

# Integration of Grammar Translation Method with Communicative Approach: A Research Synthesis

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## **Abstract**

*This article is an effort to highlight the studies (late 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century) reported about Grammar Translation method (GT), Communicative Approach (CA) and the way both these approaches can be integrated to teach English as a second language more effectively. The article discusses strengths and weaknesses of both methods separately and then builds the road for combination of GT and CA for second language learners. The findings from literature review vary from the use of traditional and modern methods to amalgamation of both. On one side a group of Linguists advocates use of translation method while on the other side second group criticises use of GT method that creates hindrance in achieving communicative competence. The synthesis of theory and research in this study provides a set of guidelines for linguists, curriculum planners, and policy makers to develop a curriculum that is characterized by the integration of traditional Grammar Translation method with Communicative Approach.*

**Keywords:** Grammar Translation Method, Communicative Approach, Integration, Second Language Learning.

## **1. Introduction**

The increasing demand of English language for meaningful communication produce immense need for quality English language education and it becomes important for the people to equip their children with good knowledge of English (Richards, 2006). The role and duties of English language teacher in the current situation has increased for developing efficient communication skills (Ahmad & Rao, 2013). Historically, English has been taught through rules, memorizing, translation activities and grammar study (Gregg, 1984). Technology is introduced in language learning with an ambition to improve language acquisition (Cunningham, 1998). Traditional methods of teaching English tend to be uncertain for integrating new technology (Kawaguchi & Di-Biase, 2009). The emphasis on spoken language is the core of audio lingual, audio-visual, total physical response methods and communicative methods. The advocates for oral language pinpointed that communication is spoken rather than written (Cook, 2008). The spoken language is emphasized in the classroom by using L2 rather than L1; thus creating second language environment through communicative and task based teaching. Grammar should be taught communicatively rather than explicit teaching of rules (Ellis, 2003). However, only communicative language teaching does not fulfil the requirements of second language learner, because learners from developing countries are not interactive an English language. In the similar countries with English as L2, the researchers and linguists are striving to find and adopt the effective teaching method.

English has been included as primary subject in curriculum around the globe and in Pakistan as well. It is vital to develop strategies for learning and assessing language for diverse range of students in the world (Cambridge English Centenary Conference [CECC], 2013). Due to lack of practice and exercise, basic speaking and listening skills have not developed, resulting in declining communicative part of language education. The current

study reviews the articles from late 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century on strengths and weaknesses of GT and CA along with combination of GT method and CA.

## **2. Theory and Research**

Around the world, in second language classrooms in late nineteenth century, translation was considered an out dated method. For instance in England, “the natural use of the target language for virtually all communication is a sure sign of a good modern language course” (DES, 1990, p.58) and in Japan most of teaching was conducted in English to become successful users (MEXT, 2003). English as the dominant language in global market has widely been recognised as lingua franca in Pakistan and official communication is conducted in English (Pinon & Haydon, 2010).

Harmer (1998) advises practising of target language in teaching classes rather than vernaculars. Hymes (1972) suggests language knowledge and communicative competency as essential elements for second language learners to be used in variety of situations. The essence of language teaching lies in the notion of attaining proficiency in negotiation with target language speakers (East, 2012). The learners in second language acquisition (SLA) attain fluency and accuracy after much practice and by applying different evaluative techniques such as teacher’s corrections or self-monitoring (Jong, 2005).

The concept of multi-competence has been proposed by Cook (1992) that refers to the combined knowledge of L1 and L2. According to this model, second language users are different from monolingual native speakers in the way that they have two languages in their mind and their ways of thinking vary. Cook used the term L2 users instead of L2 learners as L2 users use the language in real life context regardless of what the level of language is. Learners have their own language system at every level and it might be called as independent language system. The students have set their own pattern of rules for L2 as they proceed in language learning process. The two languages in one mind cannot be considered separately as the knowledge of L2 affects the knowledge of L1 in many ways such as in daily activities. No matter, the strong similarities occur between L1 and L2, still the presence of L1 is manifest difference in acquiring L2 (Cook, 2008).

