

# Methods of Teaching and Learning English Grammar

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present the methods of teaching and learning English grammar. It investigates how the English grammar teaching and learning and the role of grammar teaching as the EFL in the general studies' foundation course. This study will look at methods that have been traditionally used from the past to the present. In order to understand how grammar is presented in textbooks. It is expected that this thesis will examine the ways of grammar teaching and learning and its contents and how they are manifest in textbooks and classrooms. This study will also evaluate several teaching approaches to determine which method is the most appropriate for the purposes of teaching and learning English grammar.

**Keywords:** Methods of Teaching; Learning English Grammar

## Introduction

Teaching and learning are inextricably bound together, and the other is automatically involved when one of them is concerned. The pedagogical ideas together with the methodologies of language teaching and learning have been changing significantly. The teaching and learning methods have variously conflicted between acquisition and learning and between behaviorism and cognition, and the methods of communicative teaching, task-based language teaching etc. are being developed more and more scientifically.

### 1. The Grammar – Translation Method (GTM)

It was not until the late 1700s that the GTM was first known. Mella (1998:68-69) presents that the GTM grew out of the teaching of Latin, and this method appeals to students because of its thoroughness and systematicity. Richard and Rodgers (2001:6) describe that the GTM dominated European and foreign language teaching for almost one hundred years from the 1840s to the 1940s, and its modified form remains widely used in the ESL classrooms of the world even today.

Its more than one hundred-year survival means that the GTM retains its topical and irreplaceable characteristics: firstly, the grammars are taught deductively so that the study of rules are presented and studied before practical examples of the rules are given. Moreover, the teaching materials are used inductively by authentic, profound and worthy literature. Furthermore, the GTM makes the language learning easier than before. The GTM claims that the

language learning focuses on the sentence instead of smaller parts of a sentence. Finally, translation is emphasized, and thus L2 sentences are frequently translated into L1 sentences, which improves the translation skill from L2 to L1.

Mella (1998:69) briefly and clearly sums up the use of the GTM in one lesson by means of steps: the teacher comments on a new text sentence by sentence. Unknown vocabulary is written on the blackboard and difficult passages (or the whole text) are translated. The text from the previous lesson is checked for understanding and the students are required to read and translate the selected passages. The teacher will correct and comment on pronunciation if necessary. A grammatical structure is usually also explained in the L1 and written exercises are provided. Hence in the GTM classroom, teachers are the absolute authorities. The interaction, as a rule, is directed from the teacher to the students, and there is little chance for student-student interaction.

The GTM can provide learners with perfect skills in reading and writing, but it draws very little attention to pronunciation; much time is spent talking about L2, little time talking in L2, and the teachers are the absolute authorities in the classroom etc. Most of the drawbacks were gradually criticized by the educationalists and linguists. Then in the mid and late nineteenth century, as a reaction against the GTM, the Reform Movement originated in several European countries.

The English teaching in China has been dominated by GTM in both the textbooks and classrooms since when I studied in junior high school in the year 1996. Nowadays although it has lost its dominant place, it is still mentioned in Syllabus (2000) as follows:

*in the lesson preparation period, the teacher could use the GTM in order to highlight the important points, however, the GTM is becoming an inferior teaching method when it comes to the classroom teaching.*

## 2. The Reform Movement

Richards and Rodgers (2001:9) explain that before the 1880s, language teaching specialists such as Marcel, Prendergast, and Gouin (see further below) were devoted to promoting alternative approaches to language teaching, however, their ideas failed to receive widespread support or attention. From the 1880s, these promotive approaches of language teaching were revitalized by practical-minded linguists such as Henry Sweet in England, Wilhelm Vietor in Germany, and Paul Passy in France etc.

They gave reformist ideas greater credibility and acceptance. In the year 1886, the International Phonetics Association (IPA) was founded, which gave linguists new insight into speech processes, notably that speech, rather than the written word, was the primary form of language. The efforts of linguists became known as the Reform Movement in language teaching, and these foundations for the development of the new ways of teaching language have continued to the present day.

