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Grammar-Translation Method and Communicative Language Teaching in Exam-Oriented Contexts: Balancing Accuracy and Fluency in South Asian Classrooms

Tanvir Mostafa and Tonuja Morshed

Abstract

The current mixed-method study looks into the comparative effectiveness of the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the context of the higher-secondary English classrooms in Bangladesh, a situation where high-stakes testing has a controlling effect on pedagogic practice. Based on survey results of thirty students, semi-structured interviews of ten English teachers and structured observation of classrooms, the research examines the effects of examination pressure on instructional decisions and the effects on grammatical accuracy of students and communicative fluency. The empirical fact is that GTM is still predominant, and it is mostly due to the fact that its focus on explicit grammar, translation, and exam-based writing are more or less compatible with the needs of examination. Nonetheless, excessive dependence on GTM is likely to limit the confidence of the students in the field of oral communication and their spontaneity. On the contrary, CLT encourages active involvement, engagement and fluency, but does not always provide adequate explicit scaffolding to grammatical correctness in test-based contexts.The results therefore indicate that neither of the two approaches is sufficient in exam-based classes. Instead, a more potentially effective approach to both the development of examination performance and communicative competence is provided by a context-responsive hybrid model that would be a combination of explicit form-oriented teaching with meaningful communicative practice.

Keywords: Grammar-Translation Method, Communicative Language Teaching, Exam-Oriented Education, Grammatical Accuracy, Communicative Fluency

Introduction

English is an inseparable language of academic study, career movement and democracy throughout South Asia. The traditional perception of the command of English in the Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka is that it is a requirement to be accepted at the university, a step towards higher occupational ladders and an access point to the entire body of global knowledge. However, academia is yet to agree on an ultimate teaching plan of attack especially under the conditions of assessment models that require teachers to conform to certain instructions. Two paradigms of teaching the English language have been dominant: the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), which focuses on systematic teaching of syntax, vocabulary, and translation with faith, and the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) that focused on natural discourse and learner involvement, as well as the functional use of English. The main question that divides these strategies is the final goal of the teaching process: shall it focus on creating perfect language, or shall it develop communicative competence?

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Examination based cultures compound this confusion as they place a large emphasis on grammatical accuracy, phonological faithfulness and written mastery as the assessment standards. Teachers are often pressured to devote the majority of classroom time to rule based exercises, literal translation tasks and practice of tests which are not necessarily related to the effective strategies approved by the regulatory authorities. This establishes an incongruous conflict between the conceptualized ideal of pedagogy and the realities of the formative assessment. The belief that learners should become proficient in oral and written expression, hence a success in tertiary school and the labor market, and in the civic every-day life should be balanced with the need to learn grammatical rules, which become the focus of exams. Learners with instructions that focus on grammatical understanding only are taught the skills of analyzing but rarely develop spontaneous speech. In their turn, lessons which preempt oral practice increase the level of engagement but can give rise to the linguistic inaccuracies when faced with the assessment which gives precedence to the form. In the following study, the dilemma under investigation will be conducted through the comparison of GTM and CLT in one of the higher-education classes in Bangladesh. It states four research questions:

1. What instructional strategies does a teacher use in exam-based environments?
2. What is the difference in effect of GTM and CLT on accuracy and fluency in the students?
3. What is the perception of both teachers and students towards these methodologies?
4. What amalgamated model would best be able to serve the demands of exam-oriented contexts?

The general conclusion here is that both methodologies cannot be used independently but a critical combination of the two paradigms should be made in order to meet the two demands of scholastic rigor and communicative fluency. A smart, unified curriculum - compromising the structural soundness of GTM and the interactive dynamism of CLT - promises to fill the gap between test marks and language competence in the real world.

