

Case study, as interactive method in teaching English

Vanesa MAGHERUȘAN

Romanian-American University

Abstract

We are currently witnessing a focused tendency as regards the use of interactive methods in teaching foreign languages, which are considered efficient means to meet the inner need of the individual to exchange information, ideas, opinions, to communicate with others, to set new social-emotional relationships.

Keywords

case study; English training; interactive methods;

We are currently witnessing a focused tendency as regards the enhancement of the use of interactive methods in teaching foreign languages. Such methods are considered efficient means to meet the inner need of the individual to exchange information, ideas, opinions, to communicate with others, to set new social-emotional relationships.

We have decided to focus our research on one of such interactive methods, respectively case study. In terms of communicative perspective, case study offers students the occasion to carry out an analysis, to suggest different solutions to a problem requiring decision-making, to argue and present investigation paths of such case in English. Moreover, a debate on the case involves interpersonal verbal relations, contributes to the improvement of the participant's responsibility, making students aware of the shortages of their practical training and the need to enhance their self-training efforts – both practical and theoretical. Case study makes the student active, stimulating their intellectual potential orientated towards the training of speaking skills in English.

Case study(lat. *Casus* – accident, random occurrence) was underpinned by the need of finding means to train the model of real life, of social or productive practice activity. It has gradually become one of the most active methods, with broad possibilities of use in the educational process.

Case study is the base of education forms brought forward by the Graduate School of Business Administration of Harvard. It began in France, 1926, by A. Siegfried. Later on, a wider development took place in the fields of the higher education and then all the fields of education in general. According to R. Yin, case study can be defined as: *“an empiric analysis analyzing a contemporary phenomenon in the context of real live, the border between such phenomenon and context not being very well defined and which uses various data sources”*.

A case study can be a unique complex human situation, for instance a major decision with related consequences, an important event to be investigated in actual context. There are also in our social lives unique, unrepeated events, rare or extreme situations highly problematic which can be analyzed in a singular or multiple case studies. The possibility to control the phenomenon is close to zero. Case study answers to questions such as “how” and “why” an event, a decision, etc. took place.

Case study is according to I. Bontas a way to analyze a particular, special situation, which exists or is likely to exist in an action, phenomenon, etc. whatsoever and which is called a case in order to be studied or solved in connection with the removal of some shortages or modernization of processes, ensuring the making of a proper decision in the said field. The case is an aspect, an element, a subsystem or even the system itself which requires related approaches and settlement. Thus, when approaching a case study, students get to substantiate their decisions according to their knowledge, theories and information acquired.

In his design of case study, W.A Lucas indicates the general features of the research's design substantiating the projects specific to case studies. They are important for the teaching process and have been divided into four types of projects: unitary case project – holistic; unitary case project – fixed; multiple case project – holistic and multiple case project – fixed.

We have chosen for our research the unitary case study, first of all, because is synonym to the unitary experiment and most of the requirements underpinning the unitary experiment also justify the unitary case study. The unitary case study is of interest when it represents a critical case in testing a well formulated theory. The theory stipulates an accurate series of proposals and circumstances of such proposals which are considered as true. To confirm, challenge or

expand the theory, there can be a unitary case to include all the requirements needed to test it.

Moreover, the unitary case can be used to see if the theory's proposals are correct or if there are more relevant alternative explanations. Such a study is capable of changing some subsequent inquiries in an entire field.

The study of unitary case may prove some weaknesses in its fulfillment. Thus, the design of unitary case studies requires thorough investigation to mitigate the chances of a wrongful presentation and to enhance access to data gathering.

There are two main ways to use a case study: source or knowledge and practical means.

The first way refers to a case chosen purposefully from an area of knowledge and its understanding will make clearer such area of knowledge or similar areas from a class of objects or phenomena.

The second way to analyze a case study, according to H. Kurt, is used to apply practically an experience already acquired in order to solve new problems based on an effort of thought and imagination.

In both cases, students are encouraged to see reality in its daily challenges and to cross the boundaries set by a classroom, acquiring, at the same time, new vocabulary and structures specific to a foreign language, in our case English.

Case study offers students the opportunity to analyze, synthesize and solve problems, which is more attractive for them than operating with theoretical knowledge. In such activities, students acquire new working techniques, apply their knowledge and experience and mostly, decide which is the best solution for the problem under analysis and realize how they need to improve their acquisition of English skills.

The role played by the teacher is to process the case and to organize its analysis and to settle any conflict which might arise during the debate. According to I. Cerghit, the teacher's role is to stimulate discussions, to keep them on an objective path and to refrain from offering opinions, solutions which can be reached by students through their own reasoning. Therefore, the focus is on the active and lucrative participation of the entire group.

Educational practice has shown that the case study method is highly active, requires an intense personal or team activity, in terms of collection and exploitation of information, freedom and multiplicity of

analysis for decision making, critical evaluation of alternatives, expressing sincere opinions etc.

The teaching approach for studying English should create training opportunities of communicative skills using formative case studies. In this respect the following conclusions are significant:

- It is an interactive method from the various methods involving communicative situations in which students change information and opinions in English;
- Learning based on case studies allows an active and interactive participation of students in the collective analysis and debate of the case;
- It takes time for organization and debate and varies according to the objective pursued.

The implementation of case studies in the educational practice requires a collection of cases in relation to the objectives and the requirements of the subject matter. In this respect, it is advisable to have prior experience in small groups and then to integrate them in the daily class activity.

Case study helps students who study English as a second language to develop their vocabulary by means of the professional culture and general culture and is a safe path to motivate students as regards the study and command of English. The training of the communication competence in English is made in terms of the motivation concerning the field of applied linguistics – the linguistic approach and the psycho-pedagogic approach.

Our research is based on psycho-pedagogical principles, the psycholinguistic theory and methodology and started from the assumption that if communicative skills training requires aware motivation, having as benchmarks cognitive, behavioral, psychomotor objectives in psychosocial, cultural and traditional context, then case study is an important contribution as a factor of motivation in training the communicative competence in pedagogical context that involves active engagement of students in the process of communication. In this respect, case study will facilitate the decoding of messages in English during its acquirement, also triggering the improvement of the teaching and assessment processes.

In the process of communication involving case studies, language is the fundamental code and the word and gestures become a whole. In a system of communication, the message will transform into its original form: information, idea, concept, etc. It is thus obvious that

the participants will circulate the message and not the actual information. The message is communicated by gestures, mimics, body posture and language. All humans are both receivers and sender of messages through dialogue. In a dialogue carried in regular conditions, there is a close intertwining between the two elements of communication – the verbal element and the non-verbal one, both having an equally important role in conveying and receiving the message. In the fulfillment of the communicative function of the spoken language, which is specific to human beings as visual-additive beings, the sender and receiver use a double channel at the same time: acoustic and visual. Case studies connect these two elements of the language given its composition and structure which can be expressed by various operations which lead, in the end, to finding a solution for the case.

The teaching approach for the study of English must create opportunities as regards the training of speaking skills, using case study with training possibilities and speaking value. In this respect, we can say that case study is an interactive method, part of the wide range of methods involving students' speaking skills, thus allowing an exchange of opinions and information in English.

Training foreign languages based on case study involves the active and interactive engagement of students. They have to study, debate a case collectively, to identify and examine solutions and to make decisions according to their personal system of values. As well, a case study requires time for preparation, as it varies in terms of objectives pursued, contents and technological logic of its unfolding.

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