

Why is Old Grammar Translation Method of teaching English generally unacceptable today?

The 'gr-translation method' as the name implies is to a large extent based on the formal description of the language being taught - and on the exercise of translation in and out of the mother tongue. Much of the grammar taught within this method is either pedantic or archaic, in English as well as French and German, and this method would certainly have been more effective if the grammar used were linguistically more valid and more directly relevant.

Though we accept that gr. has an imp. place in the total equation of lang. teaching, still it is in no way a substitute for the teaching of practical skills as it simply a form or statement about lang., presented generally to inexperienced and unsophisticated learners, or to speak the gr. taught is generally poor gr.

Again the role of translation is neither presupposed by, nor does it presuppose, the teaching of gr. In the conventional form of lang. teaching however, translation alternates with formal gr. is the main activity and hence the link between the two. In the beginning learners are given sentences in their mother-tongue and are asked to translate them into L₂. We have already seen that so long the learner is still acquiring the lang. the written form should not be introduced at all, as it will only produce an untangled mixture of problems in gr, lexis and orthography is pedagogically unsound as translation involves all these stages. The learner has again to learn the whole new technique of question answering at the same time as he is trying to learn the lang.

The use of isolated sentences lacking a content, other than the artificial translation exercise, stands meaningless leading to concentration on formal equivalence rather than contential equivalence. Again no attention is paid to appropriateness of register. The answers are simply marked 'right' or 'wrong', with no indication that the translation is 'more or less' or 'more probable' or 'less probable', or that a situation right in one context may be wrong in another.

Again translation is a teaching technique, but instead of becoming easier, it becomes more difficult to perform, mainly because of two reasons. First that the learner has to select the single appropriate equivalent from all possibilities, who number he finds increases as he come to know more about the lang.

Secondly, he has to decided what to do with a stretch of lang of whatever length which is patently untranslatable.

For example - Translate to English the Hindi sentence -

क्या तुम ठीक से सोते ? - Answer - Did you sleep well ? You slept well, I hope, Was your sleep sound ? etc.

There are many possible & acceptable translation, but the learner is confused as to which possibility the teacher is looking for.

The teacher cannot give a complete model answer without touching upon all these possibilities. The point here is that it

requires a selection of one response out of many possible ones.

It requires a degree of literary and historical sensitivity, along with stylistic feelings of the English lang which few school boys have.

As the names of the leading exponents to suggest, like Johann Seidenstücker, Karl Plotz, Ottenberg & Weidinger,

Grammar Translation was the offspring of German scholarship, the object of which was "to know everything about something rather than the thing itself." It Translation was first known

in the US as the Prussian method have the characteristics :-

① The goal of foreign lang was to learn a lang for the sake of mental and intellectual development resulting from it. It Translation studies lang. first through a detailed analysis of its

grammar rules, followed by applications of this knowledge to translations, and hence looks at lang as little more than

memorising of rules and facts. "The first lang is maintained as the reference system in the acquisition of the second lang."

② Reading or writing are paid more attention to than the speaking or listening.

③ Vocabulary selection is based solely on written texts in the Tran method, presented along with their translation equivalents.

④ The sentence is the basic unit of teaching and lang practice, and the most distinctive feature of this method.

⑤ Accuracy is emphasized, which having a "intrinsic moral value"

was considered a prerequisite for passing formal written examinations.

- ① It was taught deductively by presentation and study of grammar rules, then practised through translation exercises, to teach gr. in an analytical and systematic way.
- ② The native lang. was the medium of instruction to the learner, used to explain the relationship and explanation with the foreign lang. Used in the 1840's to 1940's, this method with a few modifications is still widely used. Its worst form was introduced by those who wanted to dominate the study of German & French, which resulted the method producing a dialect among learners, as learning a foreign lang meant tedious memorising of endless rules and vocabulary. This is still used in schools and colleges, where understanding literary text and need for a speaking knowledge is the sole intention. And though so widely used, it has no theory that gives a rational justification for it.

In the mid 19th century 'The Reform Movement' that was opposition to the translation method came to limelight. New approaches to lang teaching developed in Germany, England, France and parts of Europe, by individual lang teaching specialists each with a specific method for reform. C. Marechal emphasized the importance of meaning in learning, and reading to be taught before other skills. T. Prendergast proposed the first "structural syllabus" to be taught. The most important of them F. Louie advocated teaching of foreign lang based on his observation of the child's use of lang, presenting situations and themes and his famous "series" to learn a lang, which developed into Situational Lang Teaching and Total Physical Response.

Further, in an attempt to reform the International Phonetic Association (IPA) was formed which advocated

- ① the study of spoken lang,
- ② phonetic training for good pronunciation,
- ③ use of conversational texts for conversational phrases,
- ④ inductive approach to teaching grammar and
- ⑤ teaching new meanings through establishing association with the target lang, rather than the mother tongue.

(Henry Sweet) ~~like~~

The Linguistsⁱⁱ too advocated ① the careful selection of what to be taught, ② imposing limits on it ③ arranging it in terms of the four skills of listening, speaking reading & writing and ④ grading materials from simple to complex. His views were shared by another linguist Victor and others in the late 19th century which provided the theoretical foundations for a principled approach to lang. teaching. He believed that ① the spoken lang is primary and should be reflected in oral-based methodology, ② the findings of phonetics should be applied to teaching and to teacher training ③ first-learners should hear the lang, then seek to write ④ words should be presented in sentences, practised in meaning context ⑤ grammar rules should be taught only after the practice of grammar points in context and ⑥ lastly translation should be avoided, if used, with the use of mother tongue. This led to the 'natural method'^{of L. Saussure} and ultimately known as The Direct Method.