

Incorporating Communicative Tasks in Grammar Teaching: A Need of the Hour

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Abstract

The purpose of the current paper is to present a comparison of the three different approaches of teaching English grammar in the Indian Language classrooms. Furthermore, an attempt is also made to provide examples of the grammar presentation and practice exercises of the latest and the most effective but unfortunately the least used method of grammar teaching in Indian educational landscape i.e. Communicative English Language Teaching approach.

Keywords: Grammar-translation Method, Audio-Lingual method, Communicative Language Teaching

Grammar teaching is an important component of all the language acquisition courses offered to the students in the schools and colleges across India. Since grade one, training to learn the set of grammar rules begin to take place in the classroom and also occupy his mind space in the form of homework. The child is made to rote the rules, (s)he does it and keeps doing it till (s)he gets his graduation degree. Therefore, this practice underscores the importance that the teaching of grammar holds in Indian education landscape, but unfortunately despite being taught grammar for almost 12-15 years, most of the people suffer from what Diane Larsen-Freeman mentions in her Interview” inert knowledge problem.” The term was coined by Alfred North Whitehead in 1929 in some different context. He used it to refer to the fact that students learn concepts in the classroom that they cannot later put to their own purposes outside of the classroom. Diane applied the same term very well to the teaching of grammar. Students are taught grammar as a set of rules, but even if they can apply the rules to exercises successfully during the lesson, they don't seem to be able to activate their knowledge of the rules when they are communicating during another part of the lesson or in another context.

The researcher considered the traditional language teaching methodology used in the classroom as major source of the inert knowledge problem. Therefore, it seems that if the students are taught using only this method, language acquisition problems and ineffective

learning environments are created, in which learners hardly participate and/or volunteer. That does not promote learning.

An Overview and Comparison of the Different Grammar Teaching Methods and Approaches

Grammar-translation is the most common way of learning languages for hundreds of years. Students study the grammar of sentences in the target language. They translate them into their own language – or the other way around.

In a typical grammar-translation class, the teacher uses the students' mother tongue most of the time. In a typical grammar translation lesson, grammar is taught deductively: the teacher presents the grammar rules, provides long and detailed explanations and gives examples (usually a list of isolated sentences), students study the rules and practice grammar through translation exercises. A lot of attention is paid to reading and writing; little attention is paid to speaking and listening. Most of the interaction is from the teacher to the student; there is very little student-student interaction.

The ultimate goal is to achieve accuracy, that is, to produce grammatically correct sentences.

Grammar-translation became unpopular because students translated written sentences, knew grammar rules perfectly, but were not able to communicate in the target language. However, it is clear that asking students to translate into and out of their language and English can teach them a lot about the similarities and differences between the two languages.

Audio-Lingual Method

Audio-lingual methodology gives students a lot of speaking practice by using habit-formation drills. Students repeat sentences time and again until they are memorized. Audio-lingual methodology is connected to the theory of behaviorism. It uses a stimulus response reinforcement approach to language and grammar learning. A stimulus (a teacher's prompt) provokes a student response (a sentence), and this response is reinforced by reward of, for example, teacher praise and student satisfaction. If you repeat this procedure often enough, some people suggest, the language will be learned. Noam Chomsky was the first scholar who challenged the theory of behaviorism. He asked the logical question: Why can we all say new things that we have never heard before? In the 1970's, teachers stopped using only Audio-lingual methodology.

