

# A Brief Analysis on the Application of Grammar-Translation Method and Communicative Language Teaching in English Reading Teaching

Yaxuan Ying

Conservatory of Music, Zhejiang Normal University, Jinhua 321004, China

**Abstract:** *Grammar-translation method and communicative language teaching are two important methods in the language teaching. Both methods have shown pros and cons in the long time of practical application, and have strong complementarity. Therefore, it is of certain practical significance to explore the combination of the two teaching methods. This paper seeks English reading teaching as a starting point and compares the pros and cons of GTM and CLT. On this basis, it is necessary to carry out the research to analyze these two teaching methods and explores their comprehensive application in English reading teaching.*

**Keywords:** Grammar-translation method, Communicative language teaching, Comprehensive use.

## 1. Introduction

For decades, the teaching of English reading in China had been deeply influenced by traditional teaching methods, such as grammar-translation method and direct method, which emphasized the interpretation of grammar and vocabulary knowledge too much, while neglecting the cultivation of students' language application ability. Since the rise of communicative language teaching method abroad at the end of 20th century, it had been constantly introduced, studied and promoted in China. This method quickly became popular as it followed the trend and satisfied the needs of the internalized society.

GTM and CLT are two important teaching methods in English teaching. How to use it correctly is a question that many teachers have been thinking about. Some people exaggerate the role of communicative methods, believing grammar teaching is useless, or some people stick to explaining grammar and have never carried out activities of communication. As far as I am concerned, both of these methods are biased.

GTM emphasizes fluency, while CLT focuses on accuracy. Both fluency and accuracy are the goals of English teaching. Besides, the combination of these two teaching methods in foreign language teaching, not only brings their advantages into full play, but also overcomes the shortcomings of them at the same time.

In order to prompt the two teaching methods to apply to teaching better, a large number of scholars at home and abroad have done researches on the combination of them, and many studies have focused on the whole English learning procedure. Comparatively speaking, there are few researches on reading teaching. Therefore, this paper compares the pros and cons of GTM and CLT from the perspective of English reading teaching. On this basis, it is necessary to carry out the research to analyze these two teaching methods and explores their comprehensive application in English reading teaching.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Pros and cons of GTM

Grammar translation teaching method requires students to translate the text literally and memorize a large number of grammar rules and vocabularies, and the main purpose of GTM is to let learners understand the working principles of the target language. GTM can draw learners' attention to the ways grammatical forms are constructed and help learners understand what constitutes the proper use of grammatical forms. As for grammar practice, it plays an important role in helping learners acquire grammatical knowledge.

GTM maintains its own characteristics in the teaching content and teaching procedure. According to Nitish, this method contains a lot of advantages. For example, translation helps students have a deeper understanding of the abstract word meanings and complex sentence structures of foreign languages; Teaching grammar systematically helps to improve quality and efficiency in teaching; Mastering grammatical rules is conducive to cultivating students' ability to understand grammatical concepts and develop translation ability; Readings and recitations of original books help students improve reading and writing skills; The students are easy to be tested and the class is easy to be managed.

However, in the GTM classroom, knowledge is transmitted by the teacher, who is the authority and the giver of knowledge. Students are passive recipients, learning mainly by repetition and rote memorization. Along with its benefits, GTM comes with some shortcomings. For example, overemphasis on the role of translation will result in reliance on the first language when using foreign languages; Focus on reading and writing too much, neglecting listening and speaking, which means that communicative and practical needs of students cannot be met; Too much emphasis on delivering grammatical knowledge in teaching, which is far away from the students' actual needs and language level. The absolute authority of teachers, single teaching method and dull classroom environment cannot arouse students' learning interest and initiative.

### 2.2 Pros and Cons of CLT

The most striking feature of communicative language teaching method is that almost all teaching activities are intended to communicate. Students use language to the greatest extent through communicative activities. Another important feature of CLT is the use of the authentic materials. It is considered desirable to give students the opportunity to develop strategies to understand the language. GTM has dominated English teaching in China for the past few decades. CLT is a revolutionary approach compared to GTM, as it shifts attention from language competence to communicative competence.

CLT is task-centered and student-centered, which requires teachers to set different types of contexts to reflect the actual needs of life. It not only pays attention to the form of language, grammar rules, but also emphasize the appropriateness and feasibility of language, so as to cultivate students' ability to deal with problems in communicative activities.

