Information Transfer Use in English Teaching
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Abstract
In keeping with a communicative methodology teachers strive to create activities in class promote student interaction in authentic circumstances. In this paper the author introduces the technique known as Information Transfer, by first collecting different definitions of the term and then by explaining its application to English language teaching contexts in Vietnam secondary schools.

Introduction
This paper introduces an approach to language instruction called the Information Transfer Technique. It starts with a description of the technique, continues by outlining the rationale for using it, and then connects it to certain classroom activities, in particular its potential to enliven reading classes.

Information Transfer Technique: A Variety of Definitions
The Oxford English Dictionary (1997) includes the following definition for the term “transfer”. To transfer (information/music, etc.) is to “copy information, music, an idea, etc from one method of recording or presenting it to another” or “to be recorded or presented in a different way.” Based on this definition, we see that presenting the same information in two or more different formats can be described as transferring.

There are several definitions concerning the Information Transfer Technique. First of all, an Information Transfer activity “is an activity involving the reproduction of information either from a diagrammatic or semi-diagrammatic form into a fully linguistic form or vice verse (Palmer, 1991, p. 79).

A different definition is: “Information Transfer technique means translating data from one form to another. We move from the Reading or Listening text to graphic stimuli, or visual like charts, graphs, diagrams, figures, maps, etc and vice verse” (Storla, 1995, p. 5). Widdowson (1978) seems to agree when he states that the Information Transfer technique is the “transformation of instances of discourses from one type into another but these instances of discourse can also be derived from a non-verbal mode of communicating” (p. 141).

Finally, Brown (2004) explains Information Transfer as follows:

The action of comprehending graphics includes the linguistics performance of oral or written interpretation, comments, questions, etc. This implies a process of Information Transfer from one skill to another: in this case, from reading verbal and/or non-verbal information to speaking/writing” (p. 210).

It can be inferred from the definitions above that the Information Transfer technique is converting the content of the verbal language form into the non-verbal language form and vice versa to make the information easy to understand and convey.

Advantages of Information Transfer Activities
Information Transfer, as stated above, is a visual kind of information that falls into a variety of forms such as tables, charts, graphs, outlines, maps, and memos. This kind of data is very
common in our daily lives and has many advantages (Palmer, 1991). The advantages are outlined below:

**Authenticity**
Firstly, Information Transfer is an authentic task that is often used in an English speaking environment by native speakers in the normal course of their everyday lives. Let’s take the train timetables as an example. The railway clerk at the enquiries office constantly transfers his own semi-diagrammatic timetable into linguistic information for people who telephone to ask for train times. These people also probably note down that information in a semi-schematic way rather than in its fully linguistic form.

**Communicative Tasks**
Information Transfer activities are also communicative tasks. When customers book a flight at the travel agent, the clerk will interpret the information on the computer screen for them and use information transfer in communicating and offering help.

**Repetitive Tasks**
Normally, the information presented in a diagrammatic form or semi-diagrammatic form is frequently a concentrated collection of similar items of information, for example, repeatedly the train time table shows us when the train will depart from, stop at, and arrive at a limited number of places. This means that the linguistic equivalent may well be expressed by repetition of a certain structure. In this way, Information Transfer activities can be very appropriate to a controlled practice stage of a lesson.

**Productive Tasks**
An Information Transfer exercise, such as an information-gap task, usually provides students only with the bare bones of information – they must supply the additional information, often to a partner. Thus, if it is appropriately staged, information transfer can fit into the free production stage of a lesson. In the example below (Fig. 1) only the bare bones of information are given to the student. In order to present on the topic, music, they must add more information to make sentences. In this kind of exercise students can practice their speaking in front of the class. This is done during the productive stage of a class that began with a reading text about music.
Development of All Four Language Skills

Ideally an Information Transfer activity forms a kind of pivot around which any of the language skills may revolve (see Fig. 2).

Self-Access

Information Transfer provides a framework for useful self-access activities for developing listening and reading skills because it helps students to check their performance against the “correct” visual data or objects.
Apparently, the advantage is that information transfer material is graphic (i.e., it is visual). Because this type of transfer involves only a few necessary words to get the idea across, students take on the task of recasting the information in spoken forms, and then in written forms. This practice is a great benefit to students. Doing this kind of work helps them gain confidence that they can be articulate on their own, rather than just repeating or copying the words of others.

