

Concept-Based Instruction on English Past Perfect

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Abstract

Grounded upon the Vygotskian sociocultural theory, Concept-Based Instruction (CBI) is a pedagogical grammar method viewing semantic and pragmatic concepts as minimal units of grammar instruction and laying emphasis on materialization, verbalization, and internalization of concepts. Attributed to complexity of inherent temporal and aspectual concepts, the English tense and aspect system can be efficaciously taught through CBI. This paper provides a brief overview of CBI as well as the English tense and aspect system, which is followed by presentation of a case study focusing specifically on instruction on the English past perfect through CBI. Results of the pilot study indicate that CBI is capable of advancing learners' conceptual knowledge on and ameliorating their grammatical performance of target structures. That said, implemented in a laboratory setting in lieu of a classroom, teaching procedures of the case study put forward in this paper ought to be executed in genuine classroom contexts and require more in-depth investigations into its applicability and pedagogical efficacy in authentic classrooms.

Keywords Sociocultural theory, Concept-Based Instruction, grammar instruction, English tense and aspect, past perfect

1. Introduction

It is a no-brainer that myriads of pedagogical methodologies of disparate theoretical bases have been devised by applied linguists as well as educationalists in resolution of multifarious pitfalls confronted by learners in the course of grammar learning. In light of learners' imprecise grammatical knowledge out of inaccurate rules of thumb prevalently found in foreign language textbooks, Negueruela (2008) built a general instructional model and put forward Concept-Based Instruction (CBI), a pedagogical grammar method aiming at enhancing learners' explicit understanding of fundamental grammatical concepts. The English tense and aspect system is conceptually complicated and notoriously challenging to foreign language learners (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). The current article adopted CBI as the theoretical framework for structuring L2 tense-aspect instruction and empirically tested its efficacy among advanced learners of English in Hong Kong.

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1.1. *Concept-Based Instruction*

Concept-Based Instruction (CBI) is grounded upon the sociocultural theory (SCT), which was first proposed by the Soviet developmental psychologist Vygotsky and incorporated into second language learning by a group of applied linguists headed by Lantolf. Being a cognitive theory pinpointing the social nature of mental activity, SCT contends that human consciousness results from the dialectical interaction between the brain and auxiliary stimuli appropriated through socially organized activities (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). On the whole, the theory rests upon several central notions: mediation, social interaction, and internalization, all of which lay the basis of the SCT as well as CBI.

First and foremost, mediation is undoubtedly the crux of the SCT. Denoting creation and use of artificial auxiliary means of acting, mediation is founded upon the assumption that humans' cognitive activity, in particular higher forms of mental activity, is regulated by physical and symbolic tools created by human cultures; such a regulation process is denoted as mediation (Lantolf, 2000, 2011). Mediation is scaled into three orders: metacognitive mediation (Karpov & Haywood, 1998), cognitive mediation (Karpov & Haywood, 1998), and 'leading activities' (Vygotsky, 1978). Originating in interpersonal communication, the first order of mediation (metacognitive mediation) employs language as a mediator in that linguistic structures are construed as representing conceptual structures in the human mind, so human thought can be mediated by language via verbalization or a process named 'languaging', which refers to meaning making and construction of knowledge through language (Brooks, Swain, Lapkin, & Knouzi, 2010; Swain, 2006). Also known as cognitive mediation, the second order of mediation adopts culturally constructed tools such as spontaneous and scientific concepts as mediators to shape humans' perception of the environment (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). The third order of mediation regulates human thought through societal structures and institutions such as education (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). Associated with a macro-level context, the third order of mediation influences and interacts with the remaining two orders of mediation to regulate humans' cognition.

Language being one of the mediators of human thought, social interaction, which necessitates extensive use of language, provides a context for mediation to take place. It has been discovered that learning can most productively take place in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is defined as the difference between learners' current developmental level as determined through independent problem solving and a potential developmental level as determined through problem solving under guidance (Vygotsky, 1978). Should learners be provided with assistance in terms of scaffolding, which entails supportive dialogues (e.g., collaborative dialogues and verbal feedback) prompting learners to solve problems, their mental activity can be regulated through languaging and directed to perceive the world in a certain way (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006); it is then likely for them to achieve desired learning outcomes and reach a higher level of development. Regulating learners' thoughts and assisting them in moving forward within the ZPD through languaging, social interaction is an indispensable component of mediation as well as learning.

