et al.* (1996) in the error manual, but being adapted to the needs of our research.

While re-teaching areas of language that required improvement, we considered necessary to reduce the amount of the teacher's intervention under the form of direct instruction in favor of reinforcing students' knowledge by means of summarizing tables and diagrams. We also believed that student-centered activities would be more effective and, as a result of that, we made use of intense supervised independent study (asking students to review the already taught information), pair-work and groupwork activities (short dialogues with imposed grammar structures, descriptions of people and objects to revise the use of nouns and adjectives), role-play and games. All these activities were aimed at practicing skills such as reading comprehension, listening and writing (short compositions focused on certain grammar structures).

One of the purposes of our teaching activity was to get the students' language ability into action that is to actively use grammatical structures and patterns and to build vocabulary frames to be used in real communication situations. During the three weeks of remedial teaching we also adapted the teaching style,

namely the rhythm of the teaching, the amount of information distributed per teaching sequence, changing the level of given information so as to meet students' needs and capacity of understanding it.

The last stage of the research was administering a test again, making a comparison between the results obtained by the students in the initial (diagnostic) test and in the second test, which helped us establish the usefulness of the remedial instruction.

The students' samples offered a wide range of errors, so we found it useful to calculate percentage rates in order to compare the number of errors the students made in the diagnostic test and after the remedial teaching stage. The results are shown in the following section.

3. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The tables below show the results obtained by the students (divided according to their level of knowledge) in the initial test and after the remedial teaching stage.

Table 1. A comparison of students' errors (slowers)

Error code	Slowers				
	no. of errors/ Initial test	Percentage/ Initial test	no. of errors/ Second test	Percentage/ Second test	Differences IT/ST
Gart	78	8.47	50	7.68	0.79
GNNumber	89	9.66	60	9.22	0.45
GADJNumber	126	13.68	86	13.21	0.47
GADJGender	53	5.75	35	5.38	0.38
GVConj	154	16.72	102	15.67	1.05
GVM	98	10.64	74	11.37	-0.73
GP	83	9.01	68	10.45	-1.43
VWClass	72	7.82	60	9.22	-1.40
VFFriends	40	4.34	28	4.30	0.04
WM	58	6.30	36	5.53	0.77
WO	70	7.60	52	7.99	-0.39
Total	921		651		

Table 2. A comparison of students' errors (middlers)

Error code	Slowers				
	no. of errors/ Initial test	Percentage/ Initial test	no. of errors/ Second test	Percentage/ Second test	Differences IT/ST
Gart	56	8.56	23	6.20	2.36

GNNumber	63	9.63	31	8.36	1.28
GADJNumber	98	14.98	53	14.29	0.70
GADJGender	36	5.50	16	4.31	1.19
GVConj	112	17.13	58	15.63	1.49
GVM	74	11.31	38	10.24	1.07
GP	57	8.72	28	7.55	1.17
VWClass	52	7.95	29	7.82	0.13
VFFriends	28	4.28	15	4.04	0.24
WM	36	5.50	20	5.39	0.11
WO	42	6.42	21	5.66	0.76
Total	654		332		

Table 3. A comparison of students' errors (advanced)

Error code	Advanced				
	no. of errors/ Initial test	Percentage/ Initial test	no. of errors/ Second test	Percentage/ Second test	Differences IT/ST
Gart	36	9.50	13	8.90	0.59
GNNumber	22	5.80	6	4.11	1.70
GADJNumber	62	16.36	18	12.33	4.03
GADJGender	18	4.75	5	3.42	1.32
GVConj	63	16.62	20	13.70	2.92
GVM	56	14.78	15	10.27	4.50
GP	38	10.03	13	8.90	1.12
VWClass	26	6.86	9	6.16	0.70
VFFriends	12	3.17	4	2.74	0.43
WM	22	5.80	8	5.48	0.33
WO	24	6.33	8	5.48	0.85
Total	379		119		

As seen from the results, even if the number of errors was significantly reduced for most of the error categories we identified in the students' samples, there are still some structures of the language which need improvement, especially in the case of slowers, who had problems in using the following grammatical categories:

- the mood of the verb: most of the students seem to forget to add the mark of the Romanian subjunctive, for example producing forms such as: *Vreau citesc. (I want read)* instead of *Vreau să citesc.(I want to read).*

- prepositions: students know the meaning of the prepositions when doing multiple choice exercises, but they have difficulties in choosing the most appropriate preposition in fill in the gaps

exercises and short writing tasks, where they need to use the prepositions within a given context. This can be explained by the fact that the preposition *la*, for example, has more equivalent forms in the support language: *at, to, in, towards, of*. As a result, students produced forms as *Maşina pleacă la staţie (The car leaves the station)* instead of *Maşina pleacă **din** staţie. (The car gets **out of** the station)*.

- word class: students make confusions between nouns and adverbs, producing incorrect forms such as *În vara este frumoasă. (In summer is beautiful.)* instead of *Vara este frumoasă. (Summer is beautiful.)* and between adjectives and adverbs, providing sentences such as: *Vremea este bine. (Weather is well)* instead of *Vremea este bună. (Weather is fine.)*.

- word order: when using color adjectives, students have the tendency to place them in initial position, guiding themselves after the support language, miswriting forms such as: *Am cumpărat o roşie bluză. (I have bought a blouse red.)* instead of *Am cumpărat o bluză roşie. (I have bought a red blouse)*.

Table 4. Rate of students' improvement

	Slowers	Middlers	Advanced
No. of errors IT	921	654	379
No. of errors ST	651	332	119
Rate of improvement	70.68%	50.76%	31.40%

We also calculated the improvement rate for each category of learners to check the progress made by the students as a result of the remedial teaching. As seen from Table 4., each of the students' categories improved their knowledge by significant percentages. The slowers had a very good improvement rate, the number of errors being reduced by 70 % after the remedial teaching, the middlers' number of errors decreased by 50%, while in the case of advanced students it lowered by 30%. The low percentage of errors obtained by the advanced students can be explained by the fact that their initial number of errors was considerably lower than the others.

We realized that one of the reasons students obtained poor results in the initial test was due to the teaching method we used in the beginning, as we needed to provide a basic and necessary theoretical background, making them become passive listeners and reducing our possibility of taking into account the individual differences of the students. This teaching approach was doubled by a lot of drilling exercises that offered them the opportunity to get familiar with the correct forms in imposed contexts, using the given models;

therefore, they did not have the chance to apply their knowledge in freer contexts and when given different tasks most of the times they failed.

At the same time, in analyzing the students' errors after the initial test, during the remedial teaching stage we also took into consideration the possible causes that led to the production of errors. Besides the different level of filtering and retaining the information and also students' capacity of applying it, we identified causes that are connected with the peculiarities of Turkmen and Romanian, the former being of Turkic origin, and the latter of Latin origin. Students showed the tendency to apply rules from the support language to Romanian, (i.e. pre-posing the adjective). Sometimes we noticed that they made analogies with Russian, most of them being fluent speakers of this language. Other causes of error production may be irregular attendance which, obviously led to incomplete and inadequate learning.

The remedial stage also meant changing the teaching approach, enabling us to give up the controller and resource person roles and to adopt the facilitator role, the students becoming the center and the objects of the active and creative learning process. In this respect, the exercises used during the remedial stage were mainly student-centered, their usefulness being proven by the results obtained in the second test. (see Table 4).

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The remedial teaching strategy may prove its full efficiency if continuously applied, not only after certain sequences of the teaching process. Students' learning problems should be identified by the teachers on a regular basis through questioning, direct observation and measures should be taken immediately. Similarly, during the teaching process of new language structures, we should appeal to all the previously taught information, so that the students get the chance to revise it all the time and to put it in practice.

The remedial stage may become more effective if implemented by trained tutors who may support the work of the trainers. The development of a well-established remedial teaching program based on the trainers' observations would be a useful tool in overcoming the language difficulties students have to face when learning Romanian as a second language as 'the goal of remedial instruction is to provide low-achieving students with more chances to reinforce the basic knowledge (…) so that they can meet minimum academic standards.' (Chiu-Ping Huang, 2010: p.168).

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