A Contrastive Study of the Grammar Translation and the Direct Methods of Teaching

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Abstract—Learning of any second language which once may has been for the sake of pleasure or intellectual improvement but with the rapid scientific development a large vistas of knowledge has dawned on the human mind. People of different languages, different places and different lands have contributed to this scientific development, therefore, learning of second languages has become a need and in some cases an inevitability. Accordingly, attempts have been made time to time by the experts to propound the best method of learning the foreign language and among them the grammar-translation and the direct methods are of the premium value as all the other methods and techniques seem to have sprung from these two.

As the direct method is based on the principles quite contrary to the grammar translation method, therefore, it can be rightly said that the later got its emergence as the reaction to the former. Goal of the both these methods is the same but the way of achieving that goal is quite contrary to each other and This paper aims at highlighting the contrastive features of these both.

Keywords—Spontaneously, vernacular languages, mental gymnastics, fallacy

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning is the passion that is instinctive in every human being and it begins spontaneously with the birth of a child. Mother tongue at the primary stage is obtained instinctively and without any exertion or labour but the case is different with the learning of any second language as some set of rules, some sort of principles, and some orderly steps have to be followed in this regard.

At the early stage of the human history no urgency was felt for learning of any second language as the life was so simple, needs were so limited and society was so confined, but with the passage of time a rapid growth in needs and demand, interaction between the speakers of different languages became a necessity which resulted in urgency of learning and ultimately teaching of the second languages.

Teachers and expertise have always been struggling to look for the best means, the best ways and the best techniques to learn and teach any second language, therefore, different theories have been propounded and different practices have been in vogue at different times.

English Language Learning and Teaching has undergone a tremendous change over the period of time, particularly during the twentieth century it has witnessed novelty in this field. Perhaps more than any other, this discipline has been practiced in several varieties all around the globe, whereas, the methodology of teaching other subjects such as Math or Physics, has, to a greater or lesser extent, remained the same.

This paper is aimed at the detailed study of two of the most preferred and practiced techniques and methods of teaching a second language i.e. the grammar-translation method and the direct method as all the other techniques have sprung from these two main techniques.

As the grammar translation method has been practiced as the most popular one for the teaching of second languages, therefore, we inaugurate our research with the discussion on this method.

II. GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION METHOD

A. Preamble

The grammar-translation method is one of the key methods applied for the teaching of foreign languages. It is a derivation of the classical (sometimes called traditional) method of teaching Greek and Latin. According to this method students learn grammatical rules and then apply those rules for translating sentences between the target language and their native language. Advanced students may be required to translate whole texts word-for-word.

B. History and philosophy

While studying the history of teaching methods, we come to know that the grammar-translation method originated from the practice of teaching Latin. In the early 1500s, Latin was the most widely-studied foreign language due to its prominence in government, academia, and business.[4] However, during the course of the century the use of Latin dwindled, and it was gradually replaced by English, French, and Italian.[4]

After the decline of Latin, the purpose of learning it in schools changed. Whereas previously students had learned Latin for the purpose of communication, it came to be learned as a purely academic subject.[4]

Throughout Europe in the past two centuries, the education system was formed primarily around a concept called faculty psychology. This theory dictated that the body and mind were separate and the mind consisted of three parts: the will, emotion, and intellect. It was believed that the intellect could be sharpened enough to eventually control the will and emotions. The way to do this was through learning classical
literature of the Greeks and Romans, as well as mathematics. Additionally, an adult with such an education was considered mentally prepared for the world and its challenges.

At first it was believed that teaching modern languages was not useful for the development of mental discipline and thus they were left out of the curriculum. When modern languages did begin to appear in school curriculums in the 19th century, teachers taught them with the same grammar-translation method as was used for classical Latin and Greek[4] and subsequently textbooks were prepared for the modern language classroom.

C. Goals and Principles
As concerns the goals the grammar-translation stresses upon two main objectives.

One is to develop students’ reading ability to a level where they can read literature in the target language. [4] The other is to develop students’ general mental discipline.

As cited in Richards & Rodgers 2001;
When once the Latin tongue had ceased to be a normal vehicle for communication, and was replaced as such by the vernacular languages, then it most speedily became a ‘mental gymnastic’, the supremely ‘dead’ language, a disciplined and systematic study of which was held to be indispensable as a basis for all forms of higher education.[4]

As far the principals of this method they can numerated as under;

The main principles on which the grammar translation method is base are the following:
1. Translation interprets the words and phrases of the foreign languages in the best possible manner.
2. The phraseology and the idioms of the target language can best be assimilated in the process of interpretation.
3. The structures of the foreign languages are best learned when compared and contrast with those of first language.