Both mediation and social interaction undeniably pave way for internalization of knowledge, which is a process of development co-constructed intra- and interpersonally (Winegar, 1997). Having undergone the process of other-regulation, whereby mental activity is regulated by the external environment such as physical and symbolic tools as well as social interaction with other individuals, learners will eventually be capable of internalizing knowledge by moving it to their individual consciousness such that self-regulation, whereby cognition is regulated individually via self-talk or inner speech in lieu of any external tools, becomes plausible (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). In other words, internalization is a transformation of materialized, perceptual, or verbal actions, which are contingent upon artifacts or speech, into mental action (Gal'perin, 1992); such a process is crucial in that only when knowledge has been internalized do learners manage to apply the knowledge in their later performance in an autonomous fashion (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Internalization thereby constitutes the ultimate goal of learning under the paradigm of the SCT.

On the basis of the aforementioned cornerstones of the SCT, CBI has been proposed in a bid to internalize learners' knowledge by means of mediation and social interaction. The instructional paradigm holds the tenet that concepts are deemed to be the overarching mediators and so constitute the minimal unit of instruction; they ought to be materialized to learners as symbolic tools and verbalized by learners so that they can eventually be internalized into learners' mind (Gal'perin, 1969). A typical teaching cycle of CBI comprises three phases. Characterized as the orienting basis of mental action, the initiating phase is intended to present learners with relevant concepts via material tools such as charts and diagrams, capitalizing upon those symbolic artifacts to mediate learners' thoughts (Gal'perin, 1969). Having acquired comprehensive understanding of concepts at the first phase, students are expected to carry out verbal action, freeing themselves from concrete material tools and verbalizing relevant concepts in new contexts individually or collaboratively; this provides opportunities for learners to partake in languaging and social interaction, both of which facilitate mediation and internalization (Gal'perin, 1969). The final stage of the instructional model is inner speech, when knowledge has been internalized, and concepts have become completely mental; learners can utilize those concepts with automaticity without hinging on any external tools (Gal'perin, 1969).

To promote second language learning, CBI lays emphasis on materialization, verbalization, and internalization of semantic and pragmatic concepts underlying grammar structures. Possessing a tendency to explain grammar structures through rules of thumb, which are found to be incomplete and unsystematic, the overwhelming majority of foreign language textbooks hinder learners' understanding of target structures (Negueruela & Lantolf, 2006). It is reckoned that only by developing conceptual understanding of semantic and pragmatic concepts underlying target structures and linking those concepts with formal attributes of language can learners master those structures accurately and apply them in communicative contexts (Negueruela & Lantolf, 2006). For this reason, it is of vital importance to

employ CBI in grammar instruction and base grammar lessons on concepts. Intended to arouse learners' consciousness of conceptual knowledge at the level of understanding by means of materialization and verbalization, CBI is unquestionably an explicit learning model (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). Even though proceduralization of knowledge is taken no heed of by CBI, internalization of knowledge is heavily stressed and intended to be achieved by means of mediation and social interaction.

For all its solid theoretical foundations, the potentials of CBI have not been given enough attention in foreign language classrooms, and research on this pedagogy is limited. One of the most prominent studies of the incorporation of CBI into second language instruction is the one conducted by Negueruela (2003), which is a qualitative study of a university class adopting CBI to teach Spanish verbal aspects. Having been presented with materialized concepts and partaken in verbalization activities during the class, learners were discovered to be capable of providing better definitions and exhibiting substantial amelioration in the use of Spanish verbal aspects. Ganem-Gutierrez and Harun (2010) attempted to incorporate CBI into instruction on the English tense and aspect system in a university classroom; learners were found to acquire deeper understanding of the tense and aspect system after receiving conceptual explanations with the aid of material tools whilst verbalization played a regulatory role in the learning process. Despite its pedagogical efficacy corroborated by the two aforementioned studies, being a rather new pedagogical methodology, CBI assuredly has to be studied in greater depth, particularly concerning its applicability in distinct contexts.

