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GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION AND COMMUNICATIVE METHOD IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING: A PILOT STUDY

Abstract: The subject of this paper is the assessment of the effectiveness of two methods, the Grammar-Translation Method and the Communicative Method. The primary objective of this study is to determine which of the two methods contributes more to the acquisition of grammatical proficiency. Additionally, the study seeks to discern which method offers a higher level of reliability, leading to superior results in the context of grammatical competence. To achieve this goal, it was necessary to introduce a theoretical framework that sheds light on the characteristics and distinctions between these methods, and to conduct practical research. Consequently, the paper incorporates a pilot study conducted in a secondary school, involving one hundred students who were divided into two groups. One group of students received instruction through the Grammar-Translation Method, while the other group received instruction through the Communicative Method. After completing their lessons, both groups underwent testing, and the results obtained form the basis of this paper. Utilizing quantitative data analysis, it was observed that the communicative method demonstrates a higher level of efficiency, albeit with room for various interpretations.

Keywords: Grammar-Translation Method, communicative teaching, pilot study, secondary school, testing, reliability, quantitative analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

The teaching of foreign languages has been present since ancient times, but as its journey has been long, it has endured into the modern era. Passing through various socio-historical stages, the teaching of foreign languages has evolved and adapted to the needs of different contexts. Today, the study of foreign languages can be seen as a distinct entity within which we encounter methodologies, approaches, techniques, and principles of language teaching. Starting from the study of a foreign language we proceed to the development of a new discipline – sec-

ond language acquisition¹ (Kraš, Miličević 2015: 2). Such theoretical development contributes not only to the advancement of theoretical concepts but also simultaneously enhances the development of teaching practices. What should be emphasized is that there is no immediate definition or rule in the literature on how one language is acquired (Mitchell, Myles 2004: 2), which opens up numerous possibilities for examining pedagogical practices that could yield the most successful results when it comes to language acquisition, be it native or first/second, or a foreign language.

During the acquisition/learning of a foreign language, various factors emerge that directly or indirectly influence the process itself. Motivation, as an integral component in the process of learning a foreign language, pedagogical instructions provided to students, methods and techniques of individual learning, the cultural context in which a foreign language is acquired, along with many other factors, are indeed the elements that comprehensively integrate into the foreign language learning process. Furthermore, certain authors emphasize the existence of a propensity for languages (*language aptitude*) as yet another significant factor influencing the process of acquisition or language learning (DeKeyser, Koeth 2011: 395–406). Certainly, one should not overlook age or the age at which the process of acquiring a foreign language commences. Namely, there exist varying viewpoints regarding productivity, specifically when it comes to the initiation of second language acquisition. Thus, one group of proponents asserts that commencing the learning of a second language at an early age (*the younger, the better*) is preferable, while another group advocates the opposing thesis, being more inclined toward the idea of language acquisition at an older age (*the older, the better*) (Singleton, Ryan 2004: 61–84). Having considered all the possible factors that influence the process of second language acquisition, we come to the conclusion that for foreign language instruction to be well-coordinated and effective, attention should be paid not only to all the factors that arise during the process but also to both techniques and principles, as well as pedagogical instructions. Therefore, the methodology of foreign language teaching, with all its characteristics, offers a theoretical approach that can be used for the implementation of constructive practice.

As the dominance of certain foreign languages has shifted in response to labor market demands and global societal aspects, so has the methodology of foreign language teaching adapted to these changes. The methodology of foreign language teaching has been influenced not only by linguistics as a prominent discipline but has also been shaped by the influence of other disciplines such as psychology and sociology. Following global developments and societal needs, as well as the influence of other scientific disciplines, the methodology of language teaching, along with its principles and methods, has evolved, giving rise to new concepts. Contemporary methodology distinguishes between modern communi-

¹ The term 'second language acquisition' refers to learning a second language as a foreign one, while 'first language acquisition' implies the acquisition of the mother tongue.