The first language just becomes invisible in the class when L2 takes the position. The systematic use of both languages in the classroom produces good results and generate better learning environment. The external and internal goals of achieving language may be boosted if students are taken as successful L2 users instead of lacking in language aspects (Cook, 2001b). The use of L1 helps in introducing text, give directions in activities, understanding grammar and meanings which are difficult to comprehend in L2; it saves time of the teacher as well as of the students (Choong, 2006).

Teaching language is a dynamic process, changing with development of new methodologies and approaches. Many approaches have been evolved to cater to the needs of second language learners (Snow, Kahmi-Stein, & Brinton, 2006). Every methodology dominated in certain era and became unsuccessful due to its limitations and further research in the field of teaching language. In every approach, teacher has a prominent role as Richards and Rodgers (2001, p.15) state, “the quality of language teaching will improve, if teachers use the best available approaches”.

### **2.1 Grammar Translation Method**

Grammar translation method (GTM) or classical method was used for teaching of foreign languages. This method was developed in Greece and Rome to instruct classical languages such as Latin, Greek, etc. (Chastain 1988). According to Richards & Rodgers (2001) “its aim was to know everything about anything more than the

thing itself". The goal of using grammar translation method was that students could study foreign language by translation. It is claimed in GTM that by memorizing the rules and grammatical structures of target language, learners can understand target language easily.

In grammar translation method, grammar is taught deductively with focus on rote memorization of grammatical structures and vocabulary (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Grammatical rules are taught and students learn language by practicing rules in an authentic way. The learner learns language to be familiar with target language literature. The text from second language is translated into local language; vocabulary and grammatical rules are memorized (Thanasoulas, 2002). Cunningham (2000) considers Grammar translation method a useful method for students' learning second language at all levels. Similarly, Damiani (2003) in his study on grammar translation method affirms that it is the best method to teach grammar and vocabulary and teacher believes that his/her students are learning while in any other method the teacher is not sure that students learn the language.

Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, (2011) illustrates pitfalls of grammar translation method that it focuses on cramming grammatical rules, students are only taught lexical meanings and it does not focus on listening and speaking skills. In Grammar translation method, the focus of individual is only limited to learning grammatical structures; in real sense grammar is not language but is an aspect of language that adds to language learning. One of the major drawbacks of this method is that it teaches the students about structure of language and actual language is missing. It is teacher centered so teaching learning environment is not so conducive for active learning and learner has no opportunity to use techniques for their own language learning (Thuleen, 1996).

## **2.2 Communicative Approach**

The history of communicative language teaching (CLT) dates back to late 1960s and it was presented with the application in communicative approach (CA) in traditional British language teaching (Swan, 1985a). Communicative approach was started in reaction to situational and structural approaches to language teaching. Theories of British Functional Linguists (Widdowson, and Halliday), as well as American sociolinguists (Hymes, Gumperz, Wilkins, and Labov) along with the writings of Jane Austin formulated basis for communicative language teaching, considering target language as a means of effective communication (Demirezen, 2011).

Chomsky and anthropological linguists criticized grammar translation method, behavioral and structural approaches for only stressing on futile mechanistic pattern drills, memorization of grammatical structures and inadequate reinforcement rather than giving preference to teach foreign language for real life communication. Hymes (1967) anticipated theory of communicative competence, which formed the basis of communicative approach (as cited in Nunan, 1999). Chomsky's (1957) linguistic competence was criticized, as it was limited concept in language learning (Demirezen, 2011).

Traditional approaches focused on learning grammatical rules and structures but CLT aims at developing communicative proficiency (Canale & Swain, 1980; Benson & Voller, 1997). The notion of communicativeness became popular in mid 1970s (Swan, 1985a.). And there is paradigm shift from traditional methodologies to communicative methodology (Hymes, 1971; Widdowson, 1990). In comparison of CLT with audio lingual and grammar translation approaches, CLT creates a real life

and interactive environment, which enables learner to communicate effectively, develop vocabulary and improve grammatical competence. All these contribute to effective second language learning (Belchamber, 2007).

