

**Lecture 2: Brief History of Language Teaching: A-Traditional Approaches/Methods****I-The Grammar-Translation Method (GTM)****II-The Direct Method (DM)****I-The Grammar-Translation Method (GTM)****Introduction**

Grammar Translation was the most popular method used to teach Latin and Greek. It dominated European and Foreign Language Teaching from the 1840s to the 1940s; it was known in the United States as the Prussian Method (1845).

**1.Characteristics of the Grammar-Translation Method**

Language is reduced to the grammatical system. The sentence is the main unit of reference, and its morphological elements must be organised according to a series of prescriptive rules. Learning is understood as a result of a great intellectual effort where the memorisation of grammatical rules and vocabulary is necessary. Language was seen as a body of knowledge to be understood and learned, not as a skill to be practised and developed. Grammar and vocabulary, particularly those found in examples of classical literature were regarded as the superior and purest form of the language. Correctness was therefore highly valued, especially grammatical correctness, so grammar was the main pillar of the syllabus and seen as 'the building blocks' of the language.

In Grammar-Translation, learning was equated with a conscious understanding of how the language is formed, purely at the syntactic level. Meaning was therefore not taken much into consideration. In order to access meaning, the analysis of grammar was combined with the memorisation of word for word translations of vocabulary but always in the context of the memorisation of the patterns of the language (verb forms, conjugation tables, etc.). Hence, in Grammar Translation, learning was a matter of memorisation of the knowledge of the teacher (the expert), which had to be passed without modification (as it is) to the students.

The goal of foreign language study is to learn a language in order to read its literature or in order to benefit from the mental discipline and intellectual development that result from foreign

language study. Grammar Translation is a way of studying a language that approaches the language first through detailed analysis of its grammar rules, followed by application of this knowledge to the task of translating sentences and texts into and out of the target language. It hence views language learning as consisting of little more than memorising rules and facts in order to understand and manipulate the morphology and syntax of the foreign language because “the first language is maintained as the reference system in the acquisition of the second language” (Stern, 1983, p. 455).

In this method, reading and writing are the major focus; little or no systematic attention is paid to speaking or listening. Furthermore, vocabulary selection is based solely on the reading texts used by the teacher, and words are taught through bilingual word lists, dictionary study, and memorisation. In a typical Grammar-Translation text, the grammar rules are presented and illustrated, a list of vocabulary items is presented with their translation equivalents, and translation exercises are prescribed.

Since the sentence is the basic unit of teaching and language practice, much of the lesson is devoted to translating sentences into and out of the target language to make learning easier, and it is this focus on the sentence that is a distinctive feature of the method. Earlier approaches to foreign language study used grammar as an aid to the study of texts in a foreign language. But this was thought to be too difficult for students in secondary schools (Howatt, 1984, p. 131).

Accuracy is emphasised. Students are expected to attain high standards of accuracy in translation, because it was “a prerequisite for passing the increasing number of formal written examinations that grew up during the century” (Howatt, 1984, p. 132). Grammar is taught deductively - that is, by presentation and study of grammar rules, which are then practiced through translation exercises. In most Grammar-Translation texts, a syllabus was followed for the sequencing of grammar points throughout a text, and there was an attempt to teach grammar in an organised and systematic way. The students’ native language is the medium of instruction. It is used to explain new items and to enable comparisons to be made between the foreign language and the students’ native language.

## 2.Methodological Features of the Grammar Translation Method

**Table 1**

*Methodological Features of the Grammar Translation Method*

<b>Content</b>	<b>Linguistic notions:</b> Rules and exceptions  Morphology of words  <b>Syntax:</b> Parts of the sentence  Simple and complex sentences
<b>Objectives</b>	The study of literary works is the ultimate goal  The reaching of conversation is postponed and underestimated  <b>Extra-linguistic goal:</b> mental gymnastics
<b>Materials</b>	The grammar book  The dictionary
<b>Procedures</b>	Explanations in the mother tongue by the teacher, who has a central role  Meta-language used for grammatical notions  Practice exercises to apply the notions in a deductive way  Memorisation of long vocabulary lists  Reading comprehension and vocabulary exercises of a text  Translation of literary texts  Compositions
<b>Assessment</b>	Exams to evaluate the capacity to understand written texts and to translate sentences

*Source: Molina et al. (2006). Current approaches and teaching methods : Bilingual programmes (p. 6).*

## 3.Techniques of the Grammar Translation Method

The teacher gives students vocabulary lists in L2 with their counterpart in L1 to memorise, so that they could read literary texts. The texts are selected because of the grammar they contained and are introduced after students have memorised the vocabulary. In a typical grammar-translation

class, the teacher chooses a student, who has to read a sentence in the text and translate it. The teacher corrects any mistakes and chooses a new student for the next sentence until the text is done. Correction techniques varied from simple correction, to asking another student to make the correction, to eliciting self-correction. Explanations of mistakes are all done in the students' L1. Following the reading, there is often a set of comprehension questions, written and answered in the students' L1. New language is then 'practised' in the form of grammar exercises and fill-the-gap exercises for new vocabulary. Homework often involves memorisation of the new language, which was formally tested in the next lesson. For vocabulary tests, they often involve the teacher reading a list of words in the students' L1, for which the students have to write down the L2 equivalents.