cative approaches (CLT), alternative methods, and traditional practices (Richards, Rodgers 2018: 5–6). The classical approach, known in contemporary literature as the Grammar-Translation Method, originated in the past when foreign languages, such as Latin, were taught through the direct translation of language materials and the acquisition of grammatical rules. The mentioned method has persisted into the modern era, as indicated by contemporary practices in schools. However, its dominance waned with the emergence of new methods, particularly when the need for communicative competence arose. Emphasizing communicative competence, language teaching methodology adapted and offered a new way of language acquisition through the modern method, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The CLT method presented language material to students through conversation. In this way students acquire language units and simultaneously develop productive skills, primarily speaking. Considering the widespread use of the Grammar-Translation Method in both Serbia and worldwide educational contexts, alongside the observed challenges in fully mastering specific language units through the Communicative Approach, the paper endeavors to undertake a rigorous assessment of the effectiveness of both methodologies. To assess the efficacy of the methods, we conducted a pilot study by creating two groups of students who acquired the same language unit through the two aforementioned methods.

2. GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION METHOD

The purpose of learning foreign languages, as well as the dominance of specific languages, has significantly evolved throughout history. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, the primary role in learning was fulfilled by the Grammar-Translation Method. Considering that education during that period was focused on the study of classical literature, philosophy, and other academic disciplines, there emerged a need to comprehend written texts. Therefore, the study of a foreign language was regarded as an academic discipline rather than as a means of facilitating everyday social interaction among cultures (Adamson 2004: 606).

Indeed, the Grammar-Translation Method, which had existed earlier as a classical/traditional approach, holds prominence in foreign language instruction. The focus of the traditional method lies in the acquisition of grammatical rules and their proper application in sentences, which are subsequently translated into the native/first language (Richards, Rodgers 2018: 5; Harmer 2007: 63). Furthermore, translation is not just a secondary technique of the method; rather, it is integrated as an essential part of second language acquisition. In addition to focusing on syntactic structures, the acquisition of vocabulary, i.e. foreign words, is inherent in the method itself. Texts from textbooks often serve as the sole sources for acquiring and encountering new vocabulary. However, in addition to texts, the frequent use of bilingual dictionaries containing *a priori* translations of memorized words is

common (Richards, Rodgers 2018: 6). This involves a direct search for equivalents that exist within the languages themselves. Examining the fundamental characteristics and peculiarities of the Grammar-Translation Method, it can be affirmed that the method aims to achieve both grammatical and lexical purism. More precisely, this manner of language acquisition (through the traditional method) aims to prioritize precision as the method's primary objective. By emphasizing precision and accuracy in the use of a foreign language, it should be noted that linguistic purism is present in certain language skills, most commonly manifested in writing skills. In addition to a significant emphasis on the writing skill and work therein, the reading skill is closely correlated with the aforementioned skill. The Grammar-Translation Method primarily aims at comprehension of written material; hence, translation techniques are employed as a means to understand and enhance both of these skills. Certainly, this does not imply that the remaining language skills, namely listening and speaking skills, are entirely neglected. However, it is true that the traditional method does not systematically incorporate these skills (Richards, Rodgers 2018: 6). This directly impacts their overall progress and development. Relying on specific techniques such as memorizing certain phrases contributes to their fixed reproduction. While memorizing such phrases does lead to some improvement, particularly in the speaking skill, this practice cannot lead to complete purity in speaking competence.

To fully implement the Grammar-Translation Method and achieve its goals and objectives, specific techniques within the method are utilized as means to accomplish these aims. In educational practice, teachers of foreign languages who adopt the traditional method in the classroom use techniques that are integral to it. The literature highlights those techniques that contribute to the development of skills dominant within the method, primarily reading and writing skills. These techniques include, but are not limited to: translation technique, answering questions based on the text, antonyms/synonyms, memorization technique, using a word in a sentence, filling in the blank spaces, and others (Freeman, Anderson 2011: 41–42). The listed techniques can also serve as exercises or learning tasks assigned to students.