1.2. *English Tense and Aspect*

The tense and aspect (TA) system consists of two separate but interrelated notions: tense and aspect, the former of which denotes temporal locations of situations whilst the latter entails internal dimensions of situations (Smith, 1997). Aspect can be further divided into two types: grammatical aspect and lexical aspect. Both tense and aspect are encoded by elements in verb phrases, each of which possesses one full verb as a mandatory component as well as auxiliary verbs as optional constituents (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990). Tense and grammatical aspect are always instantiated in terms of grammatical forms within verb phrases such as distinct verb forms of full verbs and discrepant auxiliary verbs, whereas lexical aspect is inherently carried by meanings of full verbs. Tense and aspect interact with each other to express specific temporal and aspectual meanings.

Referring to when a certain situation occurs, tense predominantly involves two concepts: remoteness and factuality. The English present and past tenses, which are marked by the present and past forms of full verbs or operators respectively, delineate factual situations, and the distinction between the two lies merely in remoteness of situations: the former depicts situations that are non-remote from the moment of utterance whilst the latter depicts those that are remote from the moment of utterance (Yule, 2014). In contrast with the present and past tenses, the English future and hypothetical tenses delineate non-factual situations and are marked by modal auxiliaries (Yule, 2014). The future tense, which is indicated by the auxiliary 'will', depicts possibilities that are neither factual nor remote

whereas the hypothetical tense, which is indicated by the auxiliary ‘would’, depicts non-factual yet remote possibilities (Yule, 2014). Besides temporal distance, psychological or social distance, which is unrelated to time, can also be expressed through tenses.

Akin to tense, grammatical aspect, which denotes how a situation is perceived, is also encoded by grammatical forms within verb phrases. The simple aspect, which requires no additional grammatical marker, views situations as unified wholes that are neither in progress nor in retrospect (Yule, 2014). Viewed internally, situations taking the progressive aspect, which are indicated by the auxiliary ‘be’ followed by present participles of full verbs, are seen as in progress (Yule, 2014). On the other hand, viewed externally, situations taking the perfect aspect, which are indicated by the auxiliary ‘have’ followed by past participles of full verbs, are seen from a retrospective perspective in relation to a certain reference time (Yule, 2014). The perfect progressive aspect can be yielded through combination of the perfect and progressive aspects to describe ongoing situations viewed retrospectively (Yule, 2014). Never can grammatical aspect be treated alone, but it should be interpreted along with lexical aspect so that internal dimensions of situations can be holistically deciphered.

Encoded by full verbs, lexical aspect is chiefly concerned with the concepts of dynamicity, durativity, and telicity; these concepts largely categorize verbs into four types (Vendler, 1967). Dynamicity distinguishes state verbs, which denote constant and stable states, from other verbs, which entail dynamic actions, whilst durativity distinguishes achievement verbs, which denote punctual and isolated actions, from other verbs, which entail states or actions extending through time. Amongst all verbs, accomplishment and achievement verbs are telic, implying that actions depicted possess certain end-points, whereas state and activity verbs are atelic, meaning that states or actions depicted possess no end-points (Vendler, 1967). Discrepant categories of verbs, which possess distinct lexical aspects, can be combined with the same grammatical aspect to convey dissimilar meanings.

Attributed to inherent complexity of temporal and aspectual concepts involved, the English TA system poses much difficulty to second language learners (Salaberry, 2000; Ayoun & Salaberry, 2008). In spite of their presence in all languages, tense and aspect are categorized and marked in unique ways across languages, so it is particularly difficult for second or foreign language learners to acquire the TA system of the target language. Even advanced learners of English exhibiting high formal accuracy of TA markers are found to possess difficulty mastering the semantics of the English TA system accurately (Bardovi-Harlig, 1992). These learners are suggested by the Aspect Hypothesis to possess a disposition to heavily rely on lexical aspects of verbs in lieu of temporal and aspectual meanings to mark grammatical markers (Andersen & Shirai, 1994). This can be an outcome of their lack of accurate and thorough understanding of the English TA system. Aiming at developing learners’ deep understanding of semantic concepts underlying target structures, CBI is considered an appropriate pedagogical methodology that can be drawn upon to teach the TA system (Negueruela, 2003; Lantolf & Poehner, 2014).