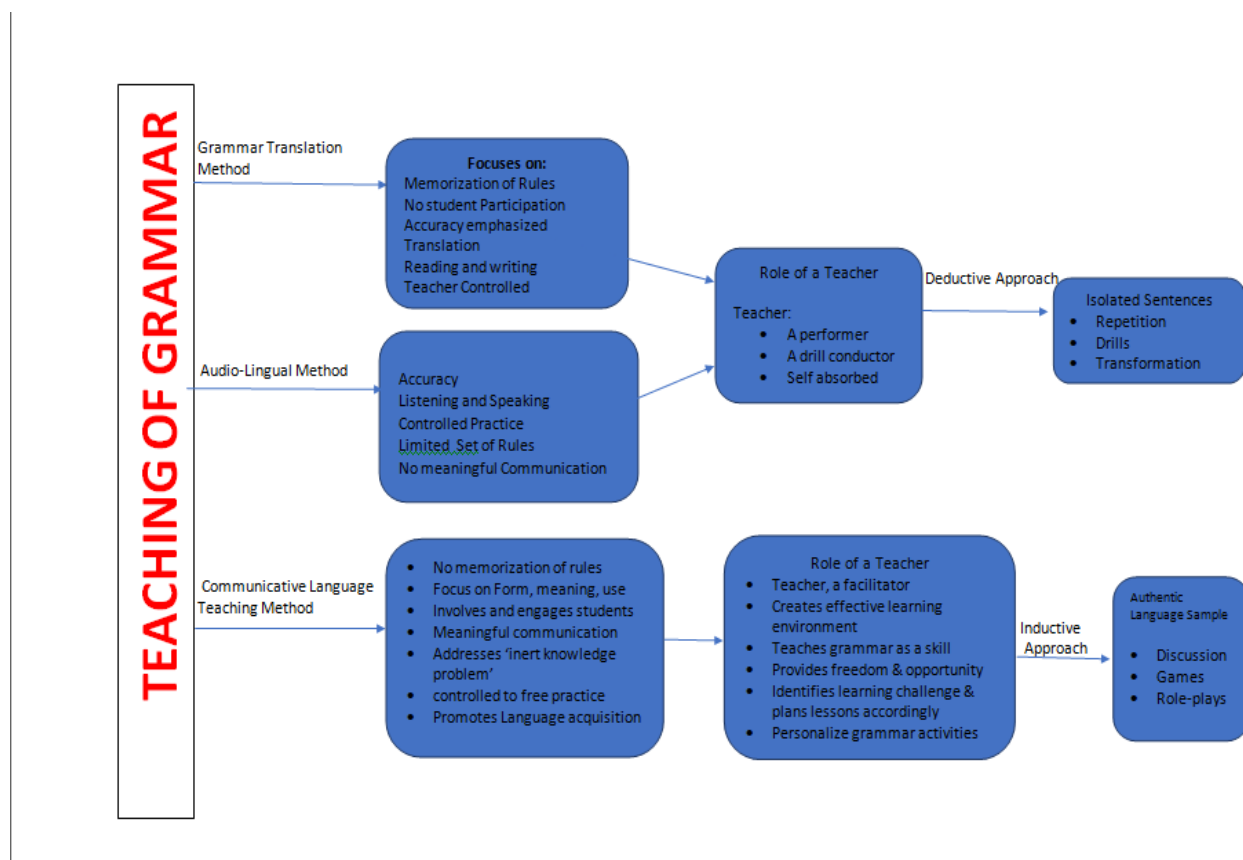
However, one of the main components of audio-lingualis – **language drilling** – which is still used in many lessons because many teachers and students believe that frequent repetition is a key to successful learning.

Communicative Language Teaching Approach

Historically, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been seen as a response to the Audio-Lingual method. CLT focuses on the idea that people learn language if they have opportunities to use it, and that if students have a desire to communicate and a purpose for communicating (rather than just practicing a grammar item), then the language learning will take care of itself.

In CLT, students do many speaking and writing tasks, trying to use any and all of the language that they can. CLT focuses more on content than on form; it puts focus on communication related to the realistic use of language in context. It concentrates on how successfully students can communicate, rather than on whether they are speaking or writing correctly. Correction often takes place after the students have tried to speak or write communicatively.

CLT gives students opportunities to practice using the language and to see its relevance outside the classroom. Also, it focuses on active learning, as well as on teaching.



Graphical representation of an Overview of the three approaches

In the Grammar translation method, a teacher is considered as a sage on the stage. She is a performer, a drill conductor and the one who manages the entire grammar show in the class and the poor students are only the spectators. They are expected to master a simple grammar item followed by the learning of complex structures. They do, yes, many a times, they succeed in learning the set of rules but, unfortunately, they never learn to use it in the diverse situations they encounter in their academic and professional lives. Since they are made to learn using isolated sentences and they are deprived of the opportunities to explore the functioning of grammar in context, they never develop their own understanding of the grammatical principles of the target language. Hence, an appropriate blend of both the methodologies should be used to engage the students in the meaningful and focused tasks to bridge the gap between form, meaning and use.

It is important to identify the leaning challenge of the students followed by the presentation of the required grammar item in context using authentic study materials and real life situations. Practice, as Scott said, is vital to gain fluency, accuracy and restructuring, should smoothly glide a student from scaffolded to unscaffolded grammar practice like ranging from drills, story chains and guessing games to role-plays, debates, presentations and discussions.

Hence, an eclectic approach is to be used to meet the learner's needs.

Sample Grammar Presentation Using Communicative Language Teaching Approach

Topic: Introduction to the Future

Aims: - To frame sentences in the future
- To practice 'wh' questions in the future
- To develop students' speaking skills

Level: Intermediate

Introduction

In this lesson, students practise forming, asking and answering 'wh' questions, besides, framing sentences, in the future tense through a game.

Task: My birthday game

• Demonstrate the game to the whole class. On the board write 'My birthday'. Explain that you are going to tell the students how you're planning to spend your special day i.e. your birthday. Your objective is to share the complete plan. The objective of your opponent (the class) is to stop you from finishing by interrupting you politely to ask questions (using future tenses). Elicit a few examples of the types of questions students can ask. Write them on the board.