What is noticeable is that authors pay special attention to the translation technique (Freeman, Anderson 2011: 41–42). The reason for this undoubtedly lies in the fact that the very name of the method implies that translation, as a technique, is implemented in teaching practice. In this regard, it should be noted that the role of translation in education in the modern world provokes various contrasting opinions and controversies (Djelloul, Neddar 2017: 163). One of the reasons why there is a stance that translation should not be used in foreign language teaching is because translation is directly associated with the Grammar-Translation Method, creating the belief that the native language, or translation in educational practice, will not develop all four language skills. Despite this perspective, the use of both the method and translation techniques in practice is evident. These claims have

been confirmed by N. Janković in a study that indicated that 59% of the secondary education students who participated in the study followed English language classes using the Grammar-Translation Method, specifically relying on translation techniques (Janković 2016: 103). Such data present a realistic classroom scenario, highlighting the need for further investigation into the effectiveness or productivity of the method and its techniques. Its role in foreign language teaching is undeniable; numerous indicators emphasize that the traditional method can be beneficial both in terms of vocabulary acquisition and explaining syntactic or grammatical differences, as well as in the analysis of discourse between two languages (Nenadović, Tomović, Janković 2019: 423–429). Conversely, the Grammar-Translation Method, when integrated with contemporary technologies that have long been a part of education, adapts by modifying certain techniques and exercises to maintain the attention and motivation of today's generation of students². For example, in order to sustain attention and the technique of memorization, teachers can implement video materials and various games aimed at memorizing lexical content in practice. This approach achieves the preservation of the Grammar-Translation Method and a level of motivation, while the degree of effectiveness compared to other methods remains to be explored.

3. COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

In light of advancements in foreign language instruction, methodology, pedagogy, and the promotion and strengthening of speaking skills and their practical application, the communicative approach to foreign language learning, known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)³, emerged. The Communicative Approach, or Communicative Method, emerged in the late 20th century coinciding with socio-economic changes. During the late 20th century, a trend of international travel became noticeable, with people increasingly exploring foreign countries, and the socio-political situation was improving. Education became accessible not only to the affluent but also, for the first time, created opportunities for learning and education for a larger segment of the population. Such global changes demanded new alternatives in the realm of foreign language instruction. In order for people to be trained to use a foreign language in foreign countries to facilitate social interaction and to conduct business collaborations with foreign

² The phrase 'today's generation of students' refers to the generation that was born in the era of the Internet and has become digitally literate. Additionally, such generations often learn through the Internet, video content, and other multimedia materials (Minić, Spalević, Gadžić 2011: 1680).

³ The term 'Communicative Language Teaching' (CLT) encompasses the 'Communicative Method,' which serves as the umbrella term. In literature, the teaching methodology also introduces the term 'Communicative Approach' (CA) because the Communicative Method can be viewed as an approach to language learning.

partners, the need for communicative competence was more than essential. For this reason, teaching methodology integrates a new method, the communicative method, which is tasked with responding to the newly emerged demands. In this context, the focus begins to shift from linguistic competencies to communicative competencies, where fluency in speech takes precedence over linguistic precision. This directly implies that the Grammar-Translation Method, which advocated for the improvement of grammatical competencies, memorization of pre-prepared dialogues, and formal registers, could not enhance communicative skills. On the other hand, the opponent, the Communicative Method, offers specific solutions by implementing improvised practice and the use of natural language in speech (Radić-Bojanić 2020: 12). In this way, improvised practice contributed to greater freedom of expression for students in a foreign language, prioritizing fluency over absolute linguistic precision. What the use of natural language, from another perspective, contributes to is direct contact with contemporary features of the foreign language.

Communication as a means of maintaining contact is considered a social interaction that is not a fixed linguistic system; on the contrary, it is of a dynamic nature and influenced by the social context (Adamson 2004: 608). This implies that the Communicative Method, which focuses on developing communicative competencies, relies on the social context. Its practice involves social interaction that leads to natural, rather than fixed, use of a foreign language. Therefore, according to the Communicative Method, teaching and learning serve the purpose of developing communication. This method assumes that language always occurs in a social context that should not be separated when learning a foreign language (Chang 2011: 16). For the Communicative Method to be successfully implemented and to effectively enhance all the aspects it advocates for, it is necessary to consider communicative competencies and gain a comprehensive understanding of what they represent.