#### **4.Example of Activities in the GTM**

**1-**Ask the students to take five (5) vocabulary words from their favourite song and then translate them into English.

**2-**In teaching a particular lesson in grammar, ask the students to memorise the rules, and they should give their sentences as samples.

**3-**Ask students to write ten (10) verbs from the article assigned to them, and then they should give the synonyms and antonyms.

**4-**Ask students to memorise at least five (5) words per day in English and give their native language equivalent.

#### **5. Criticism of the GTM (the Disadvantages)**

**1-**The classroom is teacher-centred and learners are passive receivers of knowledge.

**2-**The aim behind teaching a foreign language (English) is to make learners able to read written classical texts which often do not take into consideration learners' needs. So, it neglects speaking, listening, and learners' needs.

**3-**It gives importance only to written language and neglects oral language and communication.

**4-**This method neglects authentic/realistic spoken communication.

**5-**Language was seen as a body of knowledge to be understood and learned (structural patterns), not as a skill to be practised and developed: learners have a good structural knowledge but are not able to communicate in the L2/L3.

**6-**Lexis is not presented in context, but in bilingual lists that are to be memorised. It focuses on rote memorisation and viewed language learning as a mechanical process.

**7-**Vocabulary which is learned from one unit is not reinserted in other units, as a result, students rapidly forget a great amount of it.

**8-**At a more practical level, and leaving theoretical considerations aside, there is one detail that makes Grammar Translation unsuitable for many foreign language classrooms: the teacher must be fluent in the students' L1 !

The criticism expressed by Roulet (1972) is outstanding. The following list summarises the main gaps:

**1-**Secondary grammatical points receive a lot of attention.

**2-**Morphology is given a predominant place.

**3-**It gives an exaggerated importance to faults to be avoided.

**4-**Translations are often unsatisfactory, as they are done word by word.

**5-**Too many notions are learnt and students may feel frustrated when unable to use the FL.

In Europe in the mid and late nineteenth century, opposition to the Grammar Translation Method gradually developed in several countries. The Reform Movement by Sweet (England), Vietor (Germany), and Passy (France) in 1880s came as a reaction to Grammar Translation Method, it laid the foundations for the development of new ways of teaching languages that have continued to the present day. It emphasised the importance of teaching the spoken/oral language. Thus, phonetics received special interest especially with the creation of the International Phonetic Association (IPA) in 1886. The goals of IPA were:

**1-**the study of the spoken language; **2-**phonetic training in order to establish good pronunciation habits; **3-**the use of conversation texts and dialogues to introduce conversational phrases and idioms; **4-**an inductive approach to the teaching of grammar; **5-**teaching new meanings through

establishing associations within the target language rather than by establishing associations with the native language.

## **Conclusion**

People should learn languages for practical purposes, many aspects of grammar-translation are not suitable. Thus, importance was attached to the exclusive use of the target language as a direct methodology. Nowadays, students need to learn to actually communicate in a foreign language rather than just read its literature. For modern students, knowledge of grammar is just a part of the more important goal of language skills, not the final aim in itself. So, the GTM was short-lived and, gave place to the Direct Method and natural methods.

Although our teaching context and general approach are completely different to Grammar-Translation, it is still the method of choice in many high school systems around the world as some aspects of the method still remain today:

- 1-The present practise shape, which still dominates language teaching.
- 2-Some exercise types we use today (filling in the blanks exercises, finding synonyms or antonyms in texts, and comprehension questions).
- 3-The organisation of courses and materials around grammatical categories.
- 4-The general disregard for the teaching of vocabulary as an important learning element, independent from the texts and grammar in which it appears.
- 5-The organisation of tests into segments that test only control over grammatical or vocabulary features of the language.

## **II-The Direct Method (DM)**

### **Introduction**

The Direct Method developed by Charles Berlitz as a response to the growing importance of being able to communicate spontaneously in a foreign language and as a consequence of the widespread failure of the Grammar Translation method to achieve that. The basic assumption behind the method was that to be able to speak in L2, you had to think in L2 and that thinking in L1 hindered this process. It focused on the active involvement of the learner in speaking and listening

to the foreign language in realistic, everyday situations. This method grew mostly out of the experiences in the Natural Method (not to be confused with the Natural Approach) proposed by François Gouin in the nineteenth century. According to the German scholar Franke (1884), “A language could best be taught by using it actively in the classroom rather than using analytical procedures that focus on explanation of grammar rules in classroom teaching” (p. 9). So, the main stress is on the oral skills, and language is to be taught in natural situations by extensive listening, imitation and speaking.