The whole reform movement focuses on teaching items in a context and phonetics teaching. Richards and Rodgers (2001:7-8) highlight two persons who support the contextual and situational teaching. The Englishman T. Prendergast (1806-1886), who is one of the first to emphasize on the oral teaching, records the observation that utterances should be interpreted in the contextual and situational cues, and the children could use memorized phrases and “routines” in speaking. A Frenchman, F. Gouin (1831-1896), one of the best known reformers, refers to a new teaching approach – the so-called “series” method, which consists of a description in L2 of related actions, such as “I open the door”, “I open the widow”. The basic idea of this method is that the learner is familiar with these actions from his prior personal experience, which helps the learner understand and remember the sentences.

The reform movement is interested in learning or teaching L2 according to natural methods. The attempt of this movement is to make the second language learning more like the first language learning because we do not have any concept of grammar rules in our natural speaking when we learn our native language. The grammar rules should be built up in the speaking progress, thus a new method for oral English teaching is needed.

## 2. The Direct Method (DM)

The DM develops the idea of the Reform Movement for developing skills in listening and speaking, perhaps especially in speaking. Stern (1983) states that the dominances of the DM prevail over the years between 1880 and World War I. Simensen (2007:28) explains the “direct method” that it refers to the belief in establishing direct associations or links between L2 words and phrase and the object, actions, and states referred to. And Richards and Rodgers (2001:12) demonstrate the principles and procedures of DM in practice and the guidelines of it for teaching oral language. They are shown in detail in Figures 1.1 and 1.2.

1. Classroom instruction was conducted exclusively in the target language.
2. Only everyday vocabulary and sentences were taught.
3. Oral communication skills were built up in a carefully graded progression organized around question-and-answer exchanges between teachers and student in small, intensive classes.
4. Grammar was taught inductively.
5. New teaching points were introduced orally.
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 emphasized.
8. Correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasized.

**Figure 1.1** The principles of DM in the classroom practice (Richards and Rodgers (2001:12))

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

**Figure 1.2** The guidelines of DM for oral teaching (Richards and Rodgers (2001:12))

Figures 1.1 and 1.2 illustrate that contrary to that in the GTM classroom, the teaching language is dominated by L2 instead of L1 in the DM classroom, and monolingual instruction and student activities represent their priorities. Thus objects, actions, pictures, miming and the use of verbal paraphrases are very popular in the DM classroom. Simensen (2009:26) gives us an example of a technique that the teacher could use as a means of teaching the new language of associating words with thoughts and events, i.e. pointing at pictures and objects to explain a word's meaning.

The fact that the objects were sometimes brought into the classroom has given the method a nickname “the backpack – method”. Moreover, much time in the DM classroom is devoted to the teaching of pronunciation, vocabulary and listening, while grammar is only taught inductively.

Connected and meaningful texts are usually the basis of the lesson, which are listened to and or read by the students, then they are later to induce the rules on the basis of these observations. The content of the text is, as a rule, dealt with in question – answer sequences. Simensen (2009) sums up the roles between teacher and students that normally it is the teacher who asks and the students who answer, which further promotes the role of the teacher from the absolute author to the inductor, whereas, the teaching in classroom still keep the teacher-centered role. In addition, the direct method uses an inductive approach in teaching grammar, and the explanations are mostly given in L1. Mella (1998:46-47) explains that the teacher could use the first language more freely to explain grammar, and the target language is also used as much as possible.

As a product of the Reform Movement, the DM also has its drawbacks, one of which is that it requires the teachers to have high level of oral proficiency in the foreign language. However, normally the competence of the non-native English teachers is far from native – like fluency. Furthermore, this method largely depends on the teacher's skill, rather than on a

textbook (see Figure 2.2), which leads to the lack of clear principles of the teaching rules and the loose system. The presentation of grammar is almost totally abandoned. In the oral context, is the grammar really unnecessary for the learners? Due to the disadvantages above, the DM is criticized by the linguists strictly. Thus between the 1920s and the 1930s, a new scientific method –the Oral Method emerged.

### 3. The Oral Method (OM)

The OM origins from the works of British applied linguists who attempted to develop the OM for a principled approach to methodology in language teaching. Richards and Rodgers (2001) describe that Harold Palmer and A. S. Hornby were two of the leaders in this movement, and they wish to improve the OM to a more scientific foundation as well. They further point out that “more scientific” emphasis on the OM has a systematic basis in applied linguistics. Then the systematic principle is analyzed in their books in three directions, which are quoted by Richards and Rodgers (2001:38): selection (the procedures by which lexical and grammatical content was chosen), gradation (principles by which the organization and sequencing of content were determined), and presentation (techniques used for presentation and practice of items in a course).

