

English language learning through the combination of Grammar Translation Method and Communicative Language Teaching

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to combine the grammar translation method and the communicative language teaching for learning English language in Bangladesh. For this purpose the present study makes a questionnaire where fifty two college level students were taken as the sample of the study. The sample was selected through a random sampling method. Though some views were depicted from them, no particular method of language learning could give fruitful and transparent way of learning language in Bangladesh. Based on the current contradiction between the grammar-translation method and the communicative language teaching in English language learning, this paper, starting with clarifying the task of English language learning as well as the definition of the two teaching methods, objectively analyzes their advantages and disadvantages and proposes establishing a new idea by fusing them with an elaboration on the reasonability of combining them in the practical sense of learning English language with their complementary advantages.

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Introduction

From the very beginning to till today a number of teaching methods like- grammar-translation method, audio-lingual method, translation method, communicative language teaching, situational language teaching, silent way, suggestopedia, competency-based language teaching, natural approach and task-based language teaching are used in the various courses in different levels of education. Among them grammar-translation method and communicative language teaching are used especially secondary and higher secondary (college) level education in Bangladesh where many methods are included and reduced, but these method are used with their full prestige. As no particular method can fulfill the demand of language learning interest, a combination of the previously mentioned two methods naming grammar-translation method and communicative language teaching is needed.

Background

Language learning is not a new subject in the modern era and it was started many years before in Latin or Greek especially in school level education where language learning was taught focusing on grammatical rules, memorization of vocabulary and of various declensions and conjugations translation of texts, doing written exercises as method (which has been called the classical method). From then a number of methods have been used for language learning in the different countries of the world even today where grammar-translation method and

communicative language teaching have created a fruitful appeal separately. But no particular method can fulfill the language learning demand alone. So, a combination is needed of the two methods like grammar-translation method and communicative language teaching for English language learning.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Grammar-Translation Method in learning language

The grammar-translation method is a traditional method for foreign language learning prosperous in western European countries in the 18th and 19th centuries in which the target language is translated into the mother tongue, that is, grammar teaching and translation exercises are mainly relied on to teach a foreign language. Its core lies in that when learning a foreign language, its grammatical rule system should be learned and memorized and used when translating literature works and sentences from the target language to the mother tongue. In the period from 1980s to early 1990s, with the strong educational function of Bangladeshi government expected the mastery of language knowledge and people commonly regarded a foreign language as static language knowledge. With such an overwhelming educational idea, the grammar-translation method was undoubtedly viewed as the only way of foreign language teaching. At English language learning class (known as comprehensive class), teachers took grammar as the basis and translation as the basic method for their teaching and

translation and students' ability in reading foreign sample articles and imitating them to write their own ones as the purpose. We have to admit that this method had a lot of advantages when it was proposed. For example, translation helps students to profoundly understand abstract meaning of foreign words and complex sentence structures; systematic grammatical knowledge develops students' clear grammatical concepts, exact understanding of words and translation capacity; extensive reading and recitation of original works cultivate students' reading and writing abilities. Foreign language teaching is inclined to be instrumentality-oriented teaching and people have paid increasing attention to the practical use of language learning or the improvement of communicative ability. Students taught with the grammar-translation method have displayed some problems, such as emphasizing written language only while lacking in oral expressive ability or even suffering from long-term deaf-muteness to a foreign language, developing the habit of relying too much on translating everything into the mother language hence influencing their ability of communicating in a foreign language.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the CLT in learning English language

The communicative language teaching, established in the countries of Western European Community in early 1970s, is based on interdisciplinary involving modern sociological linguistics, sociological psychology, psychological linguistics and applied linguistics. Its core lies in teaching, learning as well as using language as a communicative tool instead of teaching students a set of grammatical rules and fragmentary word uses. With an emphasis on the central role of students as well as the practicability of language, this method enables students to practice language, have more language practice and better communicative ability in a variety of activities. Taking in consideration some problems of the traditional teaching method in teaching practice, the educational world has started to pay attention to the reform of teaching methods with the aim of "teaching serves practice". In this atmosphere has the communicative teaching method prospered in Bangladesh. This method has apparent advantages, such as emphasizing the cultivation of students' abilities and skills to use language, emphasizing students' initiative and application of what they have learnt to practice, encouraging thinking in English instead of Bengali, therefore enjoying popular recognition and support in the current educational world. However, something happening recently has raised a question for me: Has the application of the communicative teaching

method helped us to find a widely applicable and all-effective master key? According to what a representative for the English subject said at a recent teaching feedback meeting, students were bored with English due to the former teacher' explanation of vocabulary and grammar and they have got greater courage, wider horizon and improved interest in English after given more opportunities to communicate with others in the new teacher's class; however, they feel that they have failed to really grasp a necessary number of language points and therefore their output has been influenced by their insufficient input both in quantity and quality; as a result, despite their enthusiastic speeches their communication has nothing to rely on, just like water without a source or a tree without roots. I have realized from this instance that students' confusion and demands for basic language knowledge shouldn't be neglected. After all, "to dare to speak" is different from "to speak well". We cannot replace the former deaf-mute English with illiterate English.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were-

1. To know the pros and cons of the GT method (used in secondary and higher secondary level education in Bangladesh)
2. To know the characteristics (merits and demerits) of the CLT method and
3. To combine them getting a new idea that will make a new dimension for learning language especially in Bangladesh.

