

Application of grammar-translation method in teaching English

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Abstract: *The technology-dominated world has recently broken all communication barriers and dramatically changed the way people communicate in every corner of the world. Learning of second languages (L2) consequently, has become a necessity and in some cases, an inevitability to human beings. Of the widely used methods for second language teaching, the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) has been, to a great extent, one of the most popular one all the time and is mainly used in all medium schools. Despite the fact that the success of using the GTM in foreign language teaching remains controversy, as a secondary high teacher, I think that it is still one of the suggested and preferred methods in our Asian culture in general, in Vietnam context in particular.*

Keywords: *Second languages, grammar-translation method (GTM), language teaching, teacher*

Definition

As defined by Abdullah (2013) “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” (p.124). In the 19th century, it began to be used to teach modern languages such as French, German, and English and it is still used in some countries today (Chang, 2011). GTM was still in use in some classrooms during the late decades of the 20th century because it bears some advantages. The major features of GTM, according to Rahman (2012) are mostly taught by the mother tongue, with little use of the target language. The process of foreign language learning follows by translating one language to the other, especially reading comprehension to make students more familiar with the grammar of their native language. In grammar classrooms, thorough explanations about the intricacies of grammar as well as a list of new words are given to do exercises in grammatical analysis. Basically, there is little or attention to pronunciations, communication between teachers and students.

Advantages of grammar-translation method

Admittedly, it is claimed that every method or approach has its own advantages and disadvantages in teaching foreign languages. The great benefits of GTM have been shown by Vo (2011) that GTM is considered as one of the easiest and cheapest

methods to apply foreign language teaching without requiring lots of resources, energies and is suitable for large classrooms. Thanks to that, the meaning of phraseology or new words of the second language can be explained in a simple and understandable way, which avoids linguistic problems between teachers and learners. Also, Mart (2013) claimed effective role of GTM in helping students have deeper understanding about features of two languages. Therefore, students can use types of grammar well and practice reading and writing skills in order to speak or translate L2 fluently as their mother tongue. In other words, GTM has been seen, to some extent successful in acquiring the second language, for example, enriching vocabulary, developing ability to translation or interpretation, imitating good texts from native readers.

Disadvantages of the method

However, this method also draws some weaknesses among other methods of second language teaching. It can be seen that there is no interactive communication between teachers and learners to make real conversations or talks. Qing-xue and Jin-fang (2007) supported that the way of reading texts and translating them into another language is regarded as an ineffective way of speaking fluently in any kinds of languages. It makes the language lessons become less interesting because very little or no speaking or listening in class. Students, therefore, can have ability to communicate with foreign speakers

and hold full knowledge of every skill of a language. In addition, GTM often slows down the process of L2 and makes learners think in L1 always. As proved by researchers, to learn another language does not completely follow the rules but need to such kinds of practices to acquire certain skills. Someone who learnt the second language sometimes has difficulties to forget the habit of thinking in their own language often translates their ideas into L2. This thus would be dangerous because it results in misunderstanding from one culture to another.

My research context

In spite of the fact that GTM remains its own demerits, to some extent, this method is still suitable for Vietnamese context, especially in primary or secondary schools in countryside provinces in which beginner levels of students need appropriate use of both two languages: native language and target language. When I was a fourth-year student, I was appointed as a trainee teacher in a secondary school to get English Teaching Methodology and I chose Phong Hai secondary high school in my hometown. My first observation showed that the majority of teachers stand in front of over 40-student class to teach both L2 and L1 as well. The students also used to ask and talk in Vietnamese and the teachers never mind answering in Vietnamese, also. As I see one thing that never changes in Vietnamese traditional education, students depend much on their teachers who guide them to do task written on board and students copied to memorize and do homework at home. The content of a lesson is very structural and traditional. The teachers firstly check homework on diary, then start new lesson with a variety of relevant activities with each different teaching style, and finally they give homework for next days. It is undeniable that most of Vietnamese teachers are enthusiastic to give feedback by giving small prizes to motivate their students. This teaching method seems to be appropriate for levels of students, aim of lessons, studying conditions and school facilities.