Seldom can the entirety of the English TA system be taught at a time, but each lesson apparently ought to focus on one particular tense and aspect; the past perfect is selected as the target structure of the current study. Formed by a combination of the past tense and the perfect aspect, the past perfect is instantiated in terms of verb phrases with the auxiliary 'had' followed by past participles of full verbs; such a combination delineates situations viewed retrospectively in relation to a past reference time (Yule, 2014). Should the past perfect be taken by state verbs, the stative usage is yielded to depict constant states in the past that extended to a moment of retrospection that was also in the past (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990). On the other hand, should the past perfect be taken by dynamic verbs, the event usage is yielded to depict past events that had been completed at a moment of retrospection in the past (Greenbaum & Quirk, 1990). It is opined that complexity of concepts of remoteness, retrospection, stativity, and dynamicity effectuates learners' difficulty in mastering the two usages of the past perfect.

In particular, learners' first language being highly influential in second language learning, absence of an equivalent TA system or tense and aspectual inflectional markers in the Chinese language makes it especially difficult for Chinese learners of English to interpret conceptual meanings of English tenses and aspects or master the entirety of the system (Hong, 2008; McArthur, 2002; Odlin, 1989); the English TA system has thereby be notorious for being problematic for Chinese learners of English.

2. Methodology

2.1 Participants

A laboratory-based case study with 10 participants, all of whom were undergraduate students majoring in English at a university in Hong Kong, were conducted in a laboratory to incorporate CBI into instruction on the English past perfect. All the participants were advanced learners of English, with an IELTS score of above 7. The participants took content courses in English literature and linguistics and did not take grammar lessons in their university education. All of them expressed difficulties with the more advanced uses of English tenses in writing. None of them had prior exposure to CBI or research on grammar instruction.

2.2 Procedure

A pre-test was administered prior to the instruction to elicit participants' prior knowledge on the target structure and provide baseline data for analysis. A post-test, of which the format was identical to that of the pre-test, was conducted following the intervention to reveal the pedagogical efficacy of CBI in enhancing participants' accurate understanding of the target structure. The test materials are described in the Measurements section. The study lasted for approximately three hours.

Guided by the framework of CBI, the teaching procedures were designed on the basis of the aforementioned stages proposed by Gal'perin (1969), involving materialization, verbalization, and internalization of semantic concepts underlying the target structure.

2.1.1 Materialization of concepts

Concurring with the first stage of the teaching cycle of CBI, the procedure of materialization of concepts aimed at presenting students with semantic concepts underlying the past perfect by means of a flow chart as well as a diagram; usage of the past perfect was also introduced to students via sample sentences from an authentic English text. The stative and event usages of the past perfect were explained by the teacher (also the first author of the current article) with the aid of a flow chart (see Figure 1) and two diagrams (see Figure 2), which mediated students' thoughts through materialization of semantic concepts underlying the past perfect.

