

Grammar Translation Method Can be Optimized When Associated with Online English Learning Tools

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Abstract: This paper mainly discusses disadvantages of Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in English teaching and ways to overcome them, with the help of my personal teaching experience of New Concept English 2. Some online English learning tools could associate with GTM and make up its deficiencies in an efficient way. More specifically, ting.hujiang.com could improve students' ability in listening and Fun Dubbing would help in speaking. Other online learning tools remedied disadvantages of GTM remain to be explored.

1. Introduction

The GTM, as conceived by textbook authors in the latter part of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries, appears to be a negative definition, formulated in order to present a background against which a "new method" may be described. [1] This traditional grammar teaching method is teacher-centered, and the teacher normally spend the majority of the classroom time translating texts and explaining English grammar rules, while students are either listening or taking notes. Thus little attention is paid on students' development on English communicative ability, meaning modern English teaching objectives could not be achieved easily if we only insist on the conventional GTM but ignoring to explore and utilize learning tools which are helpful to perfect this teaching method. For this purpose, GTM in my teaching content and two testified online tools adopted by my students will be introduced in this paper.

2. Grammar Translation Method

GTM is an old but effective English teaching method, which has been playing a vital role in English teaching and learning activities. And it was called the classical method since it was first applied in the teaching of the classical languages of Latin and Greek as a second language. Then it was not recommended for a while until it has been revived in the 19th century by German to be a preferable method again.

The purpose of GTM was to help students read and understand foreign language literature.[2] GTM has a direct validity, since the teacher can judge students' understanding of a certain language point in target language by students' translation, thus helping the students quickly master the correct usage of that key point. Besides, this method has relatively low requirements for teachers and teaching equipment, in other words, GTM could be well adapted by most teaching circumstances conveniently. GTM does have plenty of advantages, but herein, its negative definitions and deficiencies are mainly introduced due to the aim of this paper is to provide and verify ways to cover its shortages.

Rivers presented the definition of GTM in 1968 based on her experience in Australia when she was a teacher-in-training. She mentioned that GTM aims at inculcating an understanding of the grammar of the language, expressed in traditional terms, and at training the student to write the language accurately by regular practice in translating from his native language. It aims at providing the student with a wide literary vocabulary, often of an unnecessarily detailed nature. The foreign

language is not used in class to any extent, except when stereotyped questions may be asked about the subject matter of a reading passage, and the student answers in the foreign language with sentences drawn directly from the text. Often these questions are given in writing and answered in writing. Students taught by this method are frequently confused when addressed in the foreign language and may be very embarrassed when asked to pronounce anything themselves. [3]

Another influential definition of the GTM comes from Clifford H. Prator (1979), who presented the definition in a list form:

1. Classes are taught in the mother tongue, with little active use of the target language.
2. Much vocabulary is taught in the form of lists of isolated words.
3. Long elaborate explanations of the intricacies of grammar are given.
4. Grammar provides the rules for putting words together, and instruction often focuses on the form and inflection of words.
5. Reading of difficult classical texts is begun early.
6. Little attention is paid to the content of texts, which are treated as exercises in grammatical analysis.
7. Often the only drills are exercises in translating disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue.
8. Little or no attention is given to pronunciation. [4]

It can be concluded that GTM focuses on reading and writing and has developed techniques which facilitates more or less the learning of reading and writing only. There is not usually any listening or speaking practice, and little attention is placed on pronunciation or any communicative aspects of the language. Therefore, Students taught with the GTM have some problems in their English learning, such as emphasizing written language only while lacking in oral expressive ability and developing the habit of relying too much on translating everything into the mother language. [5]

Based on what have been discussed, GTM is definitely not a perfect and complete method. However, from my perspective, I am still in favor of this method even it has been believed to be somewhat negative in English teaching when compared with the Communicative Approach, because I have already found a way to make up its deficiencies in a certain teaching context, and more importantly, GTM has been good at achieving the expected teaching objectives at my classes.

3. The Goals in English Teaching

IELTS and TOEFL test are the two most widely respected English-language tests in the world, and an IELTS or TOEFL certificate is recognized as an evidence of proficiency in English. Needless to say, both of them could evaluate how well you combine your reading, listening, speaking and writing skills to perform academic tasks, which could also illustrate that these four critical skills cannot be emphasized too much in the English learning and teaching. And four skills enjoy the same importance in a test. These two authoritative tests also well demonstrate the objectives ought to be achieved for EFL teachers in their teaching. Whereas, there is no doubt that it is extremely difficult to take account of four above-mentioned abilities in a class, no matter for the teacher or for the student.

Apart from these four skills, grammar is an elementary mainstay in the teaching practice. Teaching English grammar provides an explicit framework to guarantee producing correct structures and expedite the learning process. So the grammar teaching should have a tremendous concern with regard to the teaching process of any second languages. EFL researchers and teachers should investigate the most appropriate method to enable students to understand the rules easily and to present foreign languages in accurate forms. [6]

4. TESOL in My Context

Most of students in my class are senior high school students whose ages range from 18 to 22, and they are taking foundation classes for IELTS. Four skills mentioned above and grammar are

enjoying the equal status in my teaching. New Concept English 2 (L. G. ALEXANDER, Qixin He) was chosen as the textbook, which includes 96 texts, whose length are around 100 English words. Students' English ability have been tested at the very beginning of their studying, and the results show that they cannot read through a simple short text by themselves, not to mention having a conversation in English. In other words, they would be disappointed if there are too much spoken English from the teacher at the class. Obviously, GTM is a well-suited teaching method for them because grammar translation classes are conducted in the students' native language, which could be fully comprehended by them.