Another benefit to information transfer is that it is open-ended. This kind of data gives the students a topic and quite a bit of information, but it is always possible for the students to add their own ideas and interpretation.

**Reasons for Using Information Transfer Activities in the Teaching of Reading**

The central characteristic of communicative language teaching is that it focuses attention on the abilities to understand and convey informational content. One way to practice (and test) these abilities is through Information Transfer activities.

According to Prodromou (1992), information presented in visual form as a starting-point for practicing the four skills is another hallmark of the Communicative Approach; therefore, Information Transfer activities have a major part to play in the class for the following reasons:

- Information in a visual form is comprehensive whether a student is linguistically gifted or not; visual information is a kind of universal language.
- Because the Information Transfer technique is applicable to all four skills, different learning styles are catered for.
- Charts and diagrams lend themselves to information-gap activities in which language is used for a communicative purpose.
- Information can be distributed in such a way that less confident students may receive more support in their task than more confident students.
- Students can often work together to complete a task, thus encouraging an open and sharing atmosphere among students with a range of talents and personalities.

**The Case for Using the Information Transfer Technique in reading classes in Vietnam**

In the context of teaching reading at Vietnamese Upper Secondary schools, there are three reasons why introducing Information Transfer activities could be advantageous: it diversifies the techniques used; it helps students read the whole; and it helps with real life communication.

**Diversifying the techniques for teaching reading in Vietnam**

Teaching English reading skills has been considered the most important part to develop. In the research by Truong Vien (1999) on techniques for teaching reading, the common ones frequently used at many Upper Secondary schools for content studying are as follows:

- Question-answer
- Finding synonyms/antonyms
- Gap-filling
- True-False

Among the four techniques above, the question-answer technique seems to be most frequently used in classes. These four techniques can be employed after the language teacher explains vocabulary and structure. These techniques to some extent have satisfied the purposes of
teaching reading because they help students understand and master the ideas in the reading texts. However, if these techniques are repeatedly applied in any reading class, what will happen? Students may feel bored and less interested in the lesson. The Information Transfer technique with its advantages will bring a new cycle into the teaching process. Information Transfer could help make the activities fresher and more competitive at the same time encouraging students’ involvement in the lessons. As a result of using the technique students may feel excited by the challenging and creative activities; therefore, the atmosphere of the class will be more attractive and effervescent. Then this may lead to a more successful reading lesson for the teacher.

**Helping students understand the whole reading text**

The techniques mentioned above focus on assisting students’ comprehension of separate ideas or parts of the reading text. In this way, students cannot know how each idea connects with the other ideas and thus it is hard to get the overall idea of the text. Of course, those techniques cannot be absent from the reading lesson but that is not enough for the purpose of content exploitation since a reading lesson is expected to help students with the details as well as the overall ideas. One solution is that some teachers use the summary technique to fulfill the aim of content study. This solution seems not to be successful because students’ writing skills are not as good as desired, while their summary skills are also very limited. By using the Information Transfer technique to transfer the main information of a reading text into charts, graphs and tables will be a useful tool for teachers and students to deal with content of the text at both the general and specific level.

**Practicing real life communication**

One advantage of the Information Transfer technique is that it is a communicative task. In daily life, for example, we can see most information is presented in visual and symbolic form. In an office, for instance, we also notice that from the system of organization, timetables, memos, plans, etc. are not purely in linguistic forms but they are in forms of outline, diagrams, charts or tables. As we travel, we often deal with forms such as a tourist brochure and map, immigration and application forms, accommodation and restaurant information, most of which are both in linguistic and symbolic forms that aim to catch our attention or facilitate our reading. So, if language teachers can apply this technique in class, this will be a wonderful preparation for students later. Students should be encouraged to practice and get acquainted with these types of reading text while they are still at school. In so doing, students can develop the ability to decode information from visual and diagrammatic texts at the same time with the ability to transfer information from linguistic forms into a kind of symbolic form. This is extremely necessary for students in their future daily communication.

**References**