CA describes relation between language and communication in terms of communicative competence, which encourages a person to exchange ideas with others in real life situation in an effective way. The main purpose of CA is incorporating communicative competence; therefore activities and exercises based on CA intend to develop communicative proficiency among learners in real life context (Rai, 2003). Communicative competence comprises grammatical and sociolinguistic competence in L2 learners (Canale & Swain, as cited in Leech and Svartvik, 2006) that is more important than linguistic competence (Hymes, 1971; Widdowson, 1990).

Widdowson (1978) asserts that students by using language rules can generate sentences in classrooms, but they are unable to speak target language in actual life. Students learn to communicate by communicating (Nunan, 2004; Willis & Willis, 2007). Larsen-Freeman (2000) suggests that the activities should be organized in such a way that develops fluency and learners can produce meaningful, consistent and effective sentences. Communicative competence can be developed in students by using properly designed language games; problem-solving tasks, using picture stories and role-play methods. According to Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) describe CA as student centered activity which develops confidence through real communication, relates theory to practice, emphasizes on contextual meaning, and provides opportunities to students to take ownership of their own learning (Ellis, 1996; Demirezen, 2011).

Norland & Pruett (2006) points out that communicative language teaching only focuses on oral competency; therefore reading and writing skills are neglected. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1984), the term ‘learner-centered’ in context of communicative approach is wrong, because it does not give learners autonomy of learning. Chen, (2003) elaborates that even communicative language teaching is considered a successful method, but its success depends on cultural setting of target classroom. Brown (1994) criticizes that some experts interpret CLT as catch call term but it is not in accordance with its application. CA does not produce accuracy among students as it avoids explicit teaching of grammar, which is an essential component in language teaching.

### 2.3 Integration of GT & CA

The notion of language teaching became popular in the twentieth century with new methods- a systematic procedure based on theoretical foundations, used for instruction. The teachers as well as applied linguists have been continuously searching for innovative methodologies for language teaching. The combination of theories and practice results in methodology; theory describing the learning process of language and practice is instructional design particularly implement in the classroom. The instructional design carries the feature of ID models for example objectives, content, teacher’s role and instructional material (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).



Figure: Language Teaching Methodology (Richards & Rodgers, 2001)

The Grammar Translation method was the most prominent method from 1840 to 1940 and it is now termed as traditional method (Richards & Rodgers, 2005). But it is survived till today and being practiced in many second language classrooms (Brown, 2001). The students come from various educational backgrounds and socio economic status with knowledge of first language (Harrison & Krol, 2007). They require language support for understanding and proficiency in language acquisition. They need to learn all four skills (listening, reading, writing and speaking) of language learning (Ybarra & Green, 2003). In traditional approaches, the teacher carries dominant role, tries to memorize students factual knowledge and students become passive listeners in this environment (Orlich et al., 1998). Prenskey (2012) claims that the teachers are the main agent of transforming this independence of instructors in classroom. He further, argues, “educators need to reconsider both their methodology and their content” (p. 71). The teachers are decisive to use particular methodology for teaching any aspect of language (Holmqvist & Lindgren, 2009).

In the late 1990s and the beginning of 21st century marks great paradigm shift in teaching methodologies when grammar translation was considered outdated; although it still has potential; CLT in 1970s brought change with its communicative aspect and learner’s active role in the classroom (Na Kong, 2011). Communicative Language Teaching was evolved in substitute of structural and GT method and later it became maxim for ELT methodology (Benson & Voller, 1997). Communicative competence is the common notion affiliated with CLT and linguists started working on it considering it inevitable part of language learning. The great shift in language pedagogy from traditional models to communicative models concentrate on communicative aspect of language, necessary for globalised world (Bachman, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980; Benson & Voller, 1997).

With the emphasis of communicative competence, the communicative language teaching has been evolved, which enables students to practice language in real learning settings (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972). According to Brown (2007), CLT is such an approach for English language teaching that creates student-centered environment through task based activities and makes them to interact in target language. Task based teaching involves learners in real world tasks with focus on language meaning according to their needs and interest. They are engaged fully in doing combined language activities with out getting bored and having feedback from teachers (Bygate, Skehan & Swain, 2001). CLT encompasses large concept about language that the communication is the base and is used everywhere around the globe. It has large and immediate effect, aspires zeal and captures everyone’s attention to its communicative functions (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Task based language teaching depicts great potential for language teaching successfully through strong pedagogical implications (Van den Branden et al., 2009). The task based approaches favors practicing of first language especially in different phases of language activities (Ellis, 2002). It has innumerable advantages for second language teaching, as students’ first language reservoir of knowledge helps them to relate with new knowledge, and developing critical thinking skills to ask questions in the class (Sadeghi & Ketabi, 2010).