Literature Review

Grammar-Translation Method was invented in the instruction in classics like Latin and Greek. Its main elements that included demonstration of grammatical rules, rote memorisation, learning words in both directions and literal translation were meant to enable the learners read and comprehend texts but not to speak. It is thus understandable that this method is still common in modern courses in foreign languages since it can be easily used together with teacher-directed instructions and written examination. Learners develop the skills of recognizing the grammatical patterns, maneuvering both constituent elements of sentences, and imitating written materials within a short period of time (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). Owing to the fact that the approach is majorly analytical, critics state that the approach does not help in making fruitful usage of language. Students can have a broad range of linguistic facts but fail to apply them in a real life situation of communication. Their expertise is thus distorted in terms of detecting mistakes and reading as they tend to be shy to talk. This criticism gave birth to Communicative Language Teaching in the 1970s. The most well-known instance is by Hymes (1972), who argued that fluency is not a theoretical understanding of the rules of grammar and Canale and Swain (1980) who further argued that communicative competence is made up of grammatical accuracy, sociolinguistic appropriateness, discourse strategy, and corrective feedback. According to CLT, communicative skill acquisition is the main goal of language acquisition and not acquisition of rules in an internalised form. The use of this paradigm by teachers entails the encouragement of learners to

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be in pairs and groups, engage in role-plays, gaps filling among other forms of tasks which focus on meaning building. Those in favor of this orientation argue that it is much closer to the actual communicative needs of real life and thus learners are given a chance to negotiate meaning, experiment with language and gain confidence. However, practical application of CLT may be challenging especially in big-class room with limited resources, time and assessment systems.

The challenge facing communicative work in large classes together with the introspective of the institutions on high-stakes tests presents a great setback. Hu (2002) noted that foreign-language programs do not consider the local sociocultural contexts thus they have difficulties both within the school and the community at large. The same fears are felt in South Asia where teacher-oriented teaching and emphasis on written results still dominate school competitions and exams. In Bangladesh, empirical studies have found that there is always an existing gap between language policy and practice in classroom. Despite the introduction of CLT as a curriculum, educators mostly continue to teach grammar and literal translation and model response drill. Hamid and Baldauf (2008) observe that integrating CLT in policy may not be a sure way of translating it to the classroom since tests are still a measure of form as opposed to fluency. Later studies by Hamid and Honan (2012) also established a similar finding that CLT materials are often re-used in order to accommodate established testing patterns due to time factor, high enrolments, and pressure of the tests. Accuracy/fluency studies indicate the existence of an exaggerated dichotomy between Grammar-Translation Method and CLT. Achieving form-accuracy and expressive fluency seems to be the key to optimal learning on the part of the learners ((Larsen-Freeman, 2015).). Lightbown and Spada (2013) argue that excessive focus on either dimension may also result in an over-correction that has the effect of stifling any participation or laxity that allows continued errors. Ellis (2006) suggests the balanced approach, as a combination of explicit emphasis on linguistic form and communicative meaning work. Modern pedagogy supports a stylistic mash-up that is responsive to the specifics of the situation instead of strictly following one pedagogical approach. The mixed approach would help educators in high-test schools to fulfill test demands without negativizing communicative purposes. This is where grammar teaching is still a part of it, but it is placed in the context of activities that build up form, vocabulary, and pragmatic discourse competencies that have a part to play in the assessment. This article thus suggests a moderate model to be applied in the higher-secondary schools in Bangladesh.

Theoretical Framework

This paper was premised on two concepts that are interrelated; **communicative competence and a focus-on-form instruction**. The former demarcates the reason why we use language as we do and the latter demonstrates how it is possible to sustain grammatical structures in meaningful communication. Communicative competence as proposed by Hymes (1972) and developed by Canale and Swain (1980) is beyond the knowledge of grammar. It includes the choice of the right lexical materials in a specific social context, the consistent connection of the ideas, and the employment of the techniques to address the communicative issues. This paradigm can be used to understand the reason why students with good scores in the isolated grammar tasks can get low scores in the spontaneous speaking test. Good communication does not entirely rely on how well one properly implements the rules of grammar.

