

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18485/philologia.2023.21.21.7>

UDC: 37.091.3:811.111

811.111'276.6:658

## ■ GRAMMAR AND COMMUNICATION: TWO LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACHES

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U radu se analiziraju dve nastavne metode, gramatičko-prevodna (Grammar-Translation Method, GTM) i komunikativna (Communicative Language Teaching, CLT). Nakon kratkog istorijata i opisa dve metode, njihovih prednosti i nedostataka, sledi praktični deo, koji predstavlja osvrt na kurs poslovnog engleskog za zaposlene u poslovnom sektoru. Cilj kursa bio je obučiti zaposlene za kompetentnu poslovnu komunikaciju na engleskom, naročito usmenu. Dok bi CLT bio očigledan izbor metode za takav kurs, ispostavilo se da je polaznicima različitih nivoa predznanja bila neophodna postepena progresija od GTM ka CLT. U radu je stoga reprodukovan jedan odabir postupnih vežbanja.

Ključne reči: gramatičko-prevodni metod, komunikativna nastava jezika, poslovni engleski, spoljna i unutrašnja motivacija, prezentacije grafikona.

### 1. THE GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION METHOD (GTM)

The GTM is practically the oldest language teaching method. It originated from the traditional teaching of Greek and Latin throughout the centuries, hence also called the 'Classical Method' (Larsen-Freeman 2003: 11), the 'Prussian Method', or indeed the 'Ciceronian Method' (Richards/Rodgers 2001: 3). This method was arguably the only possible one in premodern times, when few teachers had regular opportunities to maintain high level of oral fluency in non-native language, nor were the students expected to be orally active. Its prime goal has been to train students for reading literature in other languages. As Richards and Rodgers describe it (2001: 3), it is "a way of studying a language that approaches a 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." With the sentence as the elementary teaching unit, vocabulary is likewise perceived as a toolbox for reading prose passages (for successful strategies of learning vocabulary, see Thornbury 2002).

Larsen-Freeman (2003: 19–20) provides a list of some common techniques often associated with, though not exclusive to, the GTM: translation of a passage; reading comprehension questions; antonyms/synonyms; recognizing and memorizing cognates;

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deductive application of grammar rules; fill-in-the-blanks; vocabulary memorization; students create sentences with the new vocabulary items; essay composition (the final task, practicing both vocabulary and grammar).

Teacher's role in GTM is the *ex cathedra* authority providing instructions and feedback and controlling the class dynamics. Since classroom activity can come down to following course-book instructions, often no initiative on the part of the students is necessary. Their participation is segmented, and their contribution restricted to a sequence of prompts and correct responses. The students' role is essentially passive, and their motivation consists in reaching the predefined goal.

Despite the variety of individual steps and assignments, GTM is by far the most traditional method available. In its less inspiring execution, the method can turn out unstimulating. Yet a carefully structured sequence of exercises is necessary on a beginner level, where, among other advantages, the language of instruction can be the students' native language and the tasks can be formulated unambiguously.

## 2. COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT)

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) "aims to make a communicative competence the goal of language teaching and develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills [i.e., listening, speaking, reading, writing] that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication" (Richards and Rodgers 2001: 66). According to Hymes, communicative competence is "what a speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community" (Hymes 1972: 281). That is, the goal is to know what to say in different situations and how to say it.

Communicative competence thus means applying the knowledge acquired in an artificial classroom environment to real-life situations. As opposed to GTM, CLT treats grammar primarily as a means of support for further advancement of these communicative skills. As postulated by Ur (2006: 5):

Grammar, then, may furnish the basis for a set of classroom activities during which it becomes temporarily the main learning objective. But the keyword here is *temporarily*. The learning of grammar should be seen in the long term as one of the means of acquiring a thorough mastery of the language as a whole, not as an end in itself. Thus, although at an early stage we may ask our students to learn a certain structure through exercises that concentrate on virtually meaningless manipulations of language we should quickly progress to activities that use it meaningfully. And even these activities will be superseded eventually by general fluency practice, where the emphasis is on successful communication, and any learning of grammar takes place only as an incidental to this main objective.