Even though DM and OM can both be said to oral teaching approaches, however, they should not be confused. In OM, teachers should introduce new language items in a strictly controlled and systematic manner, in contrast to the DM. Taking the grammar teaching as an example, the introduction of grammar should proceed from simple to gradually more complex grammar patterns. New grammatical structures should be introduced in familiar vocabulary and vice versa. Moreover, grammar should be taught inductively; in this factor, presentation or repetition is the added scientific principle in the oral method compared to the DM, which is illustrated in Simensen (2007:37) by the following example:

Teacher: Listen. This is a pen. This.

Students: This.

A student: This.

Teacher: This is a pen.

Students: This is a pen.

Student: (moving pen) This is a pen.

The structure to be taught in the above example is “this is ...” The teacher used the word (pen) that was not new to create a new language item situation, so that drills are likewise related to “situations”. And then the repetition happens in the familiar situation, which makes the students not only learn the new language item more easily but also review the old words.

Another principle of OM concerns situation. New language items should be introduced in contexts and situations in the classroom that help to clarify the meaning of the item, and the teaching of grammar and vocabulary are no longer absolute, which are shown in Frisby’s syllabus (1957:134, as quoted by Richards and Rodgers 2001:42):

	Sentence pattern	Vocabulary
1st lesson	<i>This is ...</i>	<i>book, pencil, ruler,</i>
	<i>That is ...</i>	<i>desk</i>
2nd lesson	<i>These are ...</i>	<i>chair, picture, door,</i>
	<i>Those are ...</i>	<i>window</i>
3rd lesson	Is this ...? Yes it is.	Watch, box, pen,
	Is that ...? Yes it is.	Blackboard

The situational element gives the method another name, Situational Language Teaching (SLT) to include the structural-situational and oral methods. The objective of the oral method is to develop skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Richards and Rodgers (2001:43-44) conclude that in the oral method classroom, the learners' roles are divided into two stages and the teachers' roles are divided into three stages: in the initial stage of learning, the learners automatically listen and repeat what the teacher says and then, to respond to the questions and commands. In contrast to learners' roles, the teacher serves as a model creating and then modeling the new structure for students to repeat. In the later stage, students are given more of an opportunity to use the language in less controlled situation, although teacher – controlled introduction and practice of new language is stressed throughout. The teacher is ever on the lookout for grammatical and structural errors. In the last stage, organizing review is a primary task for the teacher.

#### 4. Interlanguage and Error Analysis

In the 1970s, English gradually becomes an international language, and it is widely used by speakers from so many different language backgrounds. The term interlanguage was first proposed by Selinker (1972), who refers it to the mental grammar that a learner constructs at a specific stage in the learning process. In addition, interlanguage is used to refer to the learner's L2 competence as well. The concepts such as transfer, learning strategies, communication strategies, and fossilization are central in the theory of interlanguage.

Simultaneously, in the 1970s, the idea that errors may be caused by interlingual transfer is showing in the teaching process. Interlingual errors are explained as errors between the two languages involved, and the errors in the sentences are described as "negative transfer". In the contrastive analysis hypothesis, negative transfer is also predicted, of which errors are not a sign of failure, but evidence of the learner's developing systems, as signs of learning process. Brooks (1960:49) agrees that error analysis is not problem solving, but the formation and performance of habits. A behavior becomes a habit when a specific stimulus elicits an automatic response from the learner. It is in this way that the error analysis can become part of the teaching and learning method. By way of example, Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005:57) distinguish 5 steps in conducting an error analysis:

1. Collection of a sample of learner language
2. Identification of errors

3. Description of errors
4. Explanation of errors
5. Errors evaluation.

Moreover, the idea of error analysis develops that L2 learners, like L1 learners, should be seen as creatively constructing rules of grammar, and should be regarded as agents in the learning process. Hence, error analysis does not refer exclusively to the transfer of L1 structure, however, most errors are explained by the learner's cognitive development in the target language.