The paper also argues that without emphasis on form, communication cannot be able to develop fully. Long (1991) came up with the concept of focus-on-form in response to the shortcomings of the traditional, textbook

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based approach to grammar and the pure meaning based approach to pedagogy. Within this modality, the learners will have the chance to voice out freely; in case of proper grammatical structures, patterns, or mistakes, the learners will receive corrective feedback. According to Ellis (2006), such a synergistic strategy promotes fluency, as well as accuracy because grammar is learnt in a contextual framework, but not in isolation. The emphasis on form is especially helpful when it comes to exam-based environments in which the evaluation criteria are closely linked with communicative tasks. Forms are initially explained, next they are drilled in controlled exercises, and lastly practiced by the students when they are speaking or writing. The perspective of the article is that pedagogical efficacy is not based on privilege of one theoretical ideology over another, but organized in such a way that meaning and form support one another.

Method

This paper combined the quantitative evidence with the stories to determine the preferences among learners and clarify the facts about the practice in the classroom. The personal reports were related with statistical measurements and the study was devoted to the effectiveness of Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in high-school courses in English in Bangladesh and perceived value of both methods by teachers and students.

The sample was selected using high schools that equip students with higher secondary certificate examination. The samples consisted of ten teachers of English and thirty students. The level of experience of teachers was different and the students had been exposed to both traditional grammatical teaching and communicative teaching in their English course works.

Table 1 Participant groups

Participant Group	Number	Level	Purpose
Teachers	10	Higher Secondary	Teaching perceptions
Students	30	HSC	Learning experiences

There were three approaches of data collection. The first one was to administer questionnaires to students to determine which instructional practices they liked, their response to exam preparation, and their confidence in speaking English. The second question is that, semi-structured interviewing of teachers enabled us to know about their teaching priorities, classroom boundaries, and their expectations toward grammar and communication activities. Third, we visited classrooms and watched what exactly occurred, considering the way teachers explained, translated, allowed students to write, and communicated.

Table 2 Data collection tools

Tool	Target	Purpose	Data Type
Survey	Students	Preferences and exam preparation	Quantitative
Interview	Teachers	Teaching practices	Qualitative
Observation	Classes	Teaching strategies	Qualitative

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The data on the survey were examined in a descriptive manner so as to notice general trends on what they want and the way they document results. The data in both interviews and observations were analyzed according to theme, and among the frequent problems noted included the pressure of exams, class time, participation, and perceived effectiveness. Although the sample was limited, surveys, interviews, and observations as a combination of the three methods resulted in stronger findings, as they allowed comparing the statements of the people with what actually occurred in the classroom.

Findings and Discussion

The most dramatic was the fact that grammar-based teaching is still the most widespread one practiced by teachers. In most of the lessons, the instructors start with the clarification of grammatical rules, followed by the translation of examples, and writing of tasks. Students are often asked to reconstitute sentences, fill in blanks or translate English to Bangla. These practices are a reflection of the Grammar-Translation Method, and show that, despite having a curriculum that is supposedly communicatively competence-oriented, exam pressure still determines the instructional practice. Teachers were interviewed and this clarified the reason behind this consistent trend. The respondents repeatedly explained that their choices about the way they instructed were highly influenced by the HSC examination; since the exam pays great attention to written production, grammar, and the ability to use controlled language, the educators found it to be the most effective approach to take in terms of the little amount of classroom time they had. The communicative task principle was not completely dismissed but was put in the second place in comparison with the activities that directly have an impact on the exam outcomes. The discovery is consistent with other researchers who found out that curriculum reform does not result in changing the practice when the evaluation systems uphold the established routines (Hamid and Baldauf, 2008). Statistics also showed that Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) can be used to promote performance in certain fields. Students who received instruction mostly by using GTM did not only perform better in the activities requiring clear grammatical understanding like sentence correction, translation and writing in examination. They reflected their competencies in controlled writing where precision and remembering of the rules were the main ones. Therefore, GTM was effective in terms of success in examinations.