CLT is not a distinct method with clearly defined content or teaching routines: "[t]here is no single text or authority on it, nor any single model that is universally accepted as authoritative. [...] The range of exercise types and activities compatible with a communicative approach is unlimited (Richards/Rodgers 2001: 66, 76). Wesche and Skehan (2002: 208) list some criteria for identifying CLT: activities that require

frequent interaction among learners in exchanging information and to solve problems; use of authentic (non-pedagogic) texts and communication activities linked to “real-world” contexts, emphasizing links across written and spoken modes and channels (for some recent empirical observations, see Vlahović 2011); learner-centered activities, addressing learners’ needs, and goals. Richards (2006: 12) observes that the focus of CLT is encouraging learners to develop communicative competence by experimenting with language and ultimately *discovering* grammar rules. CLT entails not only the importance of what aspects of language are taught, but how they are taught. Howatt (1984: 279) posits an interesting distinction between a ‘strong’ and a ‘weak’ version of CLT:

The weak version which has become more or less standard practice in the last ten years, stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes and, characteristically, attempts to integrate such activities into a wider program of language teaching [...] The ‘strong’ version of communicative teaching, on the other hand, advances the claim that language is acquired through communication, so that it is not merely a question of activating an existing but inert knowledge of the language, but of stimulating the development of language system itself. If the former could be described as ‘learning to use’ English, the latter entails ‘using English to learn it’.

According to Littlewood’s *Communicative Language Teaching* (2001), communicative activities provide “whole-task practice” and improve motivation, while “many aspects of language learning can take place only through natural processes, which operate when a person is involved using the language for communication” (Littlewood 2001: 17–18). A clearly defined purpose of learning is essential. This contributes to merging the extrinsic with intrinsic motivation (classification in Brown 2007: 168–175), or as Gardener and Lambert (1972) call them, “instrumental” and “integrative.” Littlewood (2001: 16–64) distinguishes between two main categories of communicative classroom activities: “functional communication activities” (comparing images; arranging images in a sequence; following oral directions for orientation in a visually represented space, etc.) and “social interaction activities” (dialogues and role plays, simulations, improvisations, debates, etc.; for a distinction between simulations and role plays, see Ladousse 1987: 5).

Clearly, CLT requires more management skills from teachers than the GTM (cf. Jin *et al.* 2005: 6), and CLT classes can become much less predictable (Medgyes 1986). Ideally, teachers’ roles in CLT should vary, from being a controller, an organizer or a prompter, to being a participant, a tutor or an observer (Harmer 2006: 57–64), an explainer, involver, and enabler (Scrivener 2005: 25). Breen and Candlin (1980: 99) list the following roles: facilitator of communication process, independent participant, resource organizer, guide, researcher and learner. Among many other roles, in CLT a teacher should be a general overseer “coordinating the activities into a coherent progression” (Littlewood 2001: 92–93). In a nutshell, one of the teachers’ main duties is to “establish situations likely to promote communication” so that students are ultimately enabled to become responsible “managers of their own learning” (Larsen-Freeman 2000: 128, 129).

### 3. IN-HOUSE COURSES

In the following section, we shall reflect on these two teaching approaches through some observations from two very similar but independent in-house courses in Business English. They were held in 2022/23 to middle-management employees of a private pharmaceutical trade company and a government public consultancy agency. The former group varied from five to eight employees throughout the year, while the latter consisted of twelve regular course-takers. The required focus of both courses was oral communication, partly for online meetings but mostly for presentations. As all of the students are adult professionals, 'learning to use' English immediately, the 'weak' CLT approach seemed like an appropriate choice. Yet, unsurprisingly, the initial diagnostics showed that the course-takers were to enter the course with considerably different levels of language competence. This meant not only that they had to be divided according to their levels, but that many of them were simply not ready for 'communicative competence' as a starting point only to 'discover' grammar rules along the way.