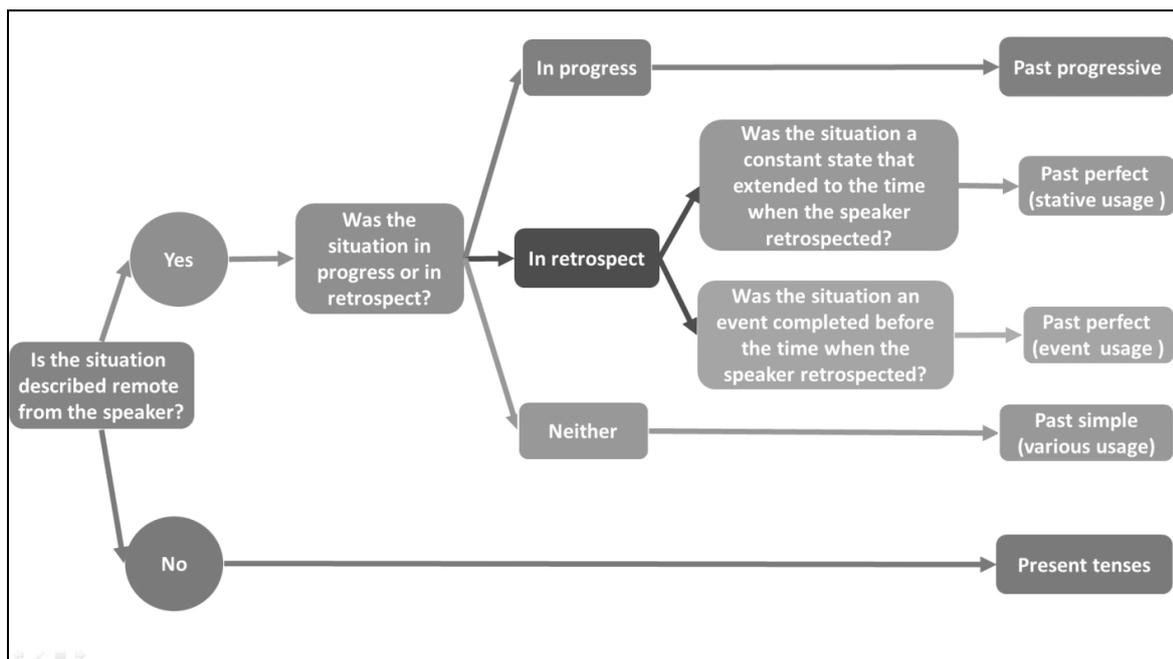


Figure 1. Flow chart used as materialization of concepts

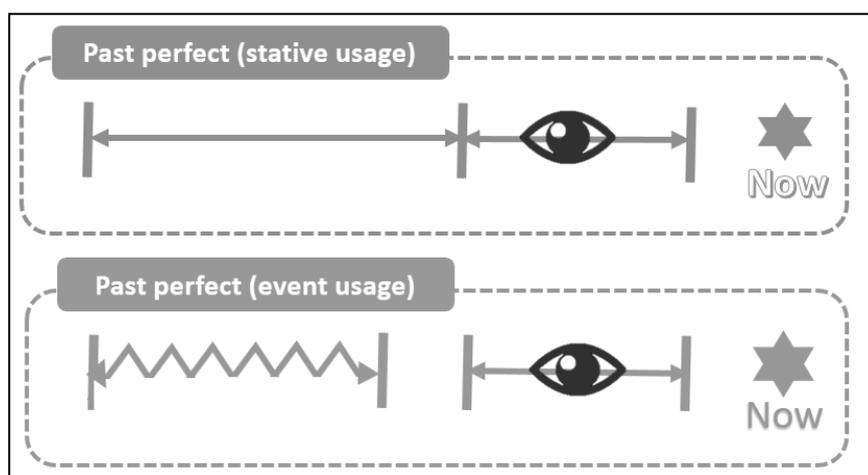


Figure 2. Diagrams used as materialization of concepts

The flow chart guided students to make judgments on choices of tense and aspect; in particular, it illustrates circumstances under which the past perfect ought to be used. The flow chart was complemented by two diagrams. A point annotated as 'now', which represents the moment of utterance, is dissociated from other components in both diagrams; this illustrates the concept of remoteness, which implies a distance between the present and the occurrence of the situations depicted. Moreover, an eye, which represents a moment of retrospection, is present in both diagrams to illustrate the concept of retrospection, which implies looking back. Concepts of stativity and dynamicity are represented by the straight and zigzag lines in the diagrams showing the stative and event usages of the past perfect respectively. Only by having their minds mediated by semantic concepts presented by material tools could students acquire accurate declarative knowledge of the meaning of the past perfect (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). The process of materialization was thereby infallibly an all-important component of the teaching procedures.

Notwithstanding their essence, rarely could semantic concepts be presented in an isolated fashion, but their application in authentic contexts ought to be introduced to students explicitly so that students could deploy the past perfect in everyday language production. Each usage of the past perfect was illustrated with one sample sentence extracted from an authentic text; the temporal and aspectual meaning conveyed by the sentence was explained through semantic concepts that had just been materialized to the students. Not only did sample sentences enable students to decipher application of the past perfect in authentic contextualized usage, they also drew students' attention to the form of the past perfect, assisting them in establishing a connection between semantic concepts and verb forms.