Literature review

Previous Related Researches into Grammar Translation Method

The related researches are as follows:

Stern, H. H. (1992) in his book "Issues and Options in Language Teaching" indicates "a contrastive analysis, just as the comparative linguistics studies, is indeed very important for the second language learner. Therefore translation in one form or another can play a certain part in language learning".

Brown H.D. (1994), in his Principles of Language Learning and Teaching, states "It does virtually nothing to enhance a student's communicative ability in the language."

Cunningham, C. (2000) in the paper "Translation in the Classroom- a Useful Tool for Second Language Acquisition" indicates "while there may indeed be some negative effects from using translation, there is a place in the learning environment for translation. Translation can contribute to the students' acquisition of the target language, at all levels".

Austin J Damiani (2003) in his paper “The Grammar Translation Method of Language Teaching” states “As a teacher, I liked using the grammar translation method because I could assume the intelligence of my students; I could talk to them like the intelligent people that they are, and we could talk about the grammar and vocabulary that I was teaching. In another method, I would have had to use simple language and familiar phrases to communicate in the target language, and even then, I could not be sure that my students knew and understood what it was that they were saying.”

Previous Related Researches into Communicative Language Teaching

Chang’s (2000) survey study in Taiwan investigated 110 high school English teachers’ attitudes toward CLT and their practice of CLT. The results showed that Taiwanese high school English teachers hold positive attitudes toward CLT. Moreover, the teachers who hold positive attitudes toward CLT tend to use more communicative activities in their classroom practice.

Liao (2003) investigated high school English teachers’ attitudes toward CLT in China. The first-phase survey study reported most Chinese teachers are supportive of the implementation of CLT. The findings indicated that among 302 participants, 94% responded favorably toward CLT and were willing to practice it. In the second-phase interview study, four interviewees were selected from survey participants who displayed favorable attitudes toward CLT. The teachers expressed their agreement with CLT such as, “the teacher should take into account the students’ need”, and “the aim of the class is to enable students to communicate easily in real life situations” (p. 125).

Karim’s (2004) survey study examined university-level EFL teacher’s attitudes toward CLT in Bangladesh. The findings showed that most teachers displayed positive attitudes toward the basic principles of CLT. He also interested to disclose, the teachers were aware of the features of CLT and their perceptions of CLT corresponded with their reported CLT practice.

Li’s (2004) study of Chinese teachers’ opinions at a tertiary level indicated that the teachers thought that learners must be given feedback when they produce L2 to modify their production. Since the students already knew how to negotiate meaning in their first language, what they needed to learn were words in order to use them in L2.

The interview data in Carless’s (2004) study revealed that some students used the simplest linguistic forms to complete the tasks.

Hawkey (2006), In Italy, applied both survey and face-to-face interviews to investigate whether

teachers agreed with the advantages of the communicative approach in language teaching. The teachers stated positive views about CLT such as “CLT improving learner motivation and interest”, and “CLT improving communicative skills” (p. 247). Through his research it is known that, teachers’ interviews suggested that the teachers were motivated to use pair-work activities to meet the learners’ communicative needs.

Razmjoo and Riazi (2006), Similarly, in their study would like to express that the teachers as a whole expressed positive attitudes toward the five principles of CLT. The teachers held strong views about CLT in the areas of grammar role and teacher role.

This view is confirmed by Tsai’s (2007) study. Taiwanese teachers also thought that EFL students have no immediate need to communicate in English. On the other hand, they need grammar and reading skills in order to learn content knowledge.

Making a new idea through the Combination of the GT Method and the CLT

Regardless of all criticism it has received, the grammar-translation method has been an indispensable method in English teaching as well as a necessary step in the cultivation of students’ communicative ability in a non-English environment. A person cannot have successful communication before having a correct mastery of language rules. Although the applicability of the communicative method has been widely accepted, this method is still confronted with some practical problems brought about by different language systems, learning habits and logic between East and West. As a result, it cannot be effectively applied and conducted immediately and fully at the moment. Accordingly, I think we should search for a fusion between the traditional teaching method and the modern teaching method with a more dialectic attitude based on the learner’s practical ability and request, that is, adopting a new method fusing the two methods together in one class of English language learning. By taking advantage of their complementary advantages, we can form a new idea and method suitable for Bangladeshi people’s learning of English.