According to Nitish, the benefits of CLT are presented as following: It attach great importance to the use of language and aims to cultivate learners' communicative competence. It also treats making mistakes as a normal part of understanding the target language constantly. Besides, teaching methods are associated with appropriate communicative tasks, rather than tasks aimed at getting familiar with specific grammatical phenomena.

Along with its benefits, CLT comes with some shortcomings. Teachers must understand students' interests and hobbies in advance, otherwise the open questions and contexts set by teachers will not arouse students' interests, thus affecting the teaching effect. Higher requirements are put forward for teachers' classroom control ability and textbook adaptability. Only students with a certain language foundation can participate in the discussion effectively. What's worse, students' mistakes are not seriously treated, and their communicative activities will be affected by improper and inaccurate language use.

### **3. Comprehensive Use of GTM and CLT in Teaching Reading**

Education is inseparable from local culture and education concepts, so the long-term learning styles and learning habits of students need to be carefully examined and considered. Although some people say that the grammar-translation method is outdated, students who are used to this method may not be able to do without it. For example, Chinese students have a strong interest in language structure and grammatical details when it comes to learn a new passage. They think that when they understand these rules, they can get the main idea of the whole passage and have a good command of the grammatical knowledge. Therefore, when teaching Chinese students, proper grammar interpretation is necessary, especially for the beginners. In the reading class, vocabulary exercises and sentence training are also the necessary ways to familiarize students with the structure of sentences, but we must understand that it does not focus on spoken language, and it lacks a set of effective ways to cultivate oral ability. Students educated in this way generally do not have oral communication skills or perform poorly in listening and speaking. Grammar and vocabulary are far from enough. For

students, to put what they have learned into practice is of equal importance.

The communicative approach advocates that teachers should try to design the teaching process as a real, credible and reasonable communication process in the social interaction process, so that students can use language for interpersonal communication and be effective and decent. However, if teachers are limited to this single method, students will lack basic language points. It is difficult for them to understand complex-structured sentences exactly and express thoughts accurately and coherently. Therefore, in order to lay a solid foundation for the students and provide a real environment in which they can communicate freely, we should integrate these two to create a teaching method suitable for Chinese students.

#### **3.1 GTM and Its Applications**

Mastering grammar is the most basic for any language learner. Grammar plays a key role and cannot be ignored in language teaching. Grammar-translation method ensures that students understand the meaning of words and sentences accurately. In the basic learning stage, learners mainly show a large amount of vocabulary, accumulate language points, and master the basic sentence patterns of the language to understand the passage, so as to achieve preliminary language expression skills. Translation can help students get rid of the confusion of conjecture and avoid inaccurate understanding of foreign language words.

For freshmen of non-English majors, because of uneven English levels, it is unscientific to directly implement communicative teaching to improve their ability to use language. Therefore, in the basic learning stage, grammar-translation method can be the main method, and communicative method as a supplement, which stimulates students' enthusiasm and enables students to have an adaptation process. Teachers should pay attention to repeating the key points they have learned when organizing teaching procedure, so as to achieve the purpose of strengthening the foundation of English as much as possible.

#### **3.2 CLT and Its Applications**

With the establishment of the student-centered educational concept, communicative teaching method was promoted. From the perspective of communicative approach, the basic unit of language is not just the grammatical and structural features, but is reflected in the function of language in discourse.

Communicative teaching method believes that teachers should determine the teaching goals according to the needs of the learners, and create practical foreign language activities. The teaching materials must use real language structures and environments to help learners master the language that should be used in the appropriate language environment.

Communicative teaching method fully embodies the teaching concept of humanism and puts students at the center. Through the analysis of students' needs and the study of language functions, the specific teaching methods are determined according to time, place and cultivating subject. For example,

when students enter the advanced stage, some activities can appropriately put into practice, such as role-playing, compiling dialogues, short play performances, and so on. In the post-reading period, students can verbally retell the content of the material they have learned, which can improve students' ability to use English.

Communicative approach treats improve students' communicative ability as the goal, and advocates teachers to do some specific activities in class, including repetition, dialogue, group discussion, and other activities, which are helpful to arouse students' learning interest, and fully activates the atmosphere in the reading class, and completely changes the traditional dull classroom environment. Students generally take more active participation. To a large extent, communicative approach enables students to consolidate and strengthen their knowledge of vocabulary and grammar through practice. These characteristics of communicative approach cannot be replaced by traditional teaching.