2.1.2 Verbalization

Complying with the second stage of the teaching cycle of CBI, the procedure of verbalization was intended to provide opportunities for students to verbalize learnt semantic concepts underlying the past perfect in new contexts via collaborative dialogues in pairs. Provided with five extracts of authentic text, each of which comprised two new sentences with the use of the past perfect, students were required to work in pairs and explain the usage of the past perfect to each other using relevant semantic concepts. More specifically, they were required to find out the past perfect verb form, identify the moment of retrospection, and explain whether the state or event usage of the past perfect was employed in each sentence. Engaging in verbalization through collaborative dialogues, students were provided with opportunities for languaging and social interaction, where their thoughts could be mediated through language, and they could be pushed to a higher level of development within the ZPD through peer scaffolding (Gal'perin, 1969; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Above all, facilitating other-regulation by means of languaging and peer scaffolding, verbalization eventually paved way for internalization of learnt semantic concepts into students' minds, which was the ultimate goal of learning under the paradigm of SCT as well as CBI (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). Playing such an integral role in students'

learning, verbalization was decidedly equally accentuated as materialization of concepts in CBI.

Barely was inner speech, the ultimate stage of a typical cycle of CBI, explicitly shown in the aforementioned teaching procedures albeit it was perceived to be students' expected learning outcome after completion of all planned activities. Having internalized semantic concepts underlying the past perfect through the verbalization activity, students could proceed from dialogic speech to inner speech, understanding and utilizing those concepts without any material or verbal aids (Gal'perin, 1969). All three stages of a typical teaching cycle of CBI were thereby incorporated into the teaching procedures of the current study.

2.3 *Measurements*

Each of the tests administered in the case study comprised three parts (see Appendix for test items). Participants were provided with short texts with blanks in the first part, and they were required to fill in the blanks with appropriate verb forms of given verbs; this type of question required them to apply distinct tenses and aspects in context. In the second part, participants were provided with two sentences, where the stative and event usages of the past perfect were employed respectively, and asked to explain the usage of the past perfect in the two sentences. Hinted that time can be represented in a spatial dimension, participants were finally asked to draw diagram(s) to illustrate the usage of the past perfect in the last part of the tests. Students' responses in both tests were analyzed in length by both quantitative and qualitative means to yield a comprehensive picture of efficacy of the aforementioned pedagogical procedures.

3. Findings and Discussion

A comparison between participants' performance in the pre-test and post-test demonstrates that not only did learners develop more accurate conceptual knowledge of the past perfect after the intervention, they also managed to apply the past perfect more accurately.

To begin with, the mean accuracy score of the blank-filling test escalated from 0.25 in the pre-test to 0.94 in the post-test, which indicates a remarkable accuracy increment in the production of the past perfect in obligatory contexts; this suggests that CBI benefit participants' grammatical performance.

In the second part of the tests, which involved written verbalization of usage of the past perfect, explication of usage of the past perfect in given linguistic data using more accurate semantic concepts was observed in the post-test in that concepts of remoteness and retrospection were absent in the pre-test yet present in the post-test. For instance, a participant Sally (pseudonym) explicated usage of the past perfect by saying "(one action) took place before (another action)" and "(one state) up to a time point in the past" in the pre-test; all explication was correlated with the concept of time without incorporation of concepts of remoteness or retrospection. In the post-test, Sally made use of diagrams (see Figure 3) with a distance between "now" and the situation referred to as well as presence of "an eye", which present concepts of remoteness and retrospection, to elucidate usage of the past

perfect in given sentences without being prompted to do so. Written verbalization of another participant Sam (pseudonym), who explicated usage of the past perfect by linguistic means in both the pre-test and the post-test, also provides conclusive evidence for advancement in conceptual knowledge on the past perfect after the intervention. In the pre-test, Sam wrote that the past perfect was used because “(one action) happened before (another action)” and “(on state happened in the past and that is not until present”); such written verbalization was comparable to that of Sally in the pre-test and represented semantic concepts underlying the past perfect inaccurately. Nevertheless, having received the intervention, Sam identified the “retrospection point” either explicitly or implicitly using phrases such as “look back on” (see Figure 4).

a) He found that he **had forgotten** to take his school bag with him when he arrived at the bus stop.

