

"The Pros and Cons of the Grammar Translation Method on the Performance of Saudi EFL Learners"

(A case study of the third class in Saudi secondary schools in Northern boarders)

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Abstract

This study aims at investigating (The pros and cons of Using Grammar Translation Method on the Performance of Saudi EFL learners) in Saudi secondary schools. The researcher applied the descriptive method of research to achieve the desired goals. The researcher used both questionnaire for teachers (35teachers) and interview for experts, and he reached the following results:

Language is seen as a collection of words which are isolated and independent. So, students themselves are not seemingly able to produce sentences. This has a negative effect on pupil's motivation. Because they fail to learn the difficult grammar rules of the target language. Students cannot master all the four skills of English (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). In GTM there is no interaction between the students and the teacher.

The study recommended that teachers should use the most appropriate method while teaching foreign languages. Teachers should take the suitable decision at any given time to which method to be used or combination of methods. Teachers are recommended to stop all translation activities inside the classroom.

Key words: Translation method- Students performance-Learning skills- Teaching-Secondary schools.

Introduction

The use of language facilitates human communication since Language is a system of conversation reflects the culture of a certain people it has to be taught to the members of the society. Therefore through various periods of history appears a kind of method to facilitate teaching languages to members of the society.

The grammar translation method which was used to help communication between the Arabs and foreigners for more than half century.

So since English language was a foreign language to Saudi people at that time, translation of English terms into Arabic language was urgently needed.

Thus translation of the terms of Arabic and English language is regarded as the backbone of this method which in return ignores the process of direct speaking which is regarded as one of the most outstanding disadvantages of this method which is actually based on the principle of translating stereotype forms of sentences which have to be kept by heart by a group of learners who repeat these boring sentences like parrots.

The use of this method in nineteenth century in Saudi Arabia or other countries which exposed to foreign occupation might be justified. But the continuation of using it now in some Saudi secondary schools is regarded as a grave situation is not justified at all.

The continuation on the use of grammar translation method in Saudi secondary schools leads to the students' weakness in skills of speaking and writing correct English sentences.

And this in turn accelerates the deterioration of the students general standard in English language.

Word by word translation of English passages leads to declining English language. This is because translation impedes the process of understanding the nature of language and makes Saudi students think of Arabic language when they want to speak English language.

This in return creates a sort of difficulties between Arabic and English language not only in the process of reading but also in the process of speaking and appreciating language. Absence of both the Saudi fully trained English language teachers and also the training English language centers like The British Council.

Also the continuation of tentative English curriculum at Saudi primary or secondary schools helps a lot in the decline of English language not only in the primary or secondary levels but also at some Saudi universities as well.

The extensive use of Arabic language inside the classroom by some Saudi English language teachers has played a major role in declining this language for this way of using much translation makes the Students resort to direct translation instead of guessing the meaning of the words within the English sentences or the context. Besides this the apparent weakness of some Saudi English language teachers has its significant role in deteriorating of the English language performance inside the classroom.

Thus finally the absence of well –trained Saudi English language teachers and also the absence of excellent English language training centers have extended the life span of grammar translation method in the Saudi Arabia and thereby it lives and continues to live happily without being buried. But unfortunately enough, the English ruler has left while his style and methods stay in the mind of many people in the unlucky Arab countries.

Statement of the problem:

The general standard of Saudis secondary school students' professing in English language continues to deteriorate as a result of the use of grammar translation method inside the classroom.

Aims of the research:

1. To explain the deficiency and the limitations of the G.T.M as a language teaching method.
2. To find out whether the G.T.M has any advantages to the Saudi secondary school learners.

Research Questions:

1. Why is the standard of Saudi secondary school students become weak recently?
2. Are there any other factors contributing to the students' weakness in English language beside the use of G.T.M?

Research hypotheses:

1. School teachers restrict themselves while teaching to the grammar translation method.
2. There are other factors that contribute to the weak performance of students.

Research limits :-

- Theme limit : to cover three schools.
- Time limit : from 2019 to 2020
- Location limit : Northern Borders / Saudi Arabia / Arar.
- Human limit : teachers+ experts

Literature Review

What is the grammar translation method?

