An attempt to Integrate Grammar Translation Method, Communicative Language Teaching, Task-based Language Teaching: Rationale and Evaluation

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Abstract: Teaching methodology plays a crucial role in second language teaching. An appropriate teaching method enables teachers to construct an engaging and efficient language learning classroom and allows students to feel more pleased and comfortable so that they can achieve effective language input and output. This paper aims to clarify the benefits and flaws of Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), along with Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Based on reflections on these teaching approaches in China, it continues with examining factors affecting second language learning and an attempt to merging GTM, CLT, as well as TBLT. Lastly, the justification and evaluation of this new teaching pattern will be given.

Keywords: Teaching approaches, Grammar-Translation Method, Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Language Teaching, Second language learning.

1. Introduction

Teaching methodology plays a crucial role in second language teaching. In light of the understanding of Anthony (1963), an approach to language teaching refers to ‘a set of procedures or overall plan for systemic presentation to teach a second or foreign language’ (Cited in Celce-Murcia, 2001: 5). Natsir (2014) states that an appropriate teaching method enables teachers to construct an engaging and efficient language learning classroom and allows students to feel more pleased and comfortable so that they can achieve effective language input and output. Despite the fact that there has been extensive research on the influential teaching approaches in second language teaching, this paper sets out to examine the benefits and flaws of Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), along with Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in the first part. In the second section, much effort will be devoted to the reflections on these teaching approaches based on my personal experiences. Lastly, I will explore the factors influencing language learning and expound what makes a successful second language learning (SLL).

2. The Strengths and Limitations of GTM, CLT, and TBLT

2.1 Grammar-Translation Method (GTM)

The origins of GTM are to be found in the classical language instruction practices such as Latin, Greek (Chastain, 1988). In grammar-translation method, students are deductively taught the grammatical rules and structures to translate between their Mother Tongue (MT) and the Target Language (TL). During the process of translation, students also need to put much stress on rote memorization of grammatical rules and vocabulary so as to ensure their accuracy in the use of TL (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Concerning the advantages of GTM, Cunningham (2000) believes that this method is suitable for students of all levels and is particularly effective in the classroom with a large number of students. Hence, the Grammar-Translation Method still has its popularity and influence over the past decades, especially on the classrooms with a large number of students and limited teaching resources and technologies. The other major benefit of GTM is the high effectiveness of grammatical and vocabulary learning. As Damiani (2003) affirms in his study, the grammar translation method can be regarded as the best method to instruct grammar and vocabulary as teachers can exactly know whether their students master the grammatical structures by examining the results of grammar drills and correct students’ mistakes immediately. It is noteworthy that reading and writing are the primary skills in GTM, while speaking and listening gain little emphasis. This leads to the biggest weakness of GTM which refers to the fact that learners only focus on cramming grammatical rules and vocabulary accumulation and ignore the cultivation of their communicative competence (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). To be specific, in grammar translation method, individual learning focus is limited to grammatical knowledge. However, grammar only belongs to one aspect of language that complements the other four skills of learning language. The other drawback of this approach, according to Natsir (2014), lies in the fact that the interaction in classrooms is mostly from teachers to students, without much students’ initiation and peer interaction. This teacher-centered pattern is not advantageous for the active participation of students. Besides, it is less likely for students to claim their learning autonomy to identify the techniques that conduce to their own language learning.

2.2 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

The impetus for Communicative Language Teaching or the Communicative Approach (CA) springs from the changes in British language teaching tradition in the end of the1960s (Richards and Rogers, 2014). Communicative Language Teaching is partly a response to Situational Language
Teaching and other structural approaches to language teaching, with its focus on effective communicative achieved by the use of target language (ibid). According to Fazal et al. (2016), at that time, Chomsky and other linguists pinpointed the drawback of grammar-translation method and other structural as well as behavioral approaches, considering that these methods put an overemphasis on the memorization of grammatical structures, mechanic drills of vocabulary or grammar rules without realizing the significance of real-life communication. As we aforementioned, traditional approaches give preference to learning grammatical structures and rules, while CLT is designed to facilitate communicative competence which forms the basis of communicative approach (Hymes; Canale & Swain; as cited in Nunan, 1999). Belchamber (2007) posits that Communicative Language Teaching purports to establish an interactive and real-life environment that contributes to effective communication. In such learning environment, students are also able to develop their grammatical competence and expand vocabulary. It is also worth mentioning that in light of Howatt (1984), there exist two versions of Communicative Language Teaching—a strong version and a weak one (As cited in Richards and Rogers, 2014). As he puts, the strong version entails the claim that language is acquired via communication that can be achieved by the stimulation of the language learning system. In contrast, the latter aims to offer learners the opportunities to utilize the target language for communicative purposes and teachers advocating this version may also emphasize the form of language and sometimes also give instruction in the first language of students.