### **1.Characteristics of the Direct Method**

In the Direct Method, language is considered as a tool for communication and as something produced spontaneously with little or no conscious thought, especially L1 thought. It was assumed that a learner could make a direct association between L2 and its meaning, without the need to translate into L1. Learning takes the natural acquisition of the mother tongue as the main model (second language learning is similar to first language learning). It emphasises simple mechanisms as association and memorisation (associative learning, Sweet, 1899), where the need for repetition and memorisation was emphasised. As a practical tool, language was divided into functional or topical areas with everyday spoken language being emphasised.

Language learning was equated with the development of a skill. So, the teacher's role was to help students develop this skill and not just to pass his knowledge of the language off to them, as was the case with the Grammar Translation method. The role of the teacher was that of a model (that is why so many teachers in this method had to be native speakers of the language) and a coach. As a skill, language was seen as something to be learned consciously and through association. For example, vocabulary was learned in the context of a full sentence – never by translation – and grammar was learned inductively with the students working out the rules for themselves from examples, but without ever formulating them as explanations. The Direct Method was the first of many methods that tried to make L2 learning reproduce the processes of L1 acquisition. Krashen (1987, p. 135) argued that “this method focuses on inductive teaching of grammar. The goal of the

instruction is for the students to guess, or work at, the rules of the language. It insists on accuracy and errors are corrected in the class. The rule is discussed and explained in the target language”.

The main premise of a Direct Method classroom was that neither the teacher nor the students ever spoke in L1. Language was often presented in context through situations or stories, which were read aloud, always concentrating on meaning not form. The meaning of new language was always conveyed as directly as possible by using pictures, realia, actions or gestures. The teacher checks understanding by asking questions in L2/L3 and the students answering in L2/L3. If the student makes a mistake in the answer, the teacher will elicit self-correction. In short, the Direct Method has the following features:

- 1-Only the target language is used (no translation).
- 2-Everyday language is the first goal.
- 3-Questions and answers are the main vehicle for a graded oral progression.
- 4-Inductive techniques so that learners discover /induce rules.
- 5-Correction is not neglected.

**Table 2**

*Methodological Features of the Direct Method*

<b>Content</b>	Spoken everyday language
	Gradual sequence
<b>Objectives</b>	Capacity to ask questions and to answer
	Listening and speaking communicative skills
<b>Materials</b>	Posters, real objects, realia and texts
<b>Procedures</b>	Direct techniques with no use of L1: immersion
	Questions and answers
	Small groups and native speakers
<b>Assessment</b>	Conversation and interview exams

*Source: Molina et al. (2006). Current approaches and teaching methods :*

*Bilingual programmes (p. 8).*



**Note:** The term immersion is used metaphorically for an intensive bilingual surrounding, a 'language bath' in which learners are immersed, that is surrounded by L2 as if immersed in water (Kersten & Rohde, 2015, p. 72). It is the direct involvement /extensive exposure of the student to the foreign language. Hammerley (1987) explained that

The immersion approach involves exposing students to instruction through the target language, and communicative interaction in it, for many years, 100% of the school day during the first two or three years. In its longest form, early immersion, this method exposes children to the second language from kindergarten on, though in a slowly decreasing percentage of time after grade two. By the end of secondary school, young people in full-fledged immersion programs should have been exposed to the second language for thirteen years. (p. 395)

## **2. Principles of the Direct Method**

**1-**Classroom instruction was conducted exclusively in the target language. Translation should be avoided, although the native language could be used in order to explain new words or to check comprehension.

**2-**Only everyday vocabulary and sentences were taught.

**3-**Oral communication skills were built up in a carefully graded progression organised around question-and-answer exchanges (dialogues) between teachers and students in small, intensive classes.

**4-**Grammar was taught inductively (rules are formed after practice/activities).

**5-**New teaching points were introduced orally (Material is first presented orally with actions or pictures).

**6-**Concrete vocabulary was taught through demonstration, objects, and pictures; abstract vocabulary was taught by association of ideas.

**7-**Both speech and listening comprehension were taught.

**8-**Meaning is more important than form.

**9-**Correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasised. Students were introduced to phonetic transcription.

**10-**The culture associated with the target language is also taught inductively. Culture is considered an important aspect of learning the language.