The G.T. method is an old method that dominates the scene of FLT in the whole world since the 19th century till now. It is still the most favorite one for most of the English language teachers in schools and universities. Teachers restricted themselves to it as a final goal and never think of other motivating and excellent methods of teaching that would improve their students' standards.

The Grammar Translation method is not new. It has had different names, it has been used by language teachers for many years it was called the Classical Method because it was the first method in teaching the classical languages like Latin and Greek. Earlier in this century, it was used for the purpose of helping students to read and appreciate foreign language literature. This method was developed by German scholars (Howatt, 2000) and later on popularized through works of others such as the American linguist Sears— probably the first that comes to mind when translation in FLT is mentioned. This method inherited the tenets of other traditional methods but at that time (that is, the 19th century) it started to be used with modern languages. The shortcomings of its methodology are probably responsible for the general hatred for translation (Vermes, 2010).

between speakers.

This was also the implicit belief in the Grammar-Translation method: grammar rules constituted a formal code, guided by logic and especially present in literary or formal texts. Indeed, proficiency in a language was assessed in terms of the lexical and grammatical accuracy shown in translations. Consequently, this method advocated deduction, memorization of rules and lists of vocabulary, translation and contrastive analysis.

Definition of the Grammar Translation Method:

According to (Freeman, 2000): The Grammar Translation Method is a language teaching method that enable learners to read literature written in the target language. The target can be reached by learning about the grammar rules and vocabulary of the Target Language. It is also believed that studying foreign language provides students with good mental exercise which helps develop the students' mind.

(Broughton, et al, 1980) said that “the traditional view that the English language consisted of a battery of grammatical rules and a vocabulary book produced a teaching method which selected the major grammar rules with their exceptions and taught them in a certain sequence”.

According to (Setiyadi, 2006) The Grammar Translation Method embraces a wide range of approaches but broadly speaking, teaching target language is seen as a mental discipline even through it is often claimed that the goal of the teaching is to be able to read literature in its original form. With regard to the nature of language and languages learning, GTM has different points of view from modern methods.

The characteristics of the Grammar Translation Method:

(Freeman, 2000) in his book titled “Techniques & principles in Language Teaching” discussed the following principles:

- The purpose of this method is to read literature of foreign language hence literary language is superior.
- The second goal is to translate target language into native language.
- Importance is given to reading & writing on the other hand speaking & listening is neglected.

- The role of teacher is an authoritarian role.
- The students are passive in the classroom.
- Grammar is taught deductively.
- Learners memorize native language equivalents for target language vocabulary words.
- The interaction in the classroom is from teacher to students.
- Vocabulary & grammar is focused.

(Prator & Murcia, 1991), listed the following major characteristics of Grammar-Translation Method:

- Target language is used meagerly & classes are taught in the mother tongue.
- Vocabulary is taught in the form of lists of isolated words.
- Long & difficult explanations of the intricacies of grammar are provided
- Classical texts are used for reading.
- The context of texts is almost neglected.
- Drills are exercises in translating disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue.
- Pronunciation is not given importance.

(Richards & Rodgers, 2006) in their famous book “Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching” discussed the following main principles of GTM:

- Translation interprets the words and phrases of the foreign languages in the best possible manner.
- The phraseology and idioms of the target language can best be assimilated in the process of interpretation the structures of the foreign language are best learnt when compared and contrasted with those of the mother tongue.

The Advantages of the Grammar-Translation Method:

The biggest advantage of this method is understanding of the phraseology (expressions & phrases) i.e. abstract words, idioms, phrases, metaphors, similes etc. since translation is possible in this method. Hence students can have better understanding of complicated concepts.

This could be one of the reasons that this method is still prevalent & practiced in some parts of world. The language of student & teacher does not hamper communication gap. Since students are taught in their mother tongue, they can comprehend well. This method is useful from this aspect that students are taught grammatical rules deductively. Consequently, student's comprehension & ability to write correct sentences improves. Students are taught books in their mother tongue they may have a better command than other students. This method requires few specialized skills on the part of teachers so any one can teach.

Disadvantages of Grammar Translation Method:

- Students do not participate actively in the classroom.
- Communication is not much focused.
- Very little attention is paid to content.

The focus is made on translation which is sometimes misleading.