Communicative competence is considered to manifest in terms of expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning. It also takes into account psycholinguistic and socio-cultural perspectives in second language acquisition research to explain its development (Savignon 2002: 1). In the book *Communicative Language Teaching Today*, Richards (2006: 3) states that communicative competencies encompass certain aspects of language knowledge, such as:

- Knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions;
- Knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants (e.g. knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication);
- Knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts (e.g. narratives, reports, interviews, conversations);

- Knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (e.g. through using different kinds of communication strategies).

Examining the previously mentioned aspects of knowledge, we can once again conclude that communicative competence depends on a broader discourse, namely its manner of use in a social context. We encounter such an assertion in the works of Hymes, who emphasized that communicative competence did not solely encompass a grammatical competence but, instead, included the ability to use language in various communicative situations (Hymes 1972). Furthermore, for students to enhance their communicative competencies, they need encounters with different situations and various contexts. Therefore, communicative competence is relative, not absolute, and depends on all participants involved (Savignon 1983: 9).

When it comes to competencies, and the Communicative Method is associated with communicative competencies, it should be noted that Canale and Swain classified grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies within communicative competence (Canale, Swain 1980: 29–31). Analyzing communicative competence as a whole leads us to the viewpoint that it does not advocate solely for communicative skill but directed certain attention to other competencies. This implies that competencies are interconnected, and working on all linguistic segments is necessary. Bojović confirmed this hypothesis in her doctoral dissertation, stating that when progress and improvement occurred in one component, that component interacted with the others with the aim of achieving progress in overall communicative competence (Bojović 2013: 21). Taking into account that communicative competence relies on other components, we can conclude that the Communicative Method also integrates other disciplines. Here, it is primarily important to emphasize that the Communicative Method, although its name primarily suggests communicative skills, does not exclude other language skills. Regarding language skills, in addition to speaking skills, the method also fosters reading, listening, writing, as well as grammar and the cultural aspects of the foreign language (Wong 2012: 2).

Drawing a parallel between the traditional and communicative methods, we observe that through the traditional method, practice does not emphasize the role of the social context and does not pay attention to language in use. The entire linguistic material, both grammar and vocabulary, are memorized by heart (Kukić 2021: 252). On the other hand, the Communicative Method advocates for the productive use of language in context. Concerning the first language, the communicative method explicitly prohibits the use of the first language, emphasizing the importance of learning the foreign language only through it (Kumaravadivelu 2006: 188). In this way, we can discern the primary differences between the two methods, which, in addition to theoretical distinctions, also entail different teaching practices.

4. METHODOLOGY

The corpus on which this research is based consists of 100 completed tests from third- and fourth-year students of the “Nikola Tesla” Electrotechnical School in Belgrade. On average, the students had been learning the English language in the educational system for around 8–10 years. The reason for selecting the third and fourth years is that both groups of students were following instruction at the B2 level (according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). Since the aim of the research is to examine the effectiveness of two methods, the Grammar-Translation Method and the Communicative Method, the students were divided into two groups. One group (G), consisting of 50 students, followed instruction using the Grammar-Translation Method, while the other group (C), consisting of 50 students, acquired the language unit through the Communicative Method. Both groups, over a period of two weeks during the 2022/23 school year, followed instruction using their respective methods, focusing on the same grammatical unit, the agreement of tenses in indirect speech.

The reason for selecting indirect speech as the topic of study lies in the fact that this grammatical structure is often present in everyday speech, with insufficient attention typically given to its syntactic form, particularly tense agreement. Furthermore, this grammatical unit facilitated the implementation of instruction through the Communicative Method as it seamlessly integrated into the speaking skill, while also offering numerous possibilities for the Traditional Method. Students who acquired this grammatical unit through the Communicative Method were exposed to peer interaction and communication with the teacher. Any errors that arose in speech related to this unit were corrected so as to maintain linguistic precision. On the other hand, students exposed to the Grammar-Translation Method relied on the textbook, and the grammatical unit was acquired deductively, with instruction primarily oriented toward the teacher–student dynamic.