**11-**Literary texts are not analysed grammatically. Advanced students read literature for comprehension and pleasure.

### **3.Guidelines for Teaching the Oral Language**

- ✓ Never translate: demonstrate
- ✓ Never explain: act
- ✓ Never make a speech: ask questions
- ✓ Never imitate mistakes: correct
- ✓ Never speak with single words: use sentences
- ✓ Never speak too much: make students speak much
- ✓ Never use the book: use your lesson plan
- ✓ Never jump around: follow your plan
- ✓ Never go too fast: keep the pace of the student
- ✓ Never speak too slowly: speak normally
- ✓ Never speak too quickly: speak naturally
- ✓ Never speak too loudly: speak naturally
- ✓ Never be impatient: take it easy. (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 12)

### **4.Techniques of the Direct Method**

**4.1. Reading aloud:** Take turn reading sections of a passage, play or whatever teaching materials.

At the end of reading, teacher uses gestures, pictures, realia, examples or other means to make the meaning of the section clear.

**4.2. Question-answer exercise:** Students ask and answer questions in full sentences and practice new words and grammatical rules.

**4.3. Self-correction:** The teacher may have the students to self-correct by asking them to make a choice between what they said and an alternative answer that the teacher supplied. The teacher might simply repeat what the student has just said with a questioning voice to signal something is wrong. Teacher repeats what student has said stopping just before the error so the student knows that the next word is wrong.

**4.4. Conversation practice:** Teacher asks student a number of questions in the target language. The questions contain a particular grammar structure. Later, student would be able to ask each other their own questions using the same grammatical structure.

**4.5. Fill-in-the-blank exercise:** Items are in the target language. No explicit grammar rule would be applied. Students have to induce the rules in need to fill in the blanks from examples and practice from earlier part of the lesson.

**4.6. Dictation:** Teacher reads the passage 3 times. First Teacher reads at normal speed and Students just listen. Then teacher reads the passage phrase by phrase, pausing long enough for the students to write down what they have heard. Then teacher again reads at the normal speed and students check their work.

**4.7. Paragraph writing:** Teacher asks the students to write a paragraph in their own words based on the reading materials. Students do this from memory or they could use the reading passage in the lesson as a model.

**4.8. Map drawing:** Aim of map drawing is listening and comprehension practice. Students are given a map with the geographical features unnamed. Teachers give directions and each student takes turn and gives the teacher instructions by finding and labelling the geographical features.

Finall, the direct method of learning English is fairly simple. It consists, primarily, of just five parts.

- ✓ **Show** – The student is shown something so that they understand the word. For example, they might be shown some visual aids such as flash cards for nouns. The teacher might use gestures to explain verbs, and so on.

- ✓ **Say** – The teacher verbally presents the word or sentence, taking care to pronounce the word correctly.
- ✓ **Try** – The student then tries to repeat what the teacher is saying.
- ✓ **Mould** – The teacher corrects the students and ensures that they are pronouncing words correctly.
- ✓ **Repeat** – Finally, the students repeat the word a number of times. Here the teacher uses a number of methods for repetition, including group repetition, single student repetition and other activities designed to get the students to repeat the word.

## 5.Criticism of the Direct Method

The Direct Method enjoyed great popularity at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth but it was difficult to implement, mainly because of budget, time, and classroom size problems. The following are the disadvantages of the Direct Method:

- 1-Although the ability to think in L2 is an admirable goal, there is a question of how early this can happen. Even if students and teacher only use L2 in class, the students may still be doing a lot of conscious processing in L1.
- 2-L1 can be a necessary prop (support) for certain types of learners, who would feel lost without explanation. There is one piece of evidence that shows there are differences in the way we learn our first and second languages, meaning that trying to mimic L1 learning does not provide everything the learner needs.
- 3-The idea of always answering in full sentences is often criticised as a contradiction. The Direct Method wanted to teach people the everyday language of communication, but very often we do not communicate in full sentences. As a result, student-student interaction was less communication centred and more form-focused.
- 4-It is not an easy methodology to use in a classroom situation. It requires small classes and high student motivation, and in the artificial environment of a classroom, it is difficult to generate natural situations of understanding and guarantee sufficient practice for everyone.

5-Although the Direct Method was popular and, to a certain extent, effective, it failed to deliver its promise particularly in the teaching of adults. While it was effective for the teaching of young learners, the characteristics of the adult learner (previous experiences, the capacity to deduce, etc.) were left aside in this method.

## **Conclusion**

Despite its disadvantages, the Direct Method contributed the first theoretical basis for language teaching in that it brought to bear a specific theory of language and a specific theory of learning. Traces of the Direct Method remain popular to this day. Some of these are:

- 1-The contextualization of grammatical items in dialogues or texts popular in most textbooks.
- 2-The insistence on teaching English through English in many foreign language contexts.
- 3-The role of the teacher as model and coach.
- 4-The inductive approach to learning grammar.
- 5-The valuing of the native speaker as the optimal model to be emulated.

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