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

An analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the use of grammar translation method in practical teaching:

The grammar-translation method is a traditional method used in foreign language teaching. It was widely used in Western European Countries in the 18th and 19th centuries. The target language was translated into the mother tongue. Grammar teaching and translation exercises were mainly relied on to teach a foreign language. The central idea was 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 China in the period from 1980s to early 1990s, the grammar-translation method was viewed as the only way of foreign language teaching. 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. In the 1990s especially the 21st century, due to the deepened contact between China and the world, government's educational idea has been changed a lot. Foreign language teaching was 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 mutism 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.

Initial principles of the Grammar Translation method:

The principle characteristics of the grammar translation method may be identified as follows:

- A fundamental purpose of learning a foreign language is to be able to *read its literature*. Literary language is superior to spoken language. Students' study of the foreign culture is limited to its literature and fine arts.
- An important goal is for students to be able to *translate* each language into the other. If students can translate from one language into another, they are considered successful language learners.
- The ability to communicate in the target language is *not a goal* of foreign language instruction.
- The primary skills to be developed are reading and writing. Little attention is given to speaking and listening, and almost none to pronunciation.
- The teacher is the authority in the classroom. It is very important that students get the correct answer.
- It is possible to find native language equivalents for all target language words.
- Learning is facilitated through attention to similarities between the target language and the native language.
- It is important for students to learn about the form of the target language.
- Deductive application of an explicit grammar rule is a useful pedagogical technique.
- Language learning provides good mental exercise.
- Students should be conscious of the grammatical rules of the target language.
- Wherever possible, verb conjugations and other grammatical paradigms should be committed to memory.

Reviewing the Principles:

The principles of the Grammar-Translation Method are organized below by answering the ten questions. Not all the questions are addressed by the Grammar-Translation Method; we will list all the questions, however, so that a comparison among the methods will be easier to make.

What are the goals of teachers who use the Grammar-Translation Method?

According to the teachers who use the Grammar-Translation Method, a fundamental purpose of learning a foreign language is to be able to read literature written in the target language.

To do this, students need to learn about the grammar rules and vocabulary of the target language. In addition, it is believed that studying a foreign language provides students with good mental exercise which helps develop their minds.

2. What is the role of the teacher? What is the role of the students?

The roles are very traditional. The teacher is the authority in the classroom. The students do as he says so they can learn what he knows.

3. What are some characteristics of the teaching/learning process?

Students are taught to translate from one language to another. Often what they translate are readings in the target language about some aspect of the culture of the foreign language community. Students study grammar deductively; that is, they are given the grammar rules and examples, are told to memorize them, and then are asked to apply the rules to other examples. They also learn grammatical paradigms such as verb conjugations. They memorize native language equivalents for foreign language vocabulary words.

4. What is the nature of student-teacher interaction? What is the nature of student-student interaction?

Most of the interaction in the classroom is from the teacher to the students. There is little student initiation and little student-student interaction.

5. How are the feelings of the students dealt with?

There are no principles of the method which relate to this area.

6. How is language viewed? How is culture viewed?

Literary language is considered superior to spoken language and is therefore the language students study. Culture is viewed as consisting of literature and the fine arts.

7. What areas of language are emphasized? What language skills are emphasized?

Vocabulary and grammar are emphasized. Reading and writing are the primary skills that the students work on. There is much less attention given to speaking and listening. Pronunciation receives little, if any, attention.

8. What is the role of the students' native language?

The meaning of the target language is made clear by translating it into the students' native language. The language that is used in class is mostly the students' native language.

9. How is evaluation accomplished?

Written tests in which students are asked to translate from their native language to the target language or vice versa are often used. Questions about the foreign culture or questions that ask students to apply grammar rules are also common.

10. How does the teacher respond to student errors?

Having the students get the correct answer is considered very important. If students make errors or don't know an answer, the teacher supplies them with the correct answer.

The components of the grammar Translation Method:

(Larsen & Freeman, 2000) in their book Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching provided expanded descriptions of some common typical techniques closely associated with the Grammar Translation Method. The listing here is in summary form only.