When it comes to the testing itself, we opted for a set of 12 sentences that needed to be translated from Serbian into English. The test primarily assessed knowledge of indirect speech in the English language, examining how well students had mastered tense agreement in indirect speech. Both groups, G and C, translated the same sentences. One of the reasons for choosing translation as the testing method is its suitability for both teaching methods. While conducting instruction through the Communicative Method, we observed that in most cases, students would first translate a given sentence into English before expressing it. Given the notion that translation can contribute to the development of fluency (Atkinson 1987: 241–247), personal practice, as well as the characteristic of the traditional method, translation served as an adequate tool.

5. RESEARCH RESULTS – ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Starting this research with the aim of highlighting the role and effectiveness of two methods and drawing upon previous experience in working with students (which primarily initiated this research), we expected a certain level of effectiveness for each method. However, at the same time, we provided potential reasons that directly influenced the final outcome. The research results are presented as percentages (%) based on the completed test. After completing the test, all students were assessed according to the school grading system used in the Republic of Serbia. Specifically, students received grades within a range of 1 to 5. A grade of 1 signifies that the student did not pass the test, implying that they did not demonstrate proficiency in the language unit. Conversely, a grade of 5 indicates that the student achieved a full command of the language unit. The test was structured so that each sentence within it was assigned a value of 1 point, with a minimum passing threshold of 4 points. Table 1 provides a visual representation of the grading criteria and the corresponding assignment of grades.

Table 1. Grading criteria

Points (the number of correct sentences)	Grade
4	1
6	2
8	3
10	4
12	5

It is worth noting that the sentences within the test were presented in isolation, outside of context. However, each of them contained a previously covered language unit (tense agreement in indirect speech in the English language). During error analysis, we focused exclusively on tense agreement, disregarding other potential errors (misspelled words, incorrect translations of certain words/phrases, untranslated segments unrelated to the verb phrase, etc.).

At the outset, we initiated our analysis with Group C (the group of students who learned through the Communicative Method), comprising 50 students, with 25 students from the third grade and the remaining 25 from the fourth grade. Table 2 illustrates the obtained results.

Table 2. The results of the effectiveness of the Communicative Method, Group C

Grades	5	4	3	2	1
The number of students who received a specific grade	8	5	7	5	25
%	16%	10%	14%	10%	50%

Based on the conducted test among students who followed classes through the communicative method, we have derived the following results: out of 50 students, only 25 students managed to pass the test. To be more precise, the Communicative Method achieved a pass rate of 50%. Regarding the highest grades (4 and 5), only 13 students (26%) were able to achieve excellent results, while the remaining 12 students received intermediate (3) or barely passing (2) grades.

Based on the illustrated table, the conclusion that can be drawn is that the Communicative Method did not yield its intended effects entirely. To consider the Communicative Method effective, we anticipated a higher pass rate, i.e. the number of students who passed the test should have exceeded 50% (which is not the case).

One factor that may have contributed to these results is the fact that students were not explicitly exposed to translation during their lessons, which resulted in them not paying sufficient attention to tense agreement and not being adequately prepared for this type of assessment. Furthermore, as the test did not carry direct consequences for the students and the grades were not of a formal nature (low-stakes testing), students did not perceive the test as crucial, leading to relatively poor results. What is noteworthy is that, upon analyzing the errors, it becomes evident that all mistakes stem from the realm of tense agreement. Specifically, students fail to discern the difference between their native language and the target language. For instance, in the part of the sentence that conveys someone else's words or thoughts, the present tense is retained in Serbian – *Mihajlo je rekao da nosi plavu majicu danas*. However, in English, this requires a shift in tense (backshift)⁴. Therefore, the accurate translation should be *Michael said that he was wearing a blue T-shirt that day, not is wearing*. Such errors are somewhat understandable, considering that the Communicative Method did not incorporate the use of the native language during the teaching process.

In contrast to Group C, Group G (comprising students who were taught using the grammar-translation method) consisted of 50 students, with 25 students belonging to the third grade, and the remaining 25 comprising the fourth grade. Table 3 within the framework presents the effectiveness of the traditional method, specifically the test results.

⁴ For further information on the subject of tense agreement in indirect speech, please refer to Rimmer, Davis (2011: 164–171).