A model was developed to teach English at intermediate level in Pakistan by integrating Grammar Translation method with communicative approach, called CGT model (Fazal, 2011). Communicative grammar translation model is amalgam of Grammar-Translation and Communicative Approach, which utilizes learners' first language for better comprehension of the second language, and highlights the positive aspects of both methodologies and minimizes their weaknesses.

The fusion of grammar translation with communicative approach generates better results for L2 learners. The strength of GT method lies in teaching of grammar; thus

enhancing grammatical competence blends with CA that has the element of communicative competence (Chang, 2011; Istiaque, 2008). The use of L1 in target language classes strengthens the concepts of L2 and develops reading and writing skills (Na Kong, 2011).

The practice of L1 in English classrooms has long been debated from traditional methods to innovative methods today. The advocates for complete use of target language in classrooms are of the view that it maximizes language learning through communication and total focusing on target language (Long, 1985; Nunan, 1995, 1999; Johnson, 1996; Brown, 2001). Yet, the other group asks to have critical look into the use of first language in classroom (Widdowson, 1974; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Seidlhofer, 1999; Tang, 2002; Marian, et al. 2003; Paradis, 2004). Students rely on first language than emphasis on target language. They find shelter in L1 and thus effective setting for L2 cannot be created (Auerbach, 1993; Seidlhofer, 1999; Brown, 2001; Paradis, 2004).

The situation for using L1 in developing countries is completely changed than developed countries and solely communicative language teaching is not appropriate (Pham, 2001; Phan, 2008). The main purpose is to achieve goals and to complete language tasks, which can be done appropriately through limited use of first language along with target language. It clarifies the concepts, saves time, and increase understanding. Swain and Lapkin (1998) have rightly remarked about use of L1 that it is "mediational tool fully available to learners, to regulate their own behavior, to focus attention on specific L2 structures, and to generate and assess alternatives" (p. 333). Thus, L1 should be sparingly used in English language teaching classrooms. Translation makes Krashen's input more comprehensible and learning more meaningful (Schmidt, 1990). Teachers should consider systematic use of L1 and L2 rather than completely avoid the first language (Cook, 2008).

Kobayashi and Rinnert's (1992) research on Japanese students depicts encouraging role of L1 in writing skills. The use of first language helps to generate and organize ideas and it is more helpful for novice and slow language learners (Akyel, 1994), but it should be minimally used (Badger & Yan, 2009). The teachers should observe situation and needs of students, when they are practicing first language in L2 contexts (Kim, 2011).

According to English language researchers (Eadie, 1999; Bialystok, 1998; Atkinson, 1993; Lazar, 1996), translation is an additional benefit in target language and it increases intellectual ability and it is also used as best strategy for L1 learners (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003; Jiang, 2008). Translation reflects natural learning process as it refers concepts back to old experiences (Seidlhofer, 1999). The successful teachers are those who efficiently practicing both languages in second language context (Cook, 2001b), because both languages have various functions in teaching learning process (Hung, 2012).

### **3. Conclusions**

Grammar translation was used traditionally to teach language through translation. Then the era of communicative competence, which led to develop communicative approach. Social interaction became necessary for learning target language. A teacher develops his/her own teaching procedures and may constantly revise, and modify teaching learning process on the basis of performance of learners and reactions to instructional practices. Moreover, the success of a method may depend on the degree to which the teacher can provide access to learning processes and content or create conditions for successful language learning. In the words of Mitchell and Myles (2004, p. 261) remark: "there can be 'no one best method'... which applies at all times and in all situations, with every type of learner". It depicts that no single approach is best for variety of learners and teacher can adopt integrated approaches to meet the students' need. The classroom activities and tasks change the situation for language acquisition by creating interest and innovation. There is a ray of hope to succeed, that the combination of GT and CA may prove effective for L2 learning.

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