E.g.

What are you going to wear? Who will you celebrate your birthday with? How will you get there? Where might you go for the dinner? Etc.

• You have a limit of three minutes. Nominate a student to keep a track of the time. Then begin.

E.g.

Teacher: It is my birthday soon and I'll be thirty next Friday.

Student: Oh really? Are you going to have a party?

Teacher: I'm going to have a meal in "The Country Inn" with a few friends. There'll be about ten of us.

Student: That'll be nice. But it's quiet far off. How'll you get there?

Teacher: Yes, it'll take us two hours to be there. All of us have got bikes and we're driving down to the restaurant.

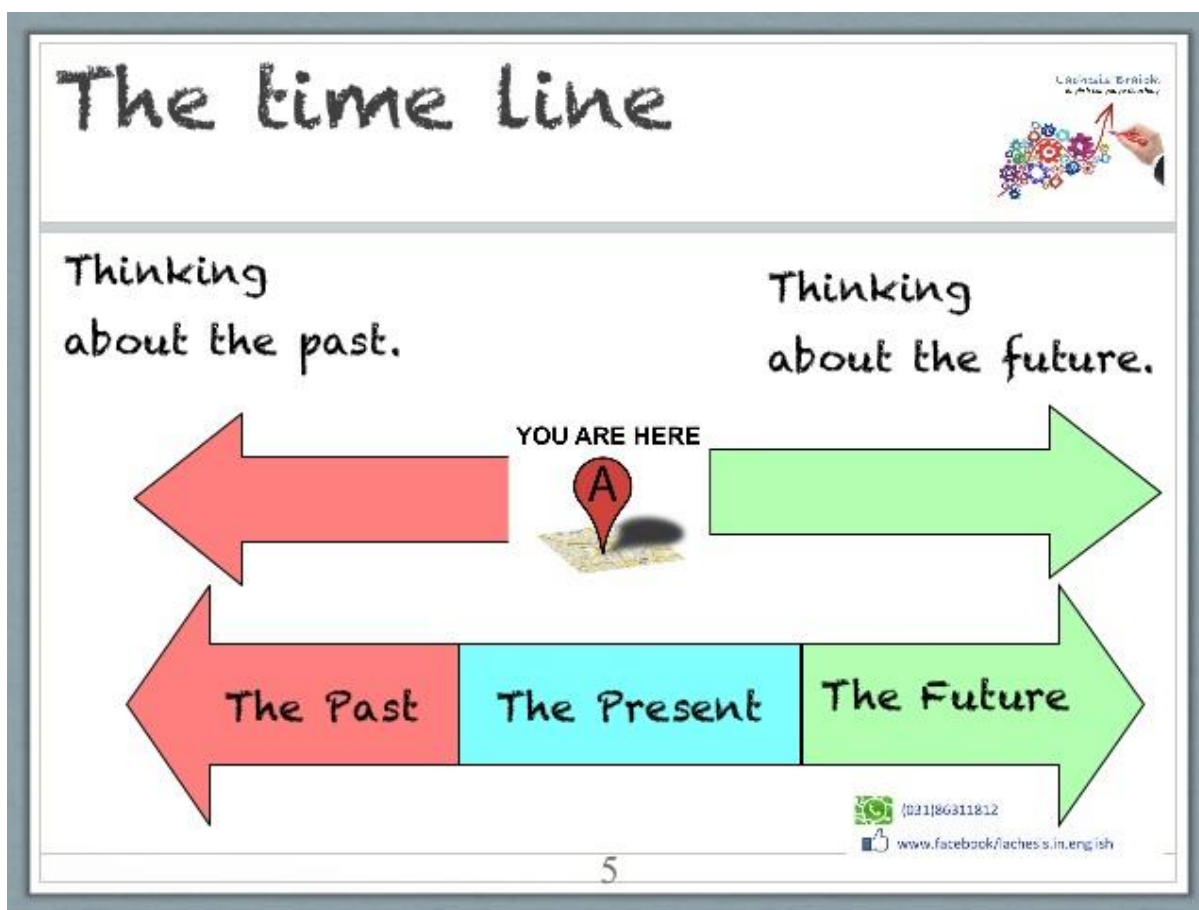
Student: When will you leave for the party?

Teacher: We'll be leaving at 5 in the evening from my workplace.

Stop after three minutes and check how much have they succeeded in interrupting you to fulfil your objective.

- Put students into groups of four to play the game. Students take turns to describe what they intend to do on their next birthdays. The other students interrupt politely to ask questions. Tell students when to start and stop. The winner in each group is the student who could describe his plan completely.