~~the action~~

b) They **had moved** into the house before the baby was born.

Figure 3. Sally’s response in post-test written verbalization

a) He found that he **had forgotten** to take his school bag with him when he arrived at the bus stop.

The retrospection point was the moment that he arrived at the bus stop.

b) They **had moved** into the house before the baby was born.

They looked back on the arrival of the time when the baby was born.

Figure 4. Sam’s response in post-test written verbalization

From the above samples, it is evident that both Sally and Sam began to feel more comfortable materializing concepts and interpreting the past perfect either using diagrams or written language as mediational tools after the intervention. Their post-test written verbalizations suggest entrance of concepts of remoteness and retrospection into their conceptual thinking after undergoing processes of materialization and verbalization of concepts during the intervention (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014).

Participants' elucidation of usage of the past perfect using diagrams in the post-test also manifests more mature and comprehensive mastery of concepts when compared to that in the pre-test; performance of another participant Amy (pseudonym) has been selected as another case for detailed examination. Asked to illustrate the usage of the past perfect using diagrams in the pre-test, Amy represented the past perfect by means of a timeline (see Figure 5), revealing the traditional method whereby the English TA system is taught in elementary and secondary schools in Hong Kong. The concept of retrospection was absent in the timeline drawn by her; this largely resulted from absence of such an essential concept in teacher's presentation of the past perfect (Curriculum Development Council, 1999). In contrast, having received instruction on the past perfect via the CBI intervention, Amy was capable of drawing her own diagram to represent concepts of remoteness and retrospection underlying the past perfect in the post-test; this is indicated by a distance between "now" and the situation referred to as well as presence of "an eye" in her post-test diagram. She did not simply mimic the two diagrams being taught during the intervention. Instead, she managed to create her own material tools for mediation of thoughts; more specifically, she modified the diagrams presented by combining both usages of the past perfect into one diagram. Such a merge sacrificed the semantic distinction between stative and event usages of the past perfect, yet it reflects that Amy had internalized the concepts partially by simplifying and streamlining conceptualization, which may facilitate better storage and retrieval of schematic information for future use (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014).

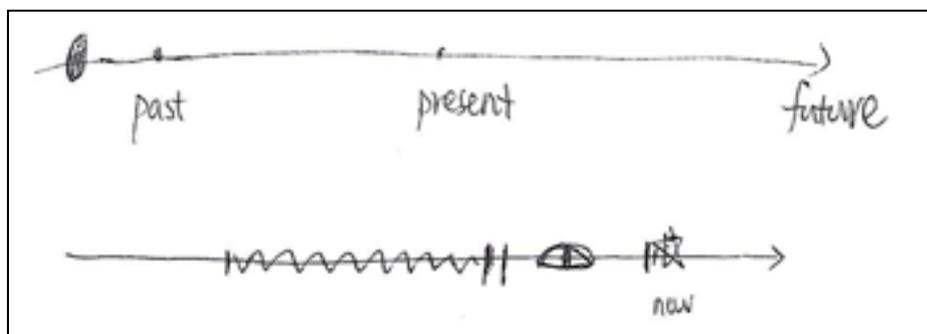


Figure 5. Diagrams drawn by Amy in pre-test (above) and post-test (below)

The aforementioned findings of the current study is concurrent with findings of previous relevant studies (e.g. Ganem-Gutierrez & Harun, 2010 and Negueruela, 2003), which suggest that CBI is effectual in advancing second language learners' conceptual development and deepening their conceptual understanding of target language structures. Attributed to its pedagogical efficacy discovered in antecedent and the current studies, CBI is reckoned to be a desirable instructional approach to be implemented in second or foreign language classrooms in various linguistic and educational contexts for the sake of learners' language learning.