Combination of the Two Methods in Practical learning and Teaching

Their combination in Different Learning Stages As to the newcomer at college, most have no strong communicative ability in English and are accustomed to accepting knowledge passively from the teacher due to the influence of exam-oriented education despite of their systematic English learning in high school (senior). When taught with a pure

communicative method, they might feel at a loss and then frustrated or even bored with English learning. Therefore, it may be better to have the grammar-translation method as the major method and the communicative method as an aid when learning these subjects in order to provide them with a solid basis which will lead to communicative training in senior grades. The ultimate goal of language learning and training still lies in achieving effective communication and fulfilling specific tasks with language as a communicative tool. With students' necessary preparation in middle and low grades, teachers are expected to offer students in senior grades with opportunities of practical communicative training in order to help and guide them to achieve the pre-set goal. At this stage, the communicative method should take the dominance while the grammar-translation method plays a complementary role.

Fusion in Different Skills

English language learning emphasizes students' comprehensive training in listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. Due to the specialty of listening and speaking training, they are usually dealt with separately while other three skills are mainly trained through the learning of texts. As for listening and speaking, students are expected to follow classes given in English, to understand short conversations, lectures as well as reports with familiar topics and simple structure, to ask and answer and retell based on relevant listening material, to make conferred presentations based on familiar topics after adequate preparation. Obviously, the communicative method helps to achieve the teaching goal in listening and speaking practice. In practice, teachers may ask students to listen to tapes, do exercises and have discussions based on hot issues with teachers' checking and instruction; they may also analyze some difficult points in listening material and have more extensive learning of new words and expressions. However, those who have been accustomed to the traditional method tend to keep silent and think little of this method since they cannot learn sufficient knowledge and language points. As a result, teachers should use the grammar-translation method at times with the communicative method as the main line. For instance, some difficult points at the linguistic level can be explained with the traditional method. Students' reading, writing and translation skills are mainly trained in learning texts. Teachers are expected to base their teaching on texts to give students certain information and language knowledge first of all by focusing on the translation and understanding of texts and then establish new situations beyond the texts for practice of

communicative skills. I once adopted a four-step method including preparatory reading, listening and answering, communication on text and conferred communication in the text teaching process, achieving a natural transition and combination of grammar-translation training and communicative training.

1). Students are required to preview a text beforehand with their grammar-translation experience in which they can make sure about some new words, the gist of the text and some questions and therefore have the next day's class with full preparation.

2). The teacher first asks students to correct their pronunciation and intonation by imitating the tape and then plays the tape once again for students to answer questions or make judgments so as to check their preparatory reading.

3). The teacher may guide students to have communication in the context related to the text and help them to solve some problems in key words, sentences and understanding of content they displayed in the previous two steps. When explaining key words and sentences, the grammar-translation method should be used to deepen students' understanding of the text and improve their ability to use language correctly and flexibly through right communication on the text and

4). Students' enthusiasm for communication is fully encouraged. Here the communication in this step is different from that in the previous steps since teachers need to employ a variety of advanced teaching methods to create language situations and communicative tasks which originating from text while going beyond of it. Students are able to apply what they have learnt to real communication through continuing writing texts, having simulated dialogues, having role-plays, having discussions and so on, hence achieving the purpose of communicating ideas through language.

Adopting the Communicative Teaching Method in Grammar Teaching

In English language learning, grammar teaching isn't intended for studying grammar but help students to grasp language rules and fulfill listening, speaking, reading and writing practice in a better way. As a result, teachers should create situations for real activities according to students' daily life to guide students to understand, grasp and use grammar correctly in such situations. I once adopted a four-step method including introduction, imitation, summary and application to promote grammar teaching at comprehensive English class. In the introduction section, the teacher gives oral demonstration on some original or relevant sentences

related to a certain grammar rule in order to introduce it. Selected examples should be in conformity with certain communicative situations hence putting it across to students to what situations this grammar rule applies. In the imitation process, students are required to have oral imitation of some expressions fit for the given situation after understanding examples, which further establishes a pattern for correct use of grammar knowledge in a new situation as well as checks whether they have understood the given knowledge points or not. In the summary part, students are guided to sum up grammatical rules and points by analyzing specific situations themselves so that they will enjoy the joy of success. Students are expected to take notes so as to accumulate material for review. In the last step, some real situations are set to help students to practice using the learnt grammatical knowledge to have communication. Once they find that they can apply grammar to real communication and specific tasks instead of memorizing mere grammatical rules, students' learning enthusiasm will be stimulated and their ability of independent analysis and solving problems will be cultivated as well. To sum up, although it is the ultimate goal of English (foreign) language learning to fully achieve communicative teaching, we are still undergoing an indispensable stage involving the combination of the grammar-translation method and the communicative method. As the practitioner of English learning and teaching, we should combine the two to serve the purpose of English language learning.

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