4.1 The Training in Reading and Writing

At the class, new words and phrases are studied just behind warming up and leading-in because they are new to students and will appear in the text. Students' pronunciation of these words and phrases will be corrected by me, and they are asked to make notes about the usage of these words and phrases, which should be memorized at or after the class. Next step, we go directly to the text. Students read and translate a whole sentence by turns, and the grammar knowledge included in that sentence will be explained by me after the correction of their pronunciation and translation. The grammar rules involved in the text would be introduced and practiced in details through blackboard-writing. Finally, we will do some multiple-choice questions based on the comprehension, structure and vocabulary of the text.

In this way, students will follow me and learn new words and phrases as well as grammar rules, and then they will do the corresponding practice by sentence-making, sentence translation and plus textbook exercises. All of these will definitely be beneficial to their English study, mostly by improving the ability in reading and writing. Admittedly, we have not been paid too much attention on listening and speaking at the class as mentioned before in the deficiencies of GTM, while communicative competence cannot be achieved without the proper guidance in grammar and vocabulary, neither the listening competence. More significantly, the effective complementary work could be done after the class. So to speak, it is an effective way for them to strengthen communicative competence only after the proper guidance in grammar and vocabulary.

4.2 The Training in Listening

There are two assignments and one quiz for every student after the class, two online tasks and one paper quiz. Above all, students are required to do the dictation of texts (normally two) they have learned in a day on ting.hujiang.com, which is a popular English learning website in China. Students could listen repeatedly until they are satisfied with the writing. Besides, they are able to pause the recording at any time for making the writing more accurate. But the dictation task must be done within 30 minutes. After the submission, their mistakes will be in red automatically while the correct parts remain in black, and the score will be shown on the screen as well.

Dictation also can be found in Test for English Majors-Band 4 (TEM-4) in China which has been operating for many years, since dictation is undoubtedly a good way to train and testify one's listening ability. Their scores in dictation are in the same tendency on ting.hujiang.com, after the adaptation of a week or so, their average scores would stay at about 90 (full score is 100). Though the content of dictation has been already known, they do not have the time to recite it, which will force them to listen carefully in the dictation. By the way, the student will be warned if he or she has been constantly low scored.

4.3 The Training in Speaking

Speaking is a difficult task in every living language, not only because its time consuming, but the lack of encouraging language environment. Taking consideration of students' English ability, reading after the tape is much more applicable because they could learn and imitate the pronunciation and intonation from a native speaker. Fun Dubbing, a mobile app was selected for my students to practice oral English by imitating the tape of texts they have learned. It works similarly as ting.hujiang.com, students are allowed to listen to the tape and record themselves repeatedly in a unit of one sentence.

Once the recording is submitted, the errors will automatically turn into red in the text, enabling students to notice that there are some wrongness in their pronunciation or intonation. And they are allowed to do it again and then submit the optimized recordings. Fun Dubbing is fair and accurate about the error judging, which has been testified by a great number of users. Moreover, the recordings completed on Fun Dubbing could be shared to other social media, for instance, WeChat. Therefore, teachers are able to learn their pronunciation by clicking the link shared by students, and give feedbacks and suggestions online or at tomorrow's class.

4.4 The Training in Grammar

The paper quiz focuses on the grammar rules involved in the text, in which students are required to form sentences in English by the given tenses and voices grammatically. Around 10 sentences are contained in the quiz, and the amount varies from the length of texts. Before the quiz, they are given time to review the notes and have a group discussion, so it is a wonderful way to strengthen their grammar knowledge while they are working in a team. Students' command of grammar rules are clearly seen in the quiz, and it is not only the learning feedback to the students, but the teaching feedback to the teachers. Teachers perhaps go over the grammar rules again at the next class when it is necessary.

4.5 Feedbacks Given by Students

Eight Students at my class were asked to give comments about two online tests and one paper quiz in Chinese, seven of them are very much into these three tests and they wrote sentences like "Fun Dubbing is good for my pronunciation" and "Three tests are helpful for me because they can improve my English". Only one student is negative about the paper quiz, as he is weak at English grammar and bored with memorizing, but he has insisted in completing these three tests and of course making a big progress in English. Thus, we can say that the two online tests and one paper quiz are feasible and effective in making up the deficiencies of GTM in a certain teaching content.

5. Conclusion

GTM has been a conventional and operative method in English teaching for a long time. Although some deficiencies it has in speaking and listening, it could be optimized by some online learning tools, which are really welcomed by young students. For teachers, it is of great difficulty to take account of grammar rules and four basic abilities at a class, but there is one thing to note, some abilities could be trained after the class. Learning is not confined to be at the class, so there is no need to be negative towards GTM for its shortcomings. GTM works pretty well for those students whose English are at basic level, and GTM would be more effective and efficient by a large margin when associated with the proper assistant tools.

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