Error analysis also has its limitations, in particular it focuses on negative aspects of learners' performance; it is easy to persist in the error, because errors are not always pointed out to them in the correct or appropriate way. I have a good example from my own experience. When I was a junior student, my English teacher taught us as a grammar topic the phrase "something else". She said "remember 'something else' is not 'else something'." Unfortunately, I only remembered "else something" and chose the form "else something" many times in the exams. Therefore, it is necessary to warn the teachers and the learners when, where and how to use this method.

The errors analysis is reflected in Syllabus (2000) as:

*In the teaching process, we should establish students' self-confidence and help them find accomplishment. For the errors in the oral language presentation, we should according to the purpose of teaching activities and type of errors find an appropriate solution. It is not advocated that all the errors must be corrected.*

## 5. Communicative Competence

The term "communicative competence" was first developed by Hymes in the late 1960s. By contrast, Chomsky's competence-performance distinction is too restricted to account for language in use, Hymes (1971:12) describes communicative competence as "what a speaker needs to know to communicate effectively in culturally significant setting." From the times of proposing "communicative competence", the English teaching and learning really steps into "language in use".

Then, Hymes (1972:281) further divides communicative competence into four sectors:

- Whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible
- Whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available
- Whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate (adequate, happy, successful) in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated
- Whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails.

We can find the characteristics of communicative competence in the English curriculum in China. Five competences compose the Curriculum (2001), and they are: Grammar Competence Grammar competence includes five sections: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, function and topic. Students should have the ability to master vocabulary and pronunciation, to study the grammar in communication, to be familiar with the topics of daily life, hobby and interest, custom and culture in communication.

### **Linguistic Competence**

Linguistic competence includes four competences: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening and reading are the comprehensive competences, whereas speaking and writing are the expressive competences. Through the language practice, students should form the ability of comprehensive language in use, laying the foundation for the true communication.

### **Social Competence**

Social competence implies motivation, interest, self-confidence, social skills and the spirit of cooperation. Language learning should contribute to these areas as well in order to facilitate successful communication.

### **Sociocultural Competence**

The culture refers to history and geography, literature and art, lifestyle, local custom and values of the English language country. The goal of cultural understanding is to help students master and understand English language better, and to arouse the interest of students to learn English, further to improve their learning abilities and communicative abilities.

## **5. The Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)**

TBLT is a logical development of Communicative Language Teaching. Richards and Rodgers (2001:223) explain that it refers to an approach based on the use of tasks as the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching. The Malynsian Communicational Syllabus (1975) and the Bangalore Project (Beretta and Davies 1985; Prabhu 1987; Beretta 1990) were two early applications of a task-based approach within a communicative framework for language teaching. TBLT proposes the notion of “task” as a central unit of planning and teaching. Skehan (1996:20) describes task as:

*Tasks ... are activities which have meaning as their primary focus. Success in tasks is evaluated in terms of achievement of an outcome, and tasks generally bear some resemblance to real-life language use. So task-based instruction takes a fair strong view of communicative language teaching.*

A task is an activity or goal that is carried out using language, and Nunan (1989) suggests that a syllabus might specify two types of tasks: real-world tasks and pedagogical tasks, such as finding a solution to a puzzle, reading a map and giving directions, making a telephone call, writing a letter, or reading a set of instructions.

