GTM Vis-a-Vis CLT: A Comparison of Language Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT
Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) are two methods commonly implored by language teachers in the classroom setting. These methods are guiding principles that equipped the language teachers in their challenge to transfer language skills to nonnative students. The comparison of these two methods shows learning a language effectively through theory versus the real world. Communicative language teaching makes use of real-life situations that necessitate communication. The teacher sets up a situation that students are likely to encounter in real life. The real-life simulations change from day to day. Students’ motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate in meaningful ways about meaningful topics. GTM is a method of studying a language that approach it first through detailed analysis of its grammar rules, followed by application of the knowledge to the task of translating sentences and texts into and out of the target language. It views language learning as memorizing rules and facts in order to understand and manipulate the morphology and syntax of the foreign language. Furthermore, grammar is taught deductively that is by presentation and study of grammar rules which are practiced through translation exercises.

Introduction
Method in language teaching is essential. It links theory to practice. Every language teacher has his methods of teaching which he uses as a guiding principle. From these methods, one anchors the design of teaching plans, learning activities, instructional materials and evaluation techniques. It is quite notable that the method is proportionate to the performance of the students. So, what went wrong with the teaching methods used in Thai classrooms? Why do most Thai students perform better in written tasks compared to spoken tasks? What happened to almost twelve years of studying English?

Although English language teaching in Thailand has improved over the years, there are still a minimal number of students with adequate
language performance to communicate in real-life situations. Two possible reasons are considered: lack of opportunity to use English in real-life situations and classroom activities do not enhance foreign language development. The latter is a critical issue worthy of in-depth discussion. Thus, this article will go through a comparative analysis of two known methods popularly used by most language teachers: the traditional Grammar Translation Method and the modern Communicative Language Teaching Method.

The Grammar Translation Method

Classes were conducted in the native language. A chapter in a distinctive textbook of this method would begin with a massive bilingual vocabulary list. Grammar points would come directly from the texts and be presented contextually in the textbook, to be explained elaborately by the instructor. Grammar thus provided the rules for assembling words into sentences. Tedious translation and grammar drills would be used to exercise and strengthen the knowledge without much attention to content. Sentences would be deconstructed and translated. Eventually, entire texts would be translated from the target language into the native language and tests would often ask students to replicate classical texts in the target language. Very little attention was placed on pronunciation or any communicative aspects of the language. The skill exercised was reading, and then only in the context of translation. In GTM, reading and writing are the major focus. Vocabulary selection is based solely on the reading texts used, dictionary study and memorization. In addition, accuracy is emphasized. Students are expected to attain high standards in translation. The student’s native language is the medium of instruction. It is used to explain new items and to enable comparison to be made between the foreign language and the native language.

Key Features of GTM

According to Prator and Celce-Murcia (1991), the key features of the Grammar Translation Method are as follows:

1. Classes are taught in the mother tongue, with little active use of the target language.
2. Much vocabulary is taught in the form of lists of isolated words.
3. Long elaborate explanations of the intricacies of grammar are given.
4. Grammar provides the rules for putting words together, and instruction often focuses on the form and inflection of words.
5. Reading of difficult classical texts is begun early.
6. Little attention is paid to the content of texts, which are treated as exercises in grammatical analysis.
7. Often the only drills are exercises in translating disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue.
8. Little or no attention is given to pronunciation.
The Main Principles of GTM: (Richards and Rodgers, 2006)

1. Translation interprets the words and phrases of the foreign languages in the best possible manner.

2. The phraseology and idioms of the target language can best be assimilated in the process of interpretation.

3. The structures of the foreign language are best learnt when compared and contrasted with those of the mother tongue.

Advantages of GTM

1. The phraseology of the target language is quickly explained. Translation is the easiest way of explaining the meaning of words.

2. Teacher’s labor is saved. Communication between the teacher and the learner does not cause linguistic problems.

Disadvantages of GTM

1. It is an unnatural method. The natural order of learning a language is listening, speaking, reading, and writing. That is how the child learns his mother tongue in natural surroundings. GTM starts with reading thus, the learning process is reversed.

2. Speech is neglected. The Grammar Translation Method lays emphasis on reading and writing. It neglects speech. Thus, the students who are taught English through this method fail to express themselves adequately in spoken English. Even at the undergraduate stage they feel shy of communicating through English. It has been observed that in a class, which is taught English through this method, learners listen to the mother tongue more than that to the second/foreign language. Since language learning involves habit formation such students fail to acquire habit of speaking English. Thus, they have to pay a heavy price for being taught through this method.

3. Exact translation is not possible. Translation is, indeed, a difficult task and exact translation from one language to another is not always possible. A language is the result of various customs, traditions, and modes of behavior of a speech community and these traditions differ from community to community. There are several lexical items in one language, which have no synonyms/equivalents in another language.

4. It does not give pattern practice. A person can learn a language only when he internalizes its patterns to the extent that they form his habit. But the Grammar Translation Method does not provide any such practice to the learner of a language. It rather attempts to teach language through rules and not by use. Researchers in linguistics have proved that to speak any language, whether native or foreign entirely by rule is quite impossible. Language learning means acquiring certain skills, which can be learnt through practice and not by just memorizing rules.

5. Low translation standard are caused by grammatical techniques which force the learners to deduce sentences from a multiplicity of rules and exceptions.

6. Little or no attention to pronunciation.

7. This method neither approaches nor encourage the student’s communicative competence.
Typical Techniques in GTM

Diane Larsen-Freeman, in her book Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching (1986:13) provides expanded descriptions of some common/typical techniques closely associated with the Grammar Translation Method. The listing here is in summary form only.