Concerning the merits of CLT, firstly, it is conducive for the improvement of students’ fluency when they speak the target language. Larsen-Freeman (2000) adds that communicative competence can be gradually cultivated in students through engaging in communicative tasks and examples include the fact that learners are capable of producing fluent, consistent sentences. In addition, as Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) puts, the communicative approach is normally students-oriented, which gives students the learner autonomy (Cited in Fazal and Majoka, and Ahmad, 2016). Besides, the Communicative Approach, even focusing on the extensive use of TL, still allows the judicious use of MT when feasible (Ellis, 2002), which conduces to the comprehensible input of students. The last benefit lies in the extensive use of authentic resources including contrived language games, picture stories, and problem-solving tasks, which are relatively motivating and appealing for students (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

In relation to the drawbacks of the communicative approach, Norland and Pruett (2006) deem that the skills of reading and writing may be neglected in CLT as much emphasis is attached to oral competency. Brown (1994) identifies another disadvantage of CLT—the lack of accuracy. He expounds that the failure to teach grammar explicitly may finally cause the uncertainty of accuracy as grammar plays an essential role in language learning. Apart from it, CLT also has its inapplicability in a big class, as teachers may find it time-consuming to check the language use of every student and correct the language mistakes timely (Richards and Rogers, 2014).

2.3 Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)

According to the understanding of Richards and Rogers (2014), Task-Based Language Teaching refers to the language teaching approach that claims the use of tasks as the core unit of class planning and instruction. Although scholars have given dozens of definitions of ‘task’, there still exists a common-sensical assumption that ‘a task is an activity or goal that is carried out using language’ (Richards and Rogers, 2014: 224). Examples of the task in TBLT comprise making a phone call, solving a real-life problem, reading a map or writing a letter. Notably, some scholars believe that TBLT can date back to the Communicative Language Learning movement in the 1980s, as it takes advantages of several principles from the Communicative Approach such as activities with the adoption of real-communication purposes, the use of activities that are designed in the form of tasks (ibid). In this sense, Ellis (2003) holds the view that TBLT belongs to the subcategory of CLT. But different from the Communicative Approach, Linguists in favour of TBLT contend that language learning can take place on the premise that learners are immersed in both the ‘comprehensible input’ and the tasks that enable them to communicate meaning and engage in real-life communication (Krashen, 1988; Richards and Rogers, 2014). Based on this consideration, it can be argued that TBLT can provide learners enough input and output, which are indispensable for language acquisition.

As for the advantages of TBLT, the most obvious one lies in the fact that TBLT is beneficial for students to develop the implicit knowledge of the language, which allows them to engage naturally and easily in communication. This is in line with the theory of implicit learning that is defined as the acquisition of knowledge without awareness, which is a key factor in language acquisition (Shanks, 2005; Dienes and Berry 1997; Cleeremans and Dienes 2008). As Rhalmi (2018) elucidates, in TBLT, teachers are in charge of creating tasks that exist outside the margins of the classroom. When learners are finishing tasks, their interlanguage system can acquire implicit language knowledge. Secondly, since the assessment of the learning in TBLT normally depends on the task outcome and does not give much preference to the accurate use of the target knowledge (Richards and Rogers, 2014), it is considered that TBLT is advantageous for the improvement of fluency, as well as the maintenance of learners’ confidence and their motivation.

However, critics against TBLT express the concern that TBLT relies too much on communicating meanings and the tasks, which may lead to the overemphasis on performing tasks or even the ignorance of the form of language (Seedhouse cited in UKEssays, 2018). Besides, TBLT also has a high requirement for the teaching materials as it needs authentic texts rather than textbooks or other materials that can be found in classrooms (Nunan, 1999). It will also exert pressure on teachers because the creativity of teachers is necessary when they design tasks (Littlewood, 2004). Despite the fact that the assessment of TBLT can benefit students in the sense of protecting their confidence, lastly, there is still one weakness that the task outcomes cannot be as objectively measured as the evaluation of grammar-translation results.
3. Personal Reflection on the Experience of Language Learning

In this section, I will mainly talk about how I learn English from primary school to now. Some teaching methods leaving a lasting impact on me will be also examined.