Table 3 Performance of GTM learners

Skill Area	Performance
Grammar Accuracy	Strong
Translation	Strong
Exam Writing	Strong
Oral Fluency	Weak

But the same students had a tendency to perform poorly where they are asked to speak without restrictions. There was observed hesitation and short answer together with low confidence in oral interaction in the classroom. A great number of students actually appeared to be too afraid to make a mistake and tend to remain silent unless they are absolutely sure that they are right. It implies that classroom culture based on the aversion to mistakes might restrict a desire to use a new language. That is, having grammar explicitly does not mean that one speaks with confidence.

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Another pattern was observed where communicative activities were applied. Students who worked either in pairs, discussed, or participated in role plays were more willing to talk, talked very actively, and felt confident about sharing ideas. They also had higher chances of negotiating meaning, acting spontaneously and working together with peers. These results are consistent with the main assertions of CLT: language proficiency is developed when the learners use the language in reality in order to accomplish communication.

Table 4 Performance of CLT learners

Skill Area	Performance
Oral Fluency	Strong
Communication	Strong
Grammar Accuracy	Moderate
Exam Writing	Weaker

Nevertheless, the communicative participation did not ensure grammatical accuracy. According to some teachers, even students who were comfortable in talking still repeated simple mistakes in tense, sentence structure and written expression. This was understandable concern in a system of examination which rewards accuracy. The teachers were afraid that overemphasis on fluency would dilute the performance of students of the very tests that will be used to measure the performance of the school, teachers, and learners. The same tension was reflected in the student survey results. Another issue which most learners found valuable in the communicative activities is that in most cases, they viewed these activities as confidence enhancing, "Yet most students still preferred grammar-based teaching because they felt better prepared for the examinations." That is not to say that students refuse to communicate, but instead it demonstrates that they are strategic in reacting to the institutional rewards. When the success of exams is primarily based on the accuracy of the writing, then students will appreciate whatever instruction appears to be the most helpful in that respect.

Table 5 Student preferences

Method	Students	Percentage
GTM	20	67%
CLT	10	33%

Combined, the results assist in putting the GTM -CLT debate in a context. One is not always superior to another. Each of them brought about profits in the region that they focused on. GTM goes in line with accuracy in grammar, translation, and writing exams. CLT promotes fluency, confidence, as well as meaningful use of English. The pedagogical dilemma is not in determining which approach overpowers the other but in determining how the merits of the two can be pooled into a realistic approach with the large, exam-driven classes.The evidence is in favor of a hybrid model arranged by sequencing. One may begin a lesson by giving a brief explanation of what target grammar or vocabulary is, transition to the controlled practice which entails solidifying the form, and then finally transition to a communicative task which entails meaningful application of the same language. As an illustration, in a scenario where students are taught about reported

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speech, the teacher can initial explain the change of rules, then give them brief written transformations, and lastly request the learners to interview someone and report their words. The grammar is visible and evaluable in this structure yet it is also used in communication.

Table 6 Hybrid teaching model

Component	GTM Role	CLT Role
Grammar Accuracy	Strong	Moderate
Exam Preparation	Strong	Weak
Oral Fluency	Weak	Strong
Communication	Weak	Strong

The same sequencing is capable of supporting narrative writing, conditional construction, reading comprehension, and vocabulary development. Students can also talk on a subject in pairs before a writing activity to be able to come up with ideas and practice the appropriate language. They can either put it into speech after a reading exercise and then write them in the form of questions that are exam type questions. Grammar explanation may therefore be the entrance point of language usage not the point of termination of teaching.

The results also imply a less bias treatment of errors. In GTM-dominant, the errors were usually considered as issues that should be eradicated at once. Staging of correction can be done strategically in a hybrid model. In the case of first speaking, small mistakes can be accepted in order to preserve communication. In the process of following up, the teacher can point out the issues that are repeated and relate them to the grammar required to write properly. This will enable the students to view error as not a failure but a development.What this is implying is that, the realities of exam do not render communicative teaching impractical, the unadapted communicative teaching is impractical. Communication, in another sense, can be used to complement exam preparation by being directly associated with target forms, writing activities, and evaluation objectives. Those pedagogies that are most appropriate in such a situation are therefore those of alignment: grammar with communication, assessment with learning goals and classroom method with institutional reality.

