

Grammar-translation method or communicative approach for language teaching resear...

[Sociology](#), [Communication](#)



Introduction

Methodology involved in learning a new language is very crucial for the learners to develop the desired skill and competency in the target language. Language learning has gone through several changes over the century and different theories have been developed over the years for language teaching. In modern times, there are several methods used for teaching a language such as the Grammar-translation Method, the Audio-Lingual Method, the Direct Teaching Method and the Communicative Approach. The Grammar-Translation method and the Communicative approach are two significant methods of language teaching, both playing important roles in teaching a foreign language to students. While the Grammar-translation method gives focus on grammar rules and translation of sentences from the mother tongue to the target language and vice versa, the Communicative approach takes into consideration the day to day communicative usage of the target language. This paper will discuss upon both the Grammar Translation Method and the Communicative approach in detail, touching upon their advantages and disadvantages.

Grammar-translation Method

Grammar-translation method as suggested by the very name is a method of teaching foreign language by translating sentences from the target language into the vernacular language of the learner and vice versa. In this method, students first develop a vast vocabulary and then learn the grammatical rules of the target language so that it becomes easy for them to make the word to word translation of sentences.

The practice of using the Grammar-translation Method derived from the teaching of Latin. Latin was the most widely spoken and studied foreign language in Europe in the early 16th century. Knowledge of Latin was essential for reading the Bible, government documentation, business and academia purposes. In Latin language studies, the emphasis was always laid on the study of written texts (University of Wuppertal). A man learned in Latin language was considered to be intelligent and superior to others. Slowly with the passage of time, the prominence of Latin declined and the usage of English, Italian and French language took over Europe. However, it was not before the late 19th century that a group of scholars taking into account the growing demand of modern languages in military, economic, and political purposes proposed the idea of introducing the study of modern languages like English, French and Italian in schools. The method used in teaching the modern languages was copied from that of Latin by laying emphasis on the written texts. Grammatical rules and translation of sentences in both native to target and target and native language were used to test the cognitive abilities of the students.

Advantage and Disadvantage of Grammar-translation Method

Grammar-translation method has a few advantages. The first advantage is by the method of using translation, it is easier to explain the meanings of phrases and words from one language to another. Further, linguistic problems do not create hindrance to the communication between students and teachers. Teachers who are not fluent in spoken English can easily teach English to students using grammar-translation method. Since mother tongue

is also used while teaching a foreign language in grammar-translation method, students feel comfortable developing the concepts of grammar, understanding the teachers' instructions and responding to questions. The stress being laid on texts, students are not required to communicate in a foreign language while learning through this method and students are able to learn a new language without having any contact with the native speakers of the language learned (Medrano & Rodriguez 2004).

However, Grammar-translation method has a few disadvantages as well. It is an improper way to teach a foreign language. The natural way of learning a language is through listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This is how a child begins to learn a language. However, in Grammar-translation method, the process of learning begins with reading and this creates problems for many. Since in Grammar-translation method, emphasis is laid on written texts and reading, the necessity to speak in the target language is ignored completely. Therefore, the students who have learned English through this method feel very uncomfortable communicating in English afterwards. Since in the classroom, students are allowed to use their mother tongue while learning through this method, they feel comfortable and thus develop a habit of speaking in their mother tongue only and later on in their life find themselves unable to communicate in the target language.

Another disadvantage of learning a foreign language through grammar-translation method is the extensive need of memorizing vocabulary, grammatical rules, and verb conjugations. Students become so conscious of keeping the sentences grammatically accurate that they lose the natural flow of the language. Additionally, the proper usage of vocabulary in proper

places becomes challenging for them. Moreover, the teacher-student interaction through this method is poor. A good many countries in Asia still use grammar-translation method to teach English to students and as a result though the students are able to write in English, they do not develop the skill to communicate in English (Medrano & Rodriguez 2004).

Since Grammar-translation method mainly deals with memorization of vocabulary, grammatical rules and formation of sentences, teachers only need to explain the grammatical rules and regulations of the target language to students, stressing the need to learn vocabulary. Teachers do not need to possess specialized skills to teach students a language through this method as taking a test using this method is easier to do and scores can also be obtained objectively. Students' role involves learning by heart a long list of vocabulary, grammar rules, grammatical paradigms, native equivalents and putting those rules to practice by forming sentences as accurately as possible (King Saud University). This method could be quite boring to the students who need to make desperate efforts to learn a language.