In China, English has been established as the required language course for students at the stage of free compulsory education (from P1 to the end of middle school) since the 1990s, but the real situation of English teaching varies from province to province (Liu, Zhang, and Yin, 2014). As for most of students in Henan province which has the biggest population in China, they normally start learning English from the fourth grade in primary school. In my hometown which is a less developed city in Henan Province, due to the lack of teacher resources, at that time, the position of English teacher is often served concurrently by other subject teachers who do not have a good command of English linguistic knowledge, not to mention teaching pedagogies. Hence, the teacher usually just played the magnetic tape that matches the textbook and asked students to read after the tape when I was in primary school. This method is similar to the Audio-lingual method as students are required to conduct mechanic drills through imitating the sound of the teaching tape. Although the target language is used extensively in the process of teaching, the deficiency of explicit explanation of the lesson content finally leads to comprehension difficulties, which left a terrible impression on me.

Over the period of senior middle school, I truly benefited from the Grammar Translation Approach. Grammar was considered as a crucial part in English teaching at that time. My favourite English often gave a lesson in Chinese and explained the grammatical structures and the vocabulary, which was beneficial for me to understand the complex grammar rules and enlarge the stock of words. After clear instruction in grammatical structures, as a way to reinforce knowledge, we were required to complete the sentence translation exercises made from the textbooks. Notably, the oral skills did not gain much emphasis because the assessment in the English course was exam-oriented and the final examination includes no listening and speaking tests. As far as I concerned, despite its effectiveness in helping students master grammatical knowledge, the major problem of GTM lies in its lack of motivation. For example, the meaningless grammar translation drills were so less appealing or even tedious that students were normally reluctant to do exercises and review what they learned proactively.

Throughout the years in middle school, English stood for a discipline instead of a means of communication. However, after I embarked on my undergraduate study, I increasingly recognized the importance of English communicative competence. My American foreign teacher inspired me deeply in her oral English course. She was a proponent of Communicative Language Teaching, deeming that English learning should not focus too much on the structures and rules and that the emphasis on English should be instead on its function. Her English class usually commences with a few questions which involve the topic or grammar that we need to learn, followed by the introduction to communicative activities such as, interviews, role play, or a topic discussion. Then students ought to spend most of the time participating in the communicative activity in English. The class comes to an end with the submission of the results of the activity. For instance, the class activity was once about conducting an interview with peers in English. When all students finished their interviews, they should hand in the notes of interviews for assessment.

The biggest impact that this type of class leaves on me is the comprehensive use of English for communicative purposes, which enhances my English fluency and boosts my confidence in interacting with others in English. As aforementioned, learners are able to produce fluent dialogues in the target language if they are immersed in the language teaching classroom that implements the communicative approach (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Besides, one thing that I can directly feel is the classroom atmosphere. Given that the activities in CLT are mostly students-oriented, students have the ownership of learning and the teacher only works as the facilitator rather than instructor, which can result in the active participation of students. Personally, the drawbacks of ignoring linguistic competence and the uncertainty of accuracy in CLT do not strike me to a high extent. What really matters is still its applicability in classrooms. To be specific, this teaching method is friendly and acceptable for intermediate or advanced students, but students with low English proficiency may find it hard to engage in classroom activities. Hence, even though the English class of CLT is more motivating and interesting than that of GTM, it is still likely that some students still stay silent and show less enthusiasm in participating in communicative activities.

This part is an effort to present my personal reflection of my previous English learning experiences. From primary school to now, there are mainly three teaching approaches influencing me the most. What I truly reflect on these methods is that second language learning is a dynamic and complex process, there not exists the absolutely effectual approach that can help learners acquire language. What we should examine is not to identify the most potent method but to strive to integrate the advantages of various teaching methodologies and reduce the adverse impacts of these methodologies. Therefore, in the following section, I will try to combine the benefits of these methods explored above to synthesize a new way that can fully optimize the positive factors beneficial language acquisition.