D. Method
Grammar-translation classes are usually conducted in the students’ native language. Grammar rules are learned deductively; students learn grammar rules by rote, and then practice the rules by doing grammar drills and translating sentences to and from the target language. More attention is paid to the form of the sentences being translated than to their content. When students reach more advanced levels of achievement, they may translate entire texts from the target language. Tests often consist of the translation of classical texts.

There is not usually any listening or speaking practice, and very little attention is placed on pronunciation or any communicative aspects of the language. The skill exercised is reading, and then only in the context of translation.

E. Scope of The Grammar-Translation Method
The method by definition has a very limited scope. Because speaking or any kind of spontaneous creative output was missing from the curriculum, students would often fail at speaking or even letter writing in the target language. A noteworthy quote describing the effect of this method comes from Bahlson, who was a student of Plötz, a major proponent of this method in the 19th century. In commenting about writing letters or speaking he said he would be overcome with "a veritable forest of paragraphs, and an impenetrable thicket of grammatical rules."[1]

According to Richards and Rodgers, the grammar-translation has been rejected as a legitimate language teaching method by modern scholars:

Though it may be true to say that the Grammar-Translation Method is still widely practiced, it has no advocates. It is a method for which there is no theory. There is no literature that offers a rationale or justification for it or that attempts to relate it to issues in linguistics, psychology, or educational theory.[4]

F. Chief Features Of Grammar Translation Method
In the lines that follow chief features of grammar translation method are given in a nutshell;

i. Roles of teacher and student in grammar translation method
Teacher has authority; students follow instructions to learn what teacher knows.

Teaching/Learning Process Students learn by translating from one language to the other, often translating reading passages in the target language to the native language. Grammar is usually learned deductively on the basis of grammar rules and examples. Students memorize the rules, then apply them to other examples. They learn paradigms such as verb conjugations, and they learn the native language equivalents of vocabulary words.

ii. Interaction: Student-Teacher & Student-Student
Most interaction is teacher-to-student; student-initiated interaction and student-student interaction is minimal.

iii. Aspects of Language the Approach Emphasizes
Vocabulary; grammar emphasizes; reading, writing are primary skills; pronunciation and other speaking/listening skills not emphasized.

iv. Role of Students’ Native Language
Native language is used freely in class as it provides key to meanings in the target language.

v. Means for Evaluation
Tests require translation from native to target and target to native language; applying grammar rules, answering questions about foreign culture.

vi. Response to Students’ Errors
Heavy emphasis placed on correct answers; teacher supplies correct answers when students cannot.

G. Merits Of The Grammar Translation Method
Merits of this method can be enumerated as under;
1) The target language is quickly explained in GTM.
Translation is the easiest way of explaining meanings or words and phrases from one language into another. Any other method of explaining vocabulary items in the second language is found time consuming. A lot of time is wasted if the meanings of lexical items are explained through definitions and illustrations in the second language. Further, learners acquire some short of accuracy in understanding synonyms in the source language and the target language.

2) Teacher and students are easy to communicate/It does not need native language
Teacher’s labour is saved. Since the textbooks are taught through the medium of the mother tongue, the teacher may ask comprehension questions on the text taught in the mother tongue. Pupils will not have much difficulty in responding to questions on the mother tongue. So, the teacher can easily assess whether the students have learnt what he has taught them. Communication between the teacher and the learners does not cause linguistic problems. Even teachers who are not fluent in English can teach English through this method. That is perhaps the reason why this method has been practiced so widely and has survived so long.

3) The students easy to understand because of grammatical lessons.
ESL students taught successfully under the grammar translation method will have the ability to translate even difficult texts from their native language into English. They possess a thorough knowledge of English grammar, including verb tenses. These students will be familiar with several classical pieces of English literature, which are used for grammatical analysis and exercises.
This method requires few specialized skills on the part of teachers. Grammar rules and Translation Tests are easy to construct and can be objectively scored. Many standardized tests of foreign languages still do not attempt to test communicative abilities, so students have little motivation to go beyond grammar analogies, translations and other written exercises.