Table 3. The results of the effectiveness of the Grammar-Translation Method, Group G

Grades	5	4	3	2	1
The number of students who received a specific grade	2	6	5	5	30
%	4,16%	12,5%	10,41%	10,41%	62,5%

On the basis of the Table 3, we observe that out of a total of 50 students, 18 students passed the test, signifying an efficacy rate of 37.48% for the Grammar-Translation Method. On the other hand, more than half of the students did not achieve a passing grade, indicating a declining trend in the effectiveness of the method.

The achieved results of students who underwent instruction through the traditional method indicate that the level of efficiency of this approach is not satisfactory. To be more precise, this method did not assist students in mastering grammatical structures, and there could be various reasons for this. One of the contributing factors is certainly the lack of interaction and student involvement during the instructional process, as communication predominantly flows from teacher to student. This unidirectional nature does not motivate or engage students effectively.

Additionally, similar to the Communicative Method, the nature of the test, which was informal, could have influenced the outcomes of this method. However, it is worth noting that the concept of the test or sentence translation to students in this group was more than familiar, as they were exposed to exercises involving translation during their lessons. Therefore, the reason for the poor results cannot be attributed to the test's concept.

6. CONCLUSION

The educational process, teaching methodology, and the field of pedagogy itself are often intertwined with the numerous challenges posed by contemporary society. These challenges emerge right from the outset, particularly during the selection of an appropriate teaching method. Given that the methodology of foreign language teaching is a complex discipline and its practical application demands special attention, we have decided to conduct research encompassing two methods: the Grammar-Translation Method and the Communicative Method, both of which are prevalent in schools not only in Serbia but also worldwide. The objective of this research was to investigate which method would yield greater efficiency concerning the acquisition of linguistic sections, specifically grammatical components.

Following the conducted research and a thorough examination of the corpus material, it can be concluded that the Communicative Method exhibited a higher

level of success compared to the Grammar-Translation Method by 12.52%. In other words, 25 students mastered the designated section through the Communicative Method, while only 18 students achieved a positive outcome through the traditional method.

Having established that the Communicative Method has demonstrated superior outcomes in this study, it is imperative to underscore that research of this nature inherently raises a plethora of inquiries concerning the effectiveness of pedagogical methodologies. Moreover, we acknowledge the capacity for diverse interpretations and in-depth analyses of the obtained results, given the manifold factors that exert influence upon the ultimate outcome. Regrettably, certain variables, such as language proficiency levels and test validity, were beyond the scope of our investigation. Consequently, we posit that this study will serve as a foundational element upon which future research endeavors within the realm of pedagogical methodology and its associated methods can be constructed.

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ГРАМАТИЧКО-ПРЕВОДИЛАЧКИ И КОМУНИКАТИВНИ МЕТОД У НАСТАВИ ЕНГЛЕСКОГ ЈЕЗИКА: ПИЛОТ ИСТРАЖИВАЊЕ

Резиме: Предмет овог рада је разматрање ефикасности два метода, граматичко-преводиначког и комуникативног. Основни циљ рада је да испита који од понуђена два метода више доприноси усвајању граматичких јединица, односно који метод пружа већи степен поузданости и који доводи до бољих резултата у погледу стицања граматичких компетенција. Како би рад испунио свој циљ – неопходно је било увести теоријски концепт који освјетљава карактеристике и разлике метода, али и спровести истраживање у пракси. Стога, у раду интегришемо пилот истраживање које је спроведено у средњој школи. У пилот истраживање укључено је било 100 ученика, који су били распоређени у двије групе. Једна група је пратила наставу посредством граматичко-преводиначког метода, а друга је усвајала језички материјал ослањајући се на комуникативни метод. Обје групе су након спроведене наставе приступиле процесу тестирања, а добијени резултати представљају корпус овог рада. Примјеном квантитативне анализе података, уочено је да комуникативни метод има већи степен ефикасности, али и да се оставља простор за различите интерпретације.

Кључне ријечи: граматичко-преводиначки метод, комуникативни метод, пилот истраживање, средња школа, квантитативна анализа, ефикасност.