One particular issue pertaining to such a pilot case study that deserves attention is whether it is necessary to present learners with two distinct usages of the past perfect. During the intervention, a participant reflected that she could use the past perfect appropriately without an ability to distinguish between the stative and event usages as long as she deciphered the concepts of remoteness and retrospection accurately. Participants' conceptualization of the past perfect using one diagram (instead of two) in the post-test also indicates their difficulty in making a distinction between the two usages of the past perfect. As a matter of fact, a fine-grained distinction between the two usages provides learners with precise understanding of concepts underlying the past perfect; this necessitates accurate comprehension and production. That said, instructional content ought to be planned in accordance with learners' levels of language proficiency and cognitive maturity. Hardly is it plausible to expect learners at preliminary stages of cognitive development to comprehend the distinction between a stable state and a dynamic action; in this case, it is more practical and feasible to present learners merely with concepts of remoteness and retrospection in lieu of a fine distinction between the two usages on the past perfect during instruction. Even if learners fail to make a distinction between the two usages, they may still manage to comprehend and produce such a verb form fairly appropriately, especially for those less complicated instances of the past perfect.

4. **Conclusions**

By and large, it is in evidence that CBI is a theoretically-informed alternative to traditional pedagogical grammar methods that can compensate for the inadequacy of rules of thumb of present in many a second or foreign language grammar book. Driven by SCT, CBI upholds that grammar lessons ought to be planned and designed on the basis of semantic and pragmatic concepts, which have to be materialized to mediate students' thoughts, verbalized through social interaction, and eventually internalized into students' minds with an ultimate goal of proceduralized application in real-life language use. Being an attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice, the current case study presented in this article incorporates CBI into instruction on the English past perfect, placing stress on temporal and aspectual concepts underlying the English tense and aspect system. It is hoped that the planned teaching procedures in the case study can be implemented in genuine ESL and EFL classrooms so that more insights into applicability and pedagogical efficacy of CBI in authentic contexts can be yielded; this can provide directions for further research on this under-researched instructional paradigm.

The current study is not without limitations. The study involved merely 10 participants and solely one instructional session. Scarcely are our findings meant to be generalized to the entirety of the population of second language learners as well as other target structures. Instead, only does it provide preliminary ideas of potential strengths and limitations of the pedagogical approach. Follow-up studies engaging more participants and focusing on a greater variety of target structures ought to be conducted to verify results of such a small-scale study and illuminate directions of application of the

pedagogy in authentic classrooms. In particular, implementation of CBI in classrooms with learners at distinct levels of language proficiency is necessary to examine pedagogical efficacy of the approach. Meanwhile, usage of CBI for instruction on other language structures, such as other verb forms in the English TA system, English modality, articles, and prepositions, will provide a more comprehensive picture of pedagogical efficacy of the approach in L2 grammar instruction in general.

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Appendix

(A) Pre-test

1. Fill in the blanks with the appropriate verb forms.

- a) Soon after the dog _____ (eat) the sausage, it _____ (start) to behave strangely. It wouldn't stop shaking his head, and he couldn't stand up properly. Mrs. Andrew thought, 'Perhaps the sausage _____ (go) bad.'
- b) Once a man named Grant _____ (find) a box of old papers in a room in the top of his house. He didn't like old things, so he decided to burn them all. He _____ (get) rid of most of them when an old letter _____ (catch) his eye.

2. Explain why the past perfect is used in the following two sentences respectively.

- a) She **had left** before I arrived.
- b) The relative humidity of Hong Kong **had been** stable by yesterday.

3. Illustrate the usage(s) of the past perfect using diagram(s).
(Hint: Time can be represented in a spatial dimension.)

(B) Post-test

1. Fill in the blanks with the appropriate verb forms.

- a) Mary went to the kitchen and _____ (find) Henry there. He _____ (finish) eating the food Mary _____ (prepare) for him.
- b) I saw the house when I first moved there. It _____ (be) empty for about a year and was beginning to need some repairs, but the house was exactly what I wanted. However, by the time I _____ (put) together enough money, I learnt that a property developer _____ (buy) it and planned to turn it into a hotel.

2. Explain why the past perfect is used in the following two sentences respectively.

- a) He found that he **had forgotten** to take his school bag with him when he arrived at the bus stop.
- b) They **had moved** into the house before the baby was born.

3. Illustrate the usage(s) of the past perfect using diagram(s).
(Hint: Time can be represented in a spatial dimension.)