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H. Demerits Of The Grammar Translation Method
Every Method and every technique has its own advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of Grammar Translation Method have been explained on the passage above. Here are mentioned some of its disadvantages:
1) No Scope for Effective Communication and Very Tedious for Learners
Direct translation is widely regarded as an inefficient way of becoming fluent in any language. For example, translating a sentence word-for-word from Spanish to English might not result in a sentence with the same meaning because so little attention is paid in class to listening and speaking. Students with years of English lessons through this method are often unable to hold even a basic conversation in English because classes with this method are usually taught in a lecture style, with the teacher mostly speaking the students’ native language rather than English, class can be dull and cause students to lose interest.

2) Ineffective Method
It is the teaching method which studies a foreign language in order to read its literature focusing on the analysis of its grammar rules, and to translate sentences and texts into and out the target language. In the Grammar Translation Method the teaching of the second language starts with the teaching of reading. Little attention is paid to the content of texts, which are treated as exercises in grammatical analysis. Thus, the learning process is reversed.

3) More Importance on Grammar Rules than on Meaning
Exact translation is not possible. Translation is, indeed, a difficult task and exact translation from one language to another is not always possible. A language is the result of various customs, traditions, and modes of behavior of a speech community and these traditions differ from community to community. There are several lexical items in one language, which have no synonyms/equivalents in another language. For instance, the meaning of the English word ‘table’ does not fit in such expression as the ‘table of contents’, ‘table of figures’, ‘multiplication table’, ‘time table’ and ‘table the resolution’, etc. English prepositions are also difficult to translate. Consider sentences such as ‘We see with our eyes’, ‘Bombay is far from Delhi’, ‘He died of cholera’, He succeeded through hard work’. In these sentences ‘with’, ‘from’, ‘of’, ‘through’ can be translated into the Hindi preposition ‘se’ and vice versa. Each language has its own structure, idiom and usage, which do not have their exact counterparts in another language. Thus, translation should be considered an index of one’s proficiency in a language.

4) Slow Learning Rate and Making Learners Think in L1
It does not give pattern practice. A person can learn a language only when he internalizes its patterns to the extent that they form his habit. But the Grammar Translation Method does not provide any such practice to the learner of a language. It rather attempts to teach language through rules and not by use. Researchers in linguistics have proved that to speak any language, whether native or foreign entirely by rule is quite impossible. Language learning means acquiring certain skills, which can be learnt through practice and not by just memorizing rules. The persons who have learnt a foreign or second language through this method find it difficult to give up the habit of first thinking in their mother tongue and then translating their ideas into the second language. They, therefore, fail to get proficiency in the second language approximating that in the first language. The method, therefore, suffers from certain weaknesses for which there is no remedy.

I. Conclusion
The Grammar Translation Method was originally developed for the study of “dead” languages and to facilitate access to
those languages’ classical literature. That’s the way it should stay. English is certainly not a dead or dying language, so any teacher that takes “an approach for dead language study” into an English language classroom should perhaps think about taking up Math or Science instead. Rules, universals and memorized principles apply to those disciplines – pedagogy and communicative principles do not.

II. ← A TEACHING METHOD: SUGGESTOPEDIA
GRAMMAR TRANSLATION METHOD →

Direct Method Preamble

Direct method is the offshoot of teaching methods which sprung in reaction to the grammar-translation method and stressed on the teaching of second language in the target language. The torch bearer of this method took it as a very beneficiary one for the teaching of foreign languages, though, later some serious drawbacks of this methods came to light. All this is mentioned and assessed in the pages that follow.

A. The History of Direct Method

During the middle ages, in the western world, foreign language learning was associated with the learning of Latin and Greek, both supposed to promote their speakers’ intellectuality. At the time, it was of vital importance to focus on grammatical rules, syntactic structures, along with rote memorization of vocabulary and translation of literary text. There was no provision for the oral use of the languages under study; after all, both Latin and Greek were not being taught for oral communication but for the sake of their speakers’ becoming “scholarly?” or creating an illusion of “erudition.” Late in the nineteenth century, the classical Method came to be known as Grammar Translation Method, which offered very little beyond an insight into the grammatical rules attending the process of translating from the second to the native language.

It is widely recognized that the Grammar Translation Method is still one of the most popular and favorite models of language teaching, which has been rather stalwart and impervious to educational reforms, remaining standard and sine qua non methodology. With hindsight, we could say that its contribution to language learning has been lamentably limited, since it has shifted the focus from the real language to a “dissected body” of nouns, adjectives and prepositions, doing nothing to enhance a student’s communicative ability in the foreign language.