Pedagogical Implications

To begin with, grammatical form and communicative meaning should be integrated in the centre of the curriculum. Teaching sequencing is not supposed to divide the linguistic rules and the pragmatic use, but the teacher can explain, demonstrate and then allow the students to apply the target structures in natural discourse. This type of a continuum makes the lessons intelligible and enables the learners to use the newly gained knowledge independently. Second, communicative tasks should be created to be useful in assessment purposes. Students will be more willing to invest when they come to understand that talking with another partner, using oral rehearsal, or sharing of editing with another person can be used to help them produce written work at a rapid rate, generate ideas, lexical retrieval and understanding. Teachers ought to place these activities as guides other than distractors and thus integrate the skill building and examination requirements. Third, teacher training programs need to be more practical based on application rather than theory. Although

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most teachers can effectively explain, correct and analyze text, they in most cases do not have strategies on how to moderate group interaction especially when dealing with larger groups. The training sessions should also demonstrate concise, smooth-sailing communication patterns that be easily implemented within the normal lessons. Fourth, there is the need to reform assessment. In case tests only encourage correct grammar and controlled writing, teaching will be very limited in nature. The creation of the assessments that will involve the speaking, listening, and meaning writing will force teachers to pursue a more comprehensive pedagogical approach and prove the applicability of oral competence in real life. Lastly, mixed-method instruction does not require intricate technology and significant funds. Pair-talk, discussion leadership, peer review, oral summary and short problem-solving activities may be practiced by the teachers even when they have limited resources. The point is that it is necessary to plan everything carefully: what aspects of the language should be prioritized, what activities should be used depending on the context, and how to plan the timely delivery of corrective feedback.

Limitations and Future Research

This research paper is limited in a number of ways. First, the sample was rather small, consisting of ten teachers and thirty other students who were also selected in a few institutions. Although the results provide rather useful information, they do not constitute the whole picture of the Bangladeshi classroom. A substantial part of the information was gathered through the self-administered questionnaires and interviews and thus the perceptions that are being reported could be an introspective perception rather than factual events.

The study might further be developed in research to get schools of various geographical areas and educational stages. It would be informative to make comparative studies of urban and rural institutions and also to investigate the concept of integrative instruction models. The longitudinal research studies which follow the learners throughout the long years of schooling would provide useful evidence on whether the learners who were introduced to balanced pedagogical methods maintain the improvement of writing and communicative competence. Also, further practice could investigate how digital materials can be used to negotiate speaking and listening practice, especially in cases where little classroom time is available.

Conclusion

Considering Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in relation to the exam-based Bangladesh classroom context, it can be said that neither perfect accuracy nor unrestrained fluency can be obtained using solely one of the methods. The strength of GTM is that it is closely aligned with the demands of high-stakes assessment and supports grammatical accuracy, translation, and examination writing; however, excessive reliance on GTM may limit learners' communicative fluency and confidence in spontaneous language use. On the other hand, CLT is indispensable as it increases the confidence of the learners as well as their communicative competence and ability to use English in a way that can be deemed as authentic. Although both methodologies resolve real educational needs, none of them can be privately implemented without concession. The most possible solution is a hybrid paradigm, which is sensitive to context, and by carefully organizing communicative activities and simultaneously taking care of the linguistic form in a concise way, teachers can prepare the students to the requirements of the exams and also learn the functional English. Nevertheless, the implementation of sustainable progress goes beyond

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classroom changes, but requires a long-lasting and thorough development of teachers, intentional curriculum planning, and assessment models that appreciate accuracy and communication as two complementary aspects. The issue of grammar over communication is therefore a red herring; the challenge to be addressed in the conscious manner is how to incorporate the two-strands into the realities we live as the South Asians with the emphasis on examinations.

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