4. The Optimal Way to Learn a Second Language

This part aims to locate the best approach to second language learning. Firstly, much attention will be putted to the illustration of the factors that affect language learning based on the above discussion. Before that, I will establish and justify a comprehensive English teaching pattern that absorbs the merits of Grammar Translation Method and Communicative Language Teaching, as well as Task-Based Language Teaching.

4.1 Factors Shaping Second Language Learning

In fact, the factors influencing SLL are still disputed in academia. As Littlewood (1984) suggests, variants affecting
second language acquisition are obscure for linguists and difficult to be defined. Ellis (1986) summarizes that aptitude, motivation, age, attitude, learning styles, and personalities are influential aspects that pertain to second language learning. In contrast to Ellis’ opinion, I find that the argument of Adwani and Shrivastava (2017) is more persuasive and concise. Disregarding some factors including aptitude, personalities, and age that are fixed or difficult to alter for language learners, they simplify relevant factors into five variations: vocabulary, grammar, the use of mother tongue, self-efficacy, along with motivation. Now we are going to briefly analyse these five factors.

Concerning vocabulary and grammar, it is quite intelligible why these two factors underpin the basis of SLL. Wilkins (1972) accentuates that vocabulary is the basic unit of language and it plays an integral role in language use. However, the meaning that vocabulary conveys is not precise and logical, and much importance should be attached to grammar which lays the groundwork for effective communication and interaction (Coady, 1993; Dickinson et al., 2009; Read, 2000). The education of grammar enables students to rectify language mistakes both in oral communication and written work. No matter which teaching methodology language learners are instructed in, they are all inevitably taught grammar either explicitly or implicitly. Situations are similar in terms of vocabulary because successful communication occurs on the basis of the mastery of a certain amount of vocabulary. Therefore, it is not difficult to construe why the two factors leave a tremendous impact on second language learners (Adwani and Shrivastava, 2017).

Although some scholars advocate the monolingualism in the classroom of second language teaching (Richards and Rogers, 2014), I still believe that the judicious use of Mother Tongue (MT) is another vital variant in SLL. As Adwani and Shrivastava (2017) verbalize, the positive transfer or negative transfer may occur when language learners apply their MT to second language learning. The proponents of monolingualism in language teaching may worry about the negative transfer of MT which is defined as the interruption of previous knowledge in new learning, but the positive transfer can happen frequently if the items transferred in MT are compatible with the target language (Odlin, 1989). Besides, as mentioned above, due to the unbalanced teaching resources in different regions, the teaching effectiveness of the sole use of TL cannot be ensured. In quest for a better understanding of abstruse grammatical structures or new vocabulary, language learners demand explicit explanation and necessary classroom communication in MT (Cook, 2001).

Self-efficacy, a significant part of social cognitive theory, also has a dramatic effect on shaping second language learning. In terms of the interpretation of Bandura (1997), self-efficacy refers to an individual’s credence in successfully accomplishing a task or making achievements. Schunk (2003) states that the faith in one’s capability can exert a lot of influence on the efforts or engagements that one spends in performing a task. As Bandura (1986) elucidates, self-efficacy demonstrates the interaction between environment, behaviour, as well as personal factors such as affective and cognitive aspects. For instance, once an individual engenders the belief in his or her ability to acquire a language, his or her internal thoughts may turn into external actions that may finally shape the environment around him or her. For this reason, language teachers tend to optimize particular teaching techniques to activate the self-efficacy of students (Bandura 1997; Schunk, 2003). This is exemplified in the case that teachers adjust the levels of difficulty in examination to enhance the confidence of students.

The last influential factor motivation, even doubted by many scholars initially, has been lately authenticated by a solid body of research (Huang, 2007; Mufiah & Rafik-Galea, 2013; Xu, 2008). According to Babaee (2012), motivation is defined as the intrinsic and external forces that expound the efforts or attitudes toward an aim. Dörnyei (1988) believes that the other factors only work on the condition that the motivation can occur (as cited in Adwani and Shrivastava, 2017). Shulman (1986, as cited in Adwani and Shrivastava, 2017) proposes that language learning can be effectually facilitated by motivation which may be improved via the production of positive emotions caused by rewards, encouragement. In my view, motivation does play a pivotal role in continuing the learning of a second language which tends to be an enduring and tedious process.