On the first day when I worked as a new teacher in this school, I had received syllabus and introduced semesters each year before and my role was to take grade 9A with 45 students. The time for each lesson was 45 minutes regularly. At first, the teacher should introduce herself or himself by English and then translate in Vietnamese because speed, language the teacher use sometimes makes students who are not

familiar with listening and speaking daily feel difficult to understand. As known in Vietnamese culture, parents prefer good results from their children, and the teachers want their students to make progress, so using GTM is not wrong. Day by day, I spoke English and translated into Vietnamese to make students understand kinds of difficult grammar, idioms and vocabularies. They tried to remember the content of lessons and knew how to get good marks in the final exam. However, it could be better if they were more confident in speaking or asking something in English. The size of classroom is arranged typically, including rows for students to sit and gaps between rows for teachers to move around, so I can interact with each student easily. Each unit in English book 9 includes five sections: listening, speaking, writing, reading and language focus for each lesson.

For grammar lesson, there are different types of tasks such as re-arranging, rewriting sentence, filling in the blanks, putting verbs. By using GTM, I taught my students how to put auxiliary verbs, for example: "I eat ice-cream"; "He eats ice-cream", recognize tenses in a sentence and then give another example to do other different exercises. Most of the time, I spoke Vietnamese for my own words and English for words used in textbooks so that my students can follow and understand easily what I was teaching. Reading comprehension is also an important skill for beginners. Every lesson, after introducing and writing the topic on board, I ask randomly some of my students standing up to read each paragraph even they do not understand the whole passage with full of new words. After that, I explained the meaning of new words, corrected pronunciation so as to make their English more fluent. Teaching writing skill by GTM, the teacher often gave something to improve students' memorization by writing their own sentences from the text. Definitely, there are lots of mistakes and I copied them on board and corrected. It can be shown that GTM is a connection between memorization and writing. First of all, I ask my students to write a topic by their own, then I corrected and showed writing samples to let them know how to imitate the way of writing well. I am sure that with adding some activities to encourage students' creativity, they have good memory the things written. Secondary school students learn listening skill through GTM may feel easier because the teachers help them explain new words and contexts in listening exercise. Another

aspect is error correction after class, after exam the teacher use GTM in classroom. From my point of view, this method is a comfortable way to let students get to know mistakes correctly. The duty of the teacher was to ask questions about the specific lesson and listen to the answer of student and finally corrected and gave recommendations.

Reasons for applying this method

To my knowledge, I think that GTM is one of the fine methods that should be applied in foreign language teaching because of its worthies said by Assalahi (2013), and it should be used in Vietnam situation because from the beginning of studying life, students know both the target language and native language. The application of this method is to help learners be able to know the whole meaning of new words and save time to know certain things. Another reason is that living and studying in the context of Vietnam, everyone often concerns about the results of studying and GTM helps students get good grades in English. Vietnam education highly appreciates University Entrance Examination which is an English grammar-focused exam, particularly English subject, for instance to select good students. Therefore, GTM becomes an easy and simple way to express teachers' words to their students. More important, lots of primary/secondary high school in countryside lack facilities and conditions for interacting with foreign speakers, so listening and speaking most of the time in class for both teachers and learners are challenging. Finally, for lower levels of students in my class, GTM is fairly suitable for following. For instance, I taught my low-level students by this method but adding some more activities and simple techniques, they are understandable a lot and feel interested in lesson. If they do not know much about new words, I can explain the meaning of different words in both L1 and L2. With thorough feedback and well-guidance from the teachers, I believe that students will make progress and fluency in L2.

Conclusion

In conclusion, after my first teaching experience in my hometown for a long time, I realize that my students improved so much through their final exam and still speak L2 more or less. They have deeper understanding about grammar rules, techniques for reading, speaking, listening and writing by the teachers' careful explanations. With the use of GTM, the teachers can be friendly to talk with students

without language barriers. Although this method has some drawbacks, I think it is possible to my class, and I am happy with my teaching method, with my students. Hopefully, in the future, we can see a great change in Vietnam education culture to apply various kinds of teaching methods.

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