Communicative Approach

Communicative approach to learning a language involves laying the primary focus on helping the students use the second language or the foreign language in a variety of contexts because it has been seen that though students are able to construct sentences grammatically accurate, they fail to apply the target language in various situations. Communicative approach provides a better opportunity for learning a language than grammar-translation method because it gives stress on the real communication needs

during language learning. It provides the learners with opportunities to experiment their knowledge and develop accuracy and fluency in the language. It does not give much stress on grammatical and allows students to discover grammar rules on their own and puts stress on the development of different skills such as speaking, reading and listening.

Language teaching has gone through several changes over the last few decades in terms of methodology and syllabus design. The traditional approach to learning a language was based on grammatical competence. In a typical traditional grammar-translation method, students were taught to build skill in grammar through repetitive practice and drilling and then apply the grammar on their own in translating and forming sentences. However, the traditional approach to learning a foreign language through grammatical competence was first questioned in the 1970s. While grammatical competence was effective in teaching students the skill of forming grammatically accurate sentences, it was not sufficient to help the students use the language in a variety of contexts based on situations, the participants, their roles and intentions (Richards 2006). Therefore, the need of developing a communicative approach to learning surfaced.

Communicative approach created a buzz when it first came into practice in the 1970s and 1980s. Instead of putting stress on grammatical accuracy and vocabulary strength, the communicative approach took into consideration the practical usage of the language. Communicative approach gave importance on developing communicative competence of a learner by taking into account the following aspects:

- A range of possible purposes for the learner to learn the target language

(for academia or for business purposes.)

- The setting in which the learner would like to use the target language (whether in office, store or in a hotel).
- The communicative events the learner is likely to participate (For example, professional contexts, academic contexts etc.).
- The functions of language required in those events, whether to give introduction, make a speech and so on.
- The grammatical and lexical content required to facilitate the communication of the learner (Richards 2006).

Advantage and Disadvantage of Communicative Approach

Communicative approach to learning has a few advantages. This approach makes the learner ready for using the language in real life by giving the students opportunities to communicate in the target language in the classroom with teachers and among peers. Communicative approach encourages students to take part in group discussion so that students can develop the skill of expressing their opinions on any given topic. Unlike students learning through grammar-translation methods, communicative approach makes students feel comfortable in speaking the target language fluently in any situation.

Communicative approach teaches language to students on the basis of needs so that they according to their professional needs develop the rightful skills and forms of language required to function in their respective profession. For example, an air-hostess working on the airlines would be taught the communicative competence of how to communicate with the

passengers politely and a management student aspiring to go into sales and marketing would be taught how to communicate impressively with the clients to sell and promote products and services. This helps students develop the required skill of communication based on their needs of profession.

Communicative approach also has a few disadvantages. Since this approach lays least emphasis on grammatical accuracy, learners though learn to speak the target language fluently and confidently often lack accuracy in their sentence constructions (Belchamber). Further, communicative approach by teaching the language on the basis of needs and setting often make students incapable of using the language in different contexts beyond their professional field. For instance, the air-hostess who has developed proficiency in talking to passengers on a flight may find herself incapable of giving a business presentation or holding a sales talk.

In communicative approach teachers play the role of a facilitator and monitor who facilitates the learning process of the students and monitors their progress. Since communication plays a big role in the classroom, teachers need to be proficient in the language so that she can help and encourage students communicate in target languages. Teachers also need to help students form grammatically accurate sentences. The role of students in communicative approach goes beyond only learning grammar and vocabulary. Students need to practice communicating in the target language with their teachers and their peers. They need to take active participation in group discussion so that they acquire fluency on the language.

Conclusion

Both Grammar-translation method and Communicative approach are two significant mediums to learn a language. Grammar translation method lays emphasis on the need of learning a language through developing grammar rules and vocabulary and then applying the knowledge in translating sentences from vernacular language into the target one. Though this method helps students develop accuracy in sentence constructions doesn't help them acquire fluency in communication and therefore, students having learnt a language through this method often find themselves unable to use the language in real life situations. Communicative Approach on the other hand puts stress on developing communicative competence by providing the students with opportunities to interact and communicate with others in the target language. However, though this method helps students acquire confidence and fluency in speaking the target language, often students don't develop the required grammatical accuracy in the language. Further, by laying emphasis on developing communicative competence on the basis of needs of a profession, students proficient in the communication requirement of a particular profession may fail in the other. Taking into account the advantages and disadvantages of both the methods, it seems that communicative approach is better than Grammar-translation method because no matter how proficient one is in grammar rules, the learning is ineffective if the learner is unable to communicate in the target language fluently.

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