4.2 The Integration of GTM, CLT, along with TBLT

Despite the respective drawbacks of GTM, CLT, TBLT, these teaching methodologies all have some outstanding effectiveness in particular aspects of language teaching. Since the discussion of the factors relevant to language learning and my own language learning experience, I have been considering the possibility of the pattern that combines the advantages of these three methods and minimizes their drawbacks. This pattern seems to be the optimal way for students to learn a second language. In the rest of this paper, I will give a brief account and justification of it.

English classes adopting the new model will function in Willis’s framework of TBLT (Willis, 1996). Tasks still works as the vehicles of the progress of the class. Different from the original TBLT framework, the new model puts much emphasis to the fusion of linguistic competence with communicative competence because, during the task cycle, students are encouraged to carry out the task with extensive use of the target language, while in the stage of language focus, they are expected to focus on the explicit explanation or exercises of grammatical or vocabulary knowledge. Hence, the meaning and form of language can be treated in balance in this new teaching model. Besides, as for the major disadvantage of CLT—its unsuitability for students with a low level of proficiency, this issue can be mitigated through adding one controlled practice into the pre-task stage. More importantly, this teaching pattern highlights the comprehensive development of students’ English competences and is feasible in the class of speaking, or reading, writing, listening.

After the brief account of the new pattern, I need to expound on why the TBLT framework of Willis is chosen. Notably, there exist several versions of TBLT framework including Prabhu’s three stages pattern, Ellis’s five-stage sequence of tasks, along with Nunan’s six-phase framework (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Prabhu, 1987). Although these frameworks all
own plausibility. I contend that the model of Willis is more convincing due to the fact that it achieves the compatibility of the form and meaning of language and also retains the attributes of TBLT (Hung, 2014).

![Figure 1: A framework for TBLT (Willis, 1996)](image)

The amalgam of GTM, CLT, and TBLT may engender better results for second language learners. Next, I will justify the new teaching pattern according to the five factors affecting second language learning to examine the new pattern’s feasibility. The design of the new teaching pattern takes into account the vocabulary and grammar factors. As aforementioned, GTM is deeded as the optimal way to instruct vocabulary and grammar (Damiani, 2003). The Chang (2011, as cited in Fazal et al, 2016) also expresses that the grammatical competence can be enhanced in the class taught in GTM. Thus, the new teaching pattern retains the essence of GTM and avails students in reinforcing the grammatical structures.

In relation to the use of MT, it is encouraged in this new pattern as a mediational tool to give attention to the specific L2 structures (Swain and Lapkin, as cited in Cook, 2001). GTM and CLT, TBLT all do not oppose the existence of MT in the classroom, but it should be judicious. As Cook (2008) suggests, the transfer between MT and L2 can make language input comprehensible and thus teachers should think over the acceptable use of MT in language teaching classrooms instead of shunning L1. Back to the context of this new model, the use of MT can be found in the controlled practices in the stage of pre-task or in the part of language focus to guarantee enough comprehensible input in language teaching classrooms.

Concerning self-efficacy and motivation, it can be argued that the new teaching model can take advantage of these two variants to a high degree. As discussed above, one obvious benefit of TBLT lies in the fact that students can acquire the implicit knowledge while finishing the task (Dienes and Berry 1997; Rhalmi, 2018). Finishing the task also gives students a sense of achievement which can be considered as the origins of their self-efficacy. It is likely that this sense of accomplishment can lead to an outstanding performance in SLL better than students’ authentic competence (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1991). It is also noteworthy that both CLT and TBLT avail students in a high extent of motivation as students paly a leading role in classes and they are allowed to employ their learners’ ownership. Besides, the comprehensive use of the target language for communicative purposes is able to motivate students to continue SLL.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, this paper attempts to illustrate the most effectual way to learn a second language. At the very start, three teaching approaches GTM, CLT, TBLT are examined in light of their own merits and drawbacks. The second section is the retrospect of previous language learning experiences and some teaching methods impressing me. Lastly, much effort is spent on the elucidation of the factors that have a dramatic influence on SLL. Based on these discussions, the fusion of TBLT with GTM and CLT is put forward. Although the integration of these three methods is rough or not fully considered, it still seems to be theoretically the best way to learn a second language.

References