- (1) Translation of a Literary Passage (Translating target language to native language).
- (2) Reading Comprehension Questions (Finding information in a passage, making inferences and relating to personal experience)
- (3) Antonyms/Synonyms (Finding antonyms and synonyms for words or sets of words).
- (4) Cognates (Learning spelling/sound patterns that correspond between L1 and the target language)
- (5) Deductive Application of Rule (Understanding grammar rules and their exceptions, then applying them to new examples).
- (6) Fill-in-the-blanks (Filling in gaps in sentences with new words or items of a particular grammar type).
- (7) Memorization (Memorizing vocabulary lists, grammatical rules and grammatical paradigms).
- (8) Use Words in Sentences (Students create sentences to illustrate they know the meaning and use of new words)
- (9) Composition (Students write about a topic using the target language).

Methodology

In this chapter the researcher introduces the description of the study methodology, the researcher will describe the tools utilized for data collection which contains the population (subjects), the procedure and the statistical analysis which applied in this research.

He used (SPSS) which known as (statistical package social science) programme, to analyze this data .To know the effects of using grammar translation method on the performance of Saudi EFL learners in Saudi secondary school students, the researcher followed some steps . So this chapter deals with procedure ,data collection form the population , the questionnaire and the interview are a very important tools for this process.

Population:

Consist of :-

- 1- A group of teachers from (35) governmental schools, were chosen randomly from Northern Borders –Arar.
- 2- A group composed from five experts were chosen from different institutes and universities.

Sampling:

In order to choose a sample for this study the target population is (35) teachers , this group is selected randomly.

The following tables show the study sample with regional to their sex ,qualifications, college and experience .

Table 3.1: The frequency and the percentage for the sample individual survey.

Descriptive Analysis

Frequency Tables

Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid male	26	74.3	74.3	74.3
female	9	25.7	25.7	100.0
Total	35	100.0	100.0	

Qualification

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid graduate	12	34.3	34.3	34.3
post graduate	23	65.7	65.7	100.0
Total	35	100.0	100.0	

Experience

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid less than 5 years	12	34.3	34.3	34.3
5--10 years	13	37.1	37.1	71.4
more than 10 years	10	28.6	28.6	100.0
Total	35	100.0	100.0	

College

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid education	32	91.4	91.4	91.4
arts	3	8.6	8.6	100.0
Total	35	100.0	100.0	

Discussion :

The tables show the demographic distribution of the individuals of the study as questionnaire sample . It consists of 74.3% of male and 25.7% of female. As for qualifications, there is 34.3% getting bachelor and 65.7% getting master degree . For experts it can be seen that the majority of the sample individuals 37.1% have experience of teaching which is less than 10 years.

Tools:

In this study, data is collected by questionnaire beside interview. 35 secondary school English teachers at northern borders (KSA) answered the questionnaire inquires.

The questionnaire design

The questionnaire was designed to collect information about the difficulties building English sentence among Saudi secondary schools students. The questionnaire consists of (20) statements , and it was designed on the scale of six points :

Strongly agree /Agree / Somewhat agree/Disagree – Strongly disagree / Somewhat disagree

Validity:

Five judges have given their opinion on the validity of the questionnaire inquires . (Appendix 3)

Reliability:

The researcher has shown the characteristics of the sample individuals and their distribution .Therefore , the statistical divisions are as follows:

- (1) The frequencies and the percentage.
- (2) Degree of consistency and correlation.

Conclusion:

Using the GTM in Saudi secondary schools is a problem which is so clear . The researcher has used two methods in conducting this study. So he used the descriptive and analytical method in analyzing data . Thus the researcher reaches the following conclusions and results.

Results:

The results of this study lie in the following points:

1. Bad effect of this method is on pupil's motivation. Because she or he cannot succeed in learning the difficult grammar rules of the target language. That leads to the boredom in the classroom.
2. Students cannot master all the four skills of English (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).
3. The grammar-translation method is the easiest for a teacher to employ. It doesn't require a teacher to speak good English or make good lesson preparations. So, his knowledge might be lost into in oblivion.

Recommendations:

1. We should use the most appropriate method while teaching foreign languages.
2. Instead of using the GTM we should use methods like the Eclectic method because it is more flexible and should be adopted by all teachers inside the classroom.
3. By using the eclectic method teachers are not only restricted to only one method , but so many methods can be used in a particular time with the students.
4. Teachers should take the suitable decision at any given time to which method to be used or combination of methods.

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