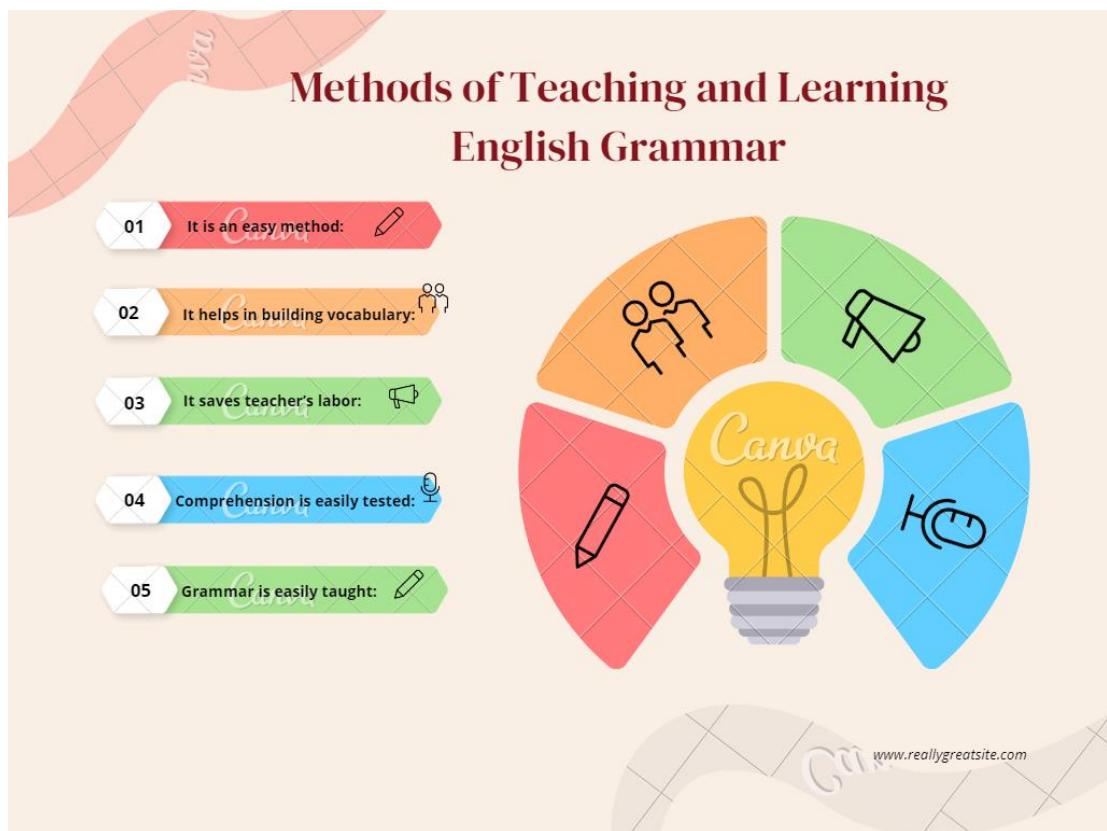
The suggestion of the main teaching method in Curriculum (2001) is the TELT, in which the major features adopt the assumptions of task-based instruction that are summarized by Feez (1998:17) as:

- The focus is on process rather than product.
- Basic elements are purposeful activities and tasks that emphasize communication and meaning.
- Learners learn language by interacting communicatively and purposefully while engaged in the activities and tasks.
- Activities and tasks can be rather: those that learners might need to achieve in real life; those that have a pedagogical purpose specific to the classroom.
- Activities and tasks of a task-based syllabus are sequenced according to difficulty.
- The difficulty of a task depends on a range of factors including the previous experience of the learner, the complexity of the task, the language required to undertake the task, and the degree of support available.

### **Knowledge from the Study**

The difference is to be found in their levels of flexibility. A method is a way of teaching where there are prescribed objectives and guidelines, and the teacher has little or no leeway when it comes to implementation. An approach is a way of teaching whose principles can be applied in many different ways.

This Grammar- Translation Method is also called Classical Method of teaching English. This method has enjoyed a very good reputation among the Indian teachers and the students, still enjoying. Translation Method means teaching a target language ( here it is English) by translating it into mother tongue. The teacher translates each word and sentence into the mother tongue. This is one of the simplest ways of teaching a foreign language. Neither the teacher nor the taught have to make extra efforts to learn the target language.



### 1. It is an easy method:

In this method the child proceeds from the known to unknown. He already knows his mother tongue and now he learns the English equivalents.

### 2. It helps in building vocabulary:

Translation method helps in the rapid expansion of vocabulary of the students as it avoids difficult definitions or lengthy explanations. The vocabulary is economically and effectively acquired. Students get the exact meanings of words.

### 3. It saves teacher's labor:

The teacher finds it very easy to prepare his lesson. He has not to think of the ways and means to explain new words. It doesn't require the teacher to make use of audio-visual aids.

### 4. Comprehension is easily tested:

Students' comprehension of English, especially at the early stages can be easily tested by asking them to answer questions in the mother tongue.

### 5. Grammar is easily taught:

Grammar of the foreign language is easily taught by comparing it with the grammar of the mother tongue.

## Conclusion

The study findings indicate that Grammar-Translation method is an important kind of teaching methodology that the teachers should adapt it to teach English as a second language. This Grammar- Translation Method is also called Classical Method of teaching English. This method has enjoyed a very good reputation among the Indian teachers and the students, still enjoying.

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