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Traditional methods in foreign language teaching

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BEFECTETÉS A JÖVŐBE

1. Some introductory thoughts on language teaching methods in general

When engaging in learning a foreign language, a language learner is faced with an immense task. There are various skills and knowledges to master, such as the grammatical competence (including the phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and the vocabulary of a language), the sociolinguistic competence (what utterances are appropriate to use in a given situation and how to join the parts of speech together correctly) and the strategic competence (how to handle potential communication failures). Language teachers therefore have a great responsibility in how best they can facilitate the learning process for their learners.

When planning a language course, a teacher has to consider a variety of different factors. Being familiar with the students' background (language proficiency, goals, motivation, age, etc.) is one of the most important aspects, when deciding about the methodology. Different methods draw on different theoretical backgrounds and thus approach language learning from different angles. Language teachers are advised to be aware of the existing language teaching methods in order to make well-informed decisions about their courses.

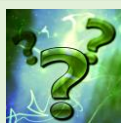
In order to illustrate how different methodologies can be, we are going to get acquainted with two of the most classical methods of language teaching, the **Grammar-Translation Method** and the **Direct Method**.

2. The Grammar-Translation Method

The Grammar-Translation Method is probably the oldest language teaching method. It used to serve the purpose of teaching the classical languages, Latin and Greek, therefore it also used to be referred to with the name 'Classical Method'.

Original purposes

The original purpose of the method was to help language learners read and appreciate foreign language literature. At the same time, the idea was that by reading literary texts, learners can become more familiar with the grammar of their native language also write and speak their native language better. Additionally, language learning was considered a helpful mental exercise which contributed to the development of the individuals.



Thinking task

Try and imagine a language class where the Grammar-Translation Method is applied. How do you imagine the classroom? What are the stages of the lesson?



Illustration

Please pretend that you are a language learner (your mother tongue is Hungarian and you learn English as a foreign language). The following task sheet is an illustration of the Grammar-Translation Method.

Task 1 Olvassa el az alábbi szöveget.

Winnie the Pooh (excerpt) – A.A. Milne

One day when Winnie the Pooh was out walking, he came to an open place in the middle of the forest, and in the middle of this place was a large oak-tree, and, from the top of the tree, there came a loud buzzing-noise.

Winnie-the-Pooh sat down at the foot of the tree, put his head between his paws and began to think. First of all he said to himself: "That buzzing-noise means something. You don't get a buzzing-noise like that, just buzzing and buzzing, without its meaning something. If there's a buzzing-noise, somebody's making a buzzing-noise, and the only reason for making a buzzing-noise that I know of is because you're a bee."

Then he thought another long time, and said: "And the only reason for being a bee that I know of is making honey."

And then he got up, and said: "And the only reason for making honey is so as I can eat it."

Task 2 Válaszoljon a következő kérdésekre.

1. Mi történt Micimackóval egy napon?
2. Hová érkezett?
3. Milyen zajt hallott?
4. Mit tett ekkor?
5. Milyen három egymást követő következtetésre jutott a zaj hallatán?

[The teacher at this point explains the use of the Simple Past tense in Hungarian. The learners write the rules in their exercise books.]

Task 3 Sorolja fel a szövegben található múlt idejű igéket, írja melléjük az első alakjukat és a magyar jelentésüket is.

Task 4 Keressen szinonimákat a szövegben az alábbi szavakra:

1. centre
2. big
3. start
4. cause
5. stand up

Task 5 Keressen antonimákat a szövegben az alábbi szavakra:

1. went
2. closed
3. small
4. nothing
5. short

Task 6 Fordítsa le a teljes szöveget magyarra.



Extra info

Click here to watch a part of a Grammar-Translation demonstration lesson:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sYCBYuF5LUA&t=141s>

In this excerpt, you can see how native speakers of English are taught a lesson on Little Red Riding Hood in Spanish.



Thinking task

Based on the demonstration, how would you modify your ideas of a Grammar-Translation class?



Summary

The illustrations have shown you the most significant elements of the Grammar-Translation Method.

As you could observe, the following phenomena happened:

- 1) The initial task is reading a literary passage, which is eventually translated into the native language. Translation may be written or spoken, and it has the purpose of showing that the students can understand the text.
- 2) Most of the classroom communication happens in the learners' native language: they ask their questions in their L1 and get answers also in their L1. The teacher also asks students in their native language. This indicates that the ability of communicating in the target language is not a goal.
- 3) Grammar is taught deductively, this means that the learners learn about the forms (grammar rules) of the target language in their L1, the grammar rules are presented by the teacher with examples and then the learners are asked to apply the rules to examples they are given.

3. The Direct Method

Original purposes

The Direct Method has been a very popular method for several decades. In many ways, the Direct Method is the exact opposite of the Grammar-Translation Method. Its success may be attributed to the fact that the Grammar-Translation Method did not prepare language learners for real-life communication, while the main aim of the Direct Method is that learners should learn to use the foreign language as naturally as possible.

The name of the method comes from the idea that the meaning of words and expressions are to be *directly* connected with the target language, therefore translation is not allowed. The core idea of the method is to teach foreign language to learners the same way a baby learning its mother tongue.



Illustration

Please open the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lls2oYe7TE0> and watch the video of a short section of a language class where the Direct Method is applied.



Summary

As you could observe in the video excerpt, the use of the target language is of primary importance in the classroom, the meaning is illustrated with the help of visual aids, and the main goal of teaching is to teach learners how to communicate in the target language. Vocabulary is taught through exposure to its use in situations. Grammar is taught inductively, that is the learners are presented with examples of language use, with the help of which they figure out the rules.

Comparison of the two methods

For a better understanding of the differences between the two methods, please check the table below. In the table you can see ten aspects (Larsen-Freeman 2000), along which you can see how these methods work and what their essence is.

| | Grammar-Translation Method | Direct Method |
|---|--|---|
| goals | reading literature in L2, developing the learners' mind, learning grammar, vocabulary and culture | communication, thinking in L2, direct association in L2 without translation |
| role of the teacher/learner | traditional, the teacher is the authority, learners learn from the teacher | the teacher directs the activities in the classroom, the teachers and the learners are partners |
| characteristics of teaching/learning process | translation, deductive grammar teaching, memorizing vocabulary | associating L2 and meaning directly in real context, using L2 only, inductive grammar teaching, the syllabus is based on topics and situations |
| nature of learner /teacher interaction | from the teacher towards the learners | both the teachers and the learners initiate interaction |
| learners' feelings | N.A. | N.A. |
| view of language/culture | literary language is preferred over spoken language | spoken language is preferred over written culture is geography, history, daily life of the speakers of the target language |
| emphasized language skills | vocabulary, grammar reading, writing | vocabulary oral communication is primary |
| role of the native language | L1 is used mostly in the classroom, both for clarifying meaning and for translation | not used |
| evaluation | written translations, questions about grammar rules, questions about culture | active language use |
| treatment of errors | correctness is important, the teacher supplies correct answers | the teacher tries to get the learners to self-correct |



Test your knowledge

Test your knowledge on the Grammar-Translation Method and the Direct Method by opening the file **traditional methods** in the attached folder.

References

Diane Larsen-Freeman. 2000. *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. Oxford University Press.