The last two decades of the nineteenth century ushered in a new age. In his the Art of Learning and Studying Foreign Languages (1880), Francois Gouin described his “harrowing” experiences of learning German, which helped him gain insights into the intricacies of language teaching and learning and find out that language learning is a matter of transforming perceptions into conceptions and then using language to represent these conceptions. Equipped with this knowledge, he devised a teaching method premised upon these insights. It was against this background that the series method was created, which taught learners directly a “series” of connected sentences that are easy to understand. Nevertheless, this approach to language learning was short-lived and, only a generation later, gave place to the Direct Method, posited by Charles Berlitz. The basic tenet of Berlitz’s method was that second language learning is similar to first language learning. In this light, there should be lots of oral interaction, spontaneous use of the language, no translation, and little if any analysis of grammatical and syntactic structures.

B. Targets Of The Direct Method

As this techniques of teaching emerged as a reaction to the grammar translation method, the main stress in it is placed on the pronunciation rather than the learning of grammar and rules.

This method is based on the direct involvement of the student when speaking, and listening to, the foreign language in common everyday situations. Consequently, there is lots of oral interaction, spontaneous use of the language, no translation, and little if any analysis of grammar rules and syntax. The focus of the lessons is on good pronunciation, often introducing learners to phonetic symbols before they see standard writing examples. Briefly it can be summed up that in direct method

"The focus is on good pronunciation, with spontaneous use of the language, no translation, and little grammar analysis".

C. The Principles Of Direct Method

Direct Method works on the following principles:

1. Classroom instruction is conducted in the target language.
2. Concrete vocabulary is taught through pictures and objects, while abstract is taught by association of ideas
3. The learner is actively involved in using the language in realistic everyday situations
4. Students are encouraged to think in the target language
5. Speaking is taught first before reading or writing
6. The printed word are kept away from the second language learner for as long as possible
7. Classroom activities are carried out only in the target language. Translation is completely banished from any classroom activity.
8. A chain activities accompanies the verbal comments
9. Grammar is taught inductively (i.e. having learners find out rules through the presentation of adequate linguistic forms in the target language)
10. Emphasis is put on correct pronunciation and grammar

D. Teaching Techniques Applied In The Direct Method

Following techniques are mostly applied in the direct method:

1. Reading aloud
2. Question answer exercise
3. Self correction
4. Conversation practice
E. The Advantages

Clearly the Direct Method is a shift away from the Grammar Translation Method. One of its positive points is that it promises to teach the language and Not about the language.

More advantages can be listed as follows:

1. It is a natural method. It teaches the second language in the same way as one learns one’s mother tongue. The language is taught through demonstration and conversation in context. Pupils, therefore, acquire fluency in speech. They are quick at understanding spoken English. They can converse in English with felicity and ease.

2. There is no gap between active and passive vocabulary. This method does not differentiate between active and passive vocabularies. According to this method whatever is required for understanding through English is also required for expressing through it. If English is taught through the mother tongue, the gulf between the active and passive vocabularies is widened. The learner acquires more of passive vocabulary because he concentrates on understanding English rather than expressing through it.

3. This method is based on sound principles of education. It believes in introducing the particular before general, concrete before abstract and practice before theory.

4. According to Macnee, "It is the quickest way of getting started".

F The Disadvantages

Major fallacy of Direct Method is the belief that second language can be learned in the same way as the first language is acquired.

Second language learning is a determined process, whereas, the learning of the first language is the natural one, so learning of the both cannot be considered on the same lines and on the same principles.

The direct methods does not rules out the teaching of grammar instead it stresses upon the inductive teaching of grammar.

Some key disadvantages of this method as are under;

1. There are many words that cannot be interpreted directly in second language and much time and are wasted in making attempts for this purpose.

2. This method assumes that the auditory appeal is stronger than the visual, but it has been experienced that many of the learners learn more with their oral-aural sense like ears and tongue.

3. This methods ignores systematic written work and reading activities and sufficient attention is not paid to reading and writing.

4. This method does not hold well in higher classes where the translation Method is found more suitable.

5. In large classes this method is not properly applicable as it fail to meet with the needs of the students individually in such classes.

G. Conclusion

The direct method of teaching emerged as the reaction to the Grammar-Translation method. It sought to immerse the learner in the same way as when a first language is learnt. All teaching is done in the target language, grammar is taught inductively, there is a focus on speaking and listening, and only useful ‘everyday’ language is taught. The weakness in the Direct Method is its assumption that a second language can be learnt in exactly the same way as a first, when in fact the conditions under which a second language is learnt are very different. The teacher and the students are more like partners in the teaching/learning process. The teacher is as the facilitator of the language and the students is the active learners who are active in learning and exploring the target language.

REFERENCES