Some early CLT attempts at presentation workshops indicated that a solid share of course-takers would struggle with grammatical and lexical accuracy to a point where the training would defeat its purpose. The prospect was that of a vicious circle: the language they used was, at best, imprecise and, at worst, inaccurate; the performance appears improvised, clumsy and unprofessional. This produces a sense of frustration and insecurity for the course-takers, leading to poor performance, and so on. For establishing "situations likely to promote communication" (Larsen-Freeman 2000, above), the last thing they needed was to navigate the potentially less predictable course of CLT (Medgyes 1986, above).

Perhaps needless to point out, instruction held two or three times a week during work hours in a non-native environment cannot aspire to amount to an immersion course, where language is absorbed, and rules 'discovered' unconsciously. To paraphrase Penny Ur (quoted above), in order to progress to activities that use language meaningfully, we needed to start with exercises that concentrate on virtually meaningless manipulations of language. In other words, many preparatory steps were necessary before some course-takers were to become "managers of their own learning."

What follows below are suggestions for some phases of this step-by-step process of gradual, coherent progression from GTM to CLT. Each step is designed to build on the previous one and lead to the next one. Adapted and combined from various textbooks (Grussendorf 2007; Freitag-Lawrence 2010; Mascull 2010) and other resources, most of the exercises below were tested in practice in the exact form presented here, while some are excerpted and abbreviated for the sake of the presentation. This selection of lessons and exercises is intended as a sample for orientation purposes; all of them can be expanded or shortened. Most of them can be easily adjusted according to the students' level, and indeed different students can be assigned slightly modified versions at the same time.

For this occasion, one specific goal is chosen, that of learning to present graphs and charts, a skill that all the course-takers needed to acquire.

1. The first step is the vocabulary necessary for presenting graphs and charts, above all the verbs describing statuses and changes. The list below is illustratively presented next to a simple sample of a line chart showing the described movements:

Verbs: *boom / climb / collapse / contract / decline / decrease / double / drop / expand / fall / flatten out / fluctuate / go down / go up / grow / hit a low / increase / level off / pick up / plunge / plummet / reach a high / recover / remain stable / remain steady / rise / rocket / slump / soar / stabilize / stay the same.*

Nouns: *decrease / drop / fall / growth / hike / increase / jump / rise / recession.*

Adjectives and adverbs: *dramatic / drastic / fast / gradual / moderate / rapid / slight / slow / small / steep; dramatically / drastically / gradually / moderately / quickly / rapidly / slightly / slowly / a little / steeply.*

The exercise for this section is, first, classifying the nouns and verbs in three rubrics: upward movement, downward movement, other. Next, finding antonyms, both the more obvious ones, such as *rise/fall, go up/go down*, etc., and those more nuanced: *hit a low/reach a high; fluctuate/remain stable; plummet/soar; rapid fall/gradual growth*, etc.

2. The next step is learning the two most frequently used tenses in presenting graphs, past simple and present perfect. In particular:

Past simple refers to a movement or a trend that happened in the past and is now finished, signaled by expressions such as *last month/year; in April; from 2009-2014; during the period of...*, etc. Present perfect refers to a movement which is not yet finished, signaled by expressions such as, *since (January; 2012; the last report, etc.), for (the three years), over (the past three years)*. Examples: *In September the production **rose** to 2 million. Between January and April the production **fell** by 70%. The investments **have declined** since 2011. The revenues **have grown** rapidly over the past year.*

The exercise in forms is filling a standard table:

past simple	present perfect	infinitive
		go up
	has declined	
fell		
		to recover

3. Moving towards more contextualized tasks, the next assignment is filling the blanks in two graph reports with exact verb forms, by looking at the image of the graph and paying attention to the timeline:

a) *decline / fall / fluctuated / picking up / reached / rose / slumped*

As we can see here, visitor numbers \_\_\_\_\_ between 3,000 and 3,500 monthly in the last three months. They even \_\_\_\_\_ moderately in March. In April you can see a