### 3.3 The Combination of GTM and CLT in Reading Teaching

In the teaching procedure, teachers should design a variety of contexts that are closely related to students' lives under the theoretical guidance of grammatical translation and communicative methods to stimulate their enthusiasm and initiative in language learning.

In the process of reading teaching, students are exposed to new passage for the first time, and words, phrases, sentence structures and grammar are quite important language materials, so experienced teachers must break down the language barriers to solve language problems for students, which requires teachers to use GTM to explain the language points in detail. In addition, in order to improve the teaching quality, teachers need to get feedback from students, that is, students' language internalization and output. Therefore, in the teaching procedure, teachers should create a relatively real language environment and design communicative activities for students, so that students can achieve the purpose of language acquisition from the simulated language environment. In fact, the real language environment cannot be reproduced in class, which requires teachers to conduct teaching activities for the purpose of communication according to the characteristics of different students.

Reading teaching puts sentences in articles and language knowledge in specific language environments, motivating students to observe, analyze, and discover language rules and master language knowledge during the learning process. It helps to improve students' ability in analyzing and understanding language. For example, during class, students can be trained to find out the author's point of view, summarize the paragraph and so on, which enables students to have a deeper understanding of the article and to voice their own opinions. For some difficult sentences, grammar teaching can help students analyze the language more thoroughly, and then accurately output the received language information in communicative activities. The coordinated use of them can not only cultivate students' deep understanding of the language they have learned, but also promote the further improvement of their language acquisition ability.

According to a book *On College English Teaching* written by Liu Runqing, communicative teaching method is not based on grammatical items to arrange teaching content and order, but based on pragmatic functions. Indeed, this is not to say that they should ignore the grammar rules, but reorganize the grammar items according to functions and concepts, and transfer the grammatical forms to language functions. Some people call it "communicative grammar". This is a major feature of communicative teaching method. Communicative approach and grammatical translation approach are not contradictory, but complementary with each other.

By analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of GTM and CLT, it can be found that GTM and CLT complement with each other. Therefore, English reading teaching should make full use of the advantages of CLT and GTM and establish a mode combining the two. On the one hand, GTM can be used to systematically teach vocabulary knowledge and grammatical content, eliminate language confusion caused by difficult sentences, and improve students' ability to analyze and use language. At the same time, we should make full use of the communicative function in reading class to cultivate students' communicative competence. In fact, in reading classes, the simple use of traditional GTM cannot enable students to smoothly convert language input into language output, and the mere use of CLT cannot satisfy students' demand for vocabulary, grammar, sentences and other basic language contents in second language acquisition. Therefore, only by combining the two methods can we promote the development of students' language competence and communicative competence more effectively.

## 4. Conclusion

The combination of GTM and CLT is more effective and helpful than only each of them in improving students' reading level. This is because the focus is on the students themselves, not the teachers. In reading class, discussion, pairing, retelling the text and other activities enable students to have more opportunities to use English. Teachers, as mentors, set appropriate tasks and activities and help students only when they meet difficulties. In other words, students are not passive recipients, but active participants in class.

From the previous discussion, we can fully understand the importance and irreplaceability of the two approaches. According to the needs of the current situation, English reading teaching in China should draw on the strengths of these two approaches and establish a teaching model combining them. On the one hand, teachers should give full play to the advantages of grammar teaching, and pay attention to the teaching of vocabulary and grammar and other knowledge. Besides, grammatical knowledge should be explained systematically, and students' ability to analyze language phenomena needs to be trained, in order to improve the teaching effect as much as possible. On the other hand, teachers are supposed to be fully aware that English is a communicative tool. The purpose of English teaching is to develop students' ability to use this tool. Teachers should pay attention to the cultivation of communicative competence in their teaching activities.

To sum up, language acquisition is multifaceted, and so is the

form of teaching. Teaching should maximize learners' language input, which should adapt to learners' language level. Therefore, GTM and CLT are not two opposite teaching methods. In English reading teaching, grammar translation method is the foundation, and communication method is the guiding ideology. We should adopt appropriate teaching methods in different stages of teaching according to the teaching purposes, students' characteristics and the phased characteristics of language so as to achieve the expected teaching effect.

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