Once the task/game is over, the teacher explains the students by showing the timeline below that talking about the past and the present is easy because they are real and we say about what happened some time ago or what is happening now.



(borrowed from <https://www.slideshare.net/lachesisbraick/verb-tenses-of-english>)

But talking about the future can be a challenge sometimes, as we talk about predictions or the things likely to happen in the times to come. Moreover, there is no single form that we can always use for the future. There are many different ways of talking about the future, depending on how we see a future event.

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Verb Forms Used for the Future

Here are some examples of verb forms used to express the future.

1	Be going to	I am going to have a meal in “The Country Inn”	(an intention)
2	Will	I’ll be thirty next Friday	(neutral future)
3	Present Continuous	We’re driving down to the restaurant	(an arrangement)
4	Present Simple	It is my birthday soon	(a timetable)
5	Will be doing	We’ll be leaving at 5 in the evening	(in the course of events)

Example:2

Topic: To Review the past Indefinite

Aim:

- To revise simple sentences and Wh-questions in the past
- To develop students’ speaking skills

Level: Pre-Intermediate

Introduction: In this lesson, students practise forming, asking and answering ‘wh’ questions, besides framing sentences in the past tense. They do individual, pair and group activities and play a game too to improve their proficiency level.

a) What did Sheena do on holiday to Goa last summer? Look at her photos and use these words to frame the sentences:

Play volleyball, lie on the beach, swim in the sea, go out dancing, have a picnic



1. *She had a picnic.*



2.



3.



4.



5.

b) Divide the class in small groups. The students sit in a circle. They take turns to ask a question to their groupmate sitting next to him/her using any of the given prompts like When did you last go to the cinema? The second student responds and asks the next question.

e.g. I went to the cinema last Sunday/ a month ago.

- meet your childhood friend
- read a story book
- go shopping
- get a present/gift

- visit a zoo
- cook a meal
- go to the cinema

c) Guess the question

• Put students into pairs; A and B. Give Students A a copy of Task 1A and give students B a copy of Task 1B.

Task 1A	
Student A. Write the answers to these questions on a piece of paper. Write simple answers. E.g. six o'clock, soup, at home, by bus, midnight.	
1	What time did you wake up in the morning today?
2	What did you have for lunch yesterday?
3	Where did you have dinner yesterday?
4	How did you come to class today?
5	What time did you go to bed last night?

Task 1B	
Student B. Write the answers to these questions on a piece of paper. Write simple answers. E.g. 7:45, noodles, at grandma's home, on foot.	
1	What time did you arrive at class today?
2	What did you have for breakfast today?
3	Where did you have your lunch yesterday?
4	How did you go home from the school yesterday?
5	What time did you leave your home today?

Students read their five questions and write their answers. They must not show their partner their worksheet.

• Student A tells student B their answer for question 1. Student B tries to guess the original question. Then students exchange roles and repeat the activity. For question 2, student B tells student A their answer first. Students guess each other's questions, taking turns to go first each time. It is important to monitor students and encourage them to help each other with guesses.

d) The 'yesterday' game

• On the board write 'yesterday'. Explain that you are going to tell the students how you spent yesterday. Your objective is to arrive at bed time. The objective of your opponent (the class) is to stop you from arriving at bed time by interrupting you politely to ask questions (using

past tenses). Elicit a few examples of the types of questions students can ask. Write them on the board.

E.g.

What did you wear? Who did you go with? How did you get there? What did you see? Etc.

• You have a limit of three minutes. Assign the duty of time keeping to a student. Then begin.

E.g.

Teacher: I had breakfast and ...

Student: Excuse me, but what did you have for breakfast?

Teacher: Actually, I had cornflakes.

Student: Did you have sugar on your cornflakes? Teacher: Yes, I did.

Student: Where did you buy the cornflakes?

Stop after three minutes and check how far into yesterday you were able to describe.

• Put students into groups of four to play the game. Students take turns to describe what they did yesterday. The other students interrupt politely to ask questions. Tell students when to start and stop. The winner in each group is the student who gets to the latest time yesterday.

Conclusion

Since long grammar-translation method has dominated the Indian classrooms at all the levels which the researcher feels has many limitations and cannot be used as the only method for the purpose of English language acquisition. Hence, Communicative language teaching methodology needs to be adopted to make a paradigm shift from the teacher-centered classroom situation to the more engaging student centric language classroom situation.

Any one method cannot be described as the best one for all the students as there are multiple factors that determine the choice of the methodology by the teacher. Rivers (1981:54), however, suggests using an eclectic approach in which the teacher absorbs the best techniques of all the well-known language teaching methods into their classroom procedures, using them for the purpose for which they are most appropriate.

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