*sharp \_\_\_\_\_ in visitor numbers. The interest of the public \_\_\_\_\_ to about 2,000 – a \_\_\_\_\_ of about 30%. As a result, the ticket sales started \_\_\_\_\_ in June. By the end of August, visitor numbers had \_\_\_\_\_ just over 2,500.*

*b) increase / rocketed / rose / stood / went down*

*The figure \_\_\_\_\_ by about 70,000 in the following year. In 2016, however, sales \_\_\_\_\_ to 1,2 million. 2017 witnessed a further \_\_\_\_\_ in sales to 1,4 million. As expected, sales \_\_\_\_\_ again in 2018 and \_\_\_\_\_ at just over 1,1 million at the end of the year.*

4. The next assignment is matching two graphs with two out of three descriptions offered (or more, depending on their length). This assignment is especially convenient for a tiered approach: course-takers of different levels can be given easier or more difficult choices, the latter being choosing between more nuanced descriptions (e.g., a *rapid* and a *steady rise*). This assignment also leaves sufficient room for engineering the descriptions to address whatever needs to be addressed, such as new phrases or difficult vocabulary.

5. The next assignment is describing a line graph from beginning till the end using the learned phrases and vocabulary. This exercise offers a lot of flexibility. For example, to account for the students' different levels, some can be asked to memorize the phrases and vocabulary in advance, and required not to repeat them, while some others can be given a list. Students can work in separate groups in order to compare results.

6. Next comes learning phrases to be used during the various phases of presentations as a whole; for example, by matching the half-sentences:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>It is interesting to note that</i>  | a) <i>you'll see what I mean.</i>          |
| 2. <i>On the next slide</i>               | b) <i>down now?</i>                        |
| 3. <i>Can I take this slide</i>           | c) <i>to the second graph.</i>             |
| 4. <i>You will have</i>                   | d) <i>seen that sales have peaked.</i>     |
| 5. <i>Take a look at this chart and</i>   | e) <i>the previous page.</i>               |
| 6. <i>There's another example on</i>      | f) <i>you can see all the main points.</i> |
| 7. <i>I'd like to draw your attention</i> | g) <i>the number has levelled out.</i>     |

Or by arranging the words back into sentences:

- past / this / in / graph / shows / trends / the / the / month*
- more / look / closely / figures / let's / these / at*
- on / table / slide / the / can / you / next / see / the*
- break / for / do / I'll / down / you*
- that / may / sales / noticed / peaked / you / year / have / last*
- popular / is / model / least / the / the / latest*

7. Only now comes the final task of preparing and delivering a complete oral presentation of actual graphs, or even a made-up one simulating the data for presentation purposes.

To conclude, while it is true that in Business English “performance objectives take priority over educational objectives or language learning for its own sake” (Ellis/Johnson 1994: 7), the performance can hardly be successful if language is inadequate. Whereas in ordinary daily communication it will usually get one through to use language unidiomatically but sufficiently comprehensibly, in a business environment the stakes can be higher, especially in oral communication. One need not say something downright wrong; being imprecise, even for a moment, can send a risky message that the speaker is not fully in control of the information. Likewise, an important aspect of any interpersonal interaction, let alone business transaction, are the communicative conventions of the situation (exercise 6). In short, only once the grammar rules and the register are in place can tedious memorization “be superseded... by general fluency practice, where the emphasis is on successful communication” (Ur 2006, cited above).

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## SUMMARY

### GRAMMAR AND COMMUNICATION: TWO LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACHES

This paper analyzes two teaching approaches, the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). A brief history and description of the two methods, their advantages and disadvantages, is followed by the practical section, reflecting on an in-house Business English course. The goal of the course was to train employees for competent business communication, especially oral. While CLT would have been the obvious choice for such a course, it turned out that course-takers of different levels of background knowledge needed a step-by-step progression from the GTM to CLT. A selection of tiered exercises is reproduced in the paper.

**KEYWORDS:** Grammar-Translation Method, Communicative Language Teaching, Business English, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, graph presentations.

#### ARTICLE INFO:

Professional article

Received: November 5, 2023

Revised: November 27, 2023

Accepted: November 28, 2023