1. Translation of a Literary Passage
   (Translating target language to native language)

2. Reading Comprehension Questions
   (Finding information in a passage, making inferences and relating to personal experience)

3. Antonyms/Synonyms
   (Finding antonyms and synonyms for words or sets of words)

4. Cognates
   (Learning spelling/sound patterns that correspond between L1 and the target language)

5. Deductive Application of Rule
   (Understanding grammar rules and their exceptions, then applying them to new examples)

6. Fill-in-the-blanks
   (Filling in gaps in sentences with new words or items of a particular grammar type)

7. Memorization
   (Memorizing vocabulary lists, grammatical rules and grammatical paradigms)

8. Use Words in Sentences
   (Students create sentences to illustrate they know the meaning and use of new words)

9. Composition
   (Students write about a topic using the target language)

So, how does a learner react to this method of teaching? The GTM may make the language learning experience uninspiring and boring. Worst effect of this method is on pupil’s motivation. Because he cannot succeed - leads to frustration, boredom and indiscipline. It may leave the students with a sense of frustration. Even among more able pupils who may be able to achieve a higher level of success, there is a feeling that this is all there is to language learning. It is not a rewarding or satisfying activity. Language learning should be fun and bring some joy and pride in achievement with it. The method by definition has a very limited scope of objectives. Because speaking or any kind of spontaneous creative output was missing from the curriculum, students would often fail at speaking or even letter writing in the target language. Through grammar translation, students lacked an active role in the classroom, often correcting their own work and strictly following the textbook.

The Communicative Language Teaching Method

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is an approach to the teaching of second and foreign languages that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. It is also referred to as “communicative approach to the teaching of foreign languages” or simply the “communicative approach”. Communicative Language Teaching marks the beginning of
a major paradigm shift in language teaching in the twentieth century. The origin of CLT is to be found in the change in the British language teaching traditions dating from the late 1960s. This was a response to the criticisms of American linguist Noam Chomsky. British applied linguists saw the need to focus in language teaching in communicative proficiency rather than on mere structures.

Language learning does not take place in a vacuum, and therefore needs to be taught in real-life contexts to be effective. CLT adds the dimension of language functions such as apologizing, persuading, negotiating, and conveying information that are vital for interaction with others. It enables learners to use language for communicative purposes in situations with others, and to be aware of the appropriate language to use according to levels of formality, tone, context, topic, and non-verbal behavior.

Features of CLT

One of the most recognized features of CLT is David Nunan’s (1991) five features of CLT:

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language. There is also an awareness of variation in language use rather than simply attention to the language.

2. The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.

3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the Learning Management process. Communicative tasks are achieved through the language rather than simple exercises on the language.

4. An enhancement of the learner’s own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning. There is an emphasis placed on students’ initiatives, rather than simply on teacher-centered directions.

5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom.

These five features are claimed by practitioners of CLT to show that they are very interested in the needs and desires of their learners as well as the connection between the language as it is taught in their class and as it used outside the classroom. Under this broad umbrella definition, any teaching practice that helps students develop their communicative competence in an authentic context is deemed an acceptable and beneficial form of instruction. Thus, in the classroom CLT often takes the form of pair and group work requiring negotiation and cooperation between learners, fluency-based activities that encourage learners to develop their confidence, role-plays in which students practice and develop language functions, as well as judicious use of grammar and pronunciation focused activities.

CLT Features at Length

Finnociaro and Brumfit (1983:91-93) compiled this list of CLT features way back in 1983.

(1) Meaning is paramount.

(2) Dialogs, if used, center around communicative
nicative functions and are not normally memorized.

3) Contextualization is a basic premise.

4) Language learning is learning to communicate.

5) Effective communication is sought.

6) Drilling may occur, but peripheral.

7) Comprehensible pronunciation is sought.

8) Any device which helps the learners is accepted - varying according to their age, interest, etc.

9) Attempts to communicate may be encouraged from the very beginning.

10) Judicious use of native language is accepted where feasible.

11) Translation may be used where students need or benefit from it.

12) Reading and writing can start from the first day, if desired.

13) The target linguistic system will be learned best through the process of struggling to communicate.

14) Communicative competence is the desired goal.

15) Linguistic variation is a central concept in materials and methods.

16) Sequencing is determined by any consideration of content function, or meaning which maintains interest.

17) Teachers help learners in any way that motivates them to work with the language.

18) Language is created by the individual often through trial and error.

19) Fluency and acceptable language is the primary goal: accuracy is judged not in the abstract but in context.

20) Students are expected to interact with other people, either in the flesh, through pair and group work, or in their writings.

21) The teacher cannot know exactly what language the students will use.

22) Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in what is being communicated by the language.

**Classroom activities used in CLT**

- Role play
- Interviews
- Information gap
- Games
- Language exchange
- Surveys
- Pair work
- Learning by teaching

However, not all courses that utilize the communicative language approach will restrict their activities solely to these. Some courses will have the students take occasional grammar quizzes, or prepare at home using non-communicative drills, for instance.

Communicative Approach to language teaching includes several distinct aspects. Two of them are mentioned here. Applying these aspects means that language teaching and learning become far more than a series of grammar lessons and vocabulary lists. For language teaching and learning to be truly communicative, it must not only be in context, but used to convey ideas, preferences,
thoughts, feelings and information in a way that is addressed to reach others. CLT can be addressed in two ways:

- Content-Based Instruction (CBI)
- Task-Based language teaching (TBLT)

Definitions of CBI vs. TBLT in ELT

In CBI, Widdowson, as cited by Brumfit, the focus of classes is not on the language and structure itself, but rather on learners acquiring skills or knowledge using English as the language of instruction. If you teach a learner how to repair computers, for example, and use English as the language of instruction, the learners improve their language communicative skills while learning foremost the skill of computer repair.

Today’s global community expects our students to be not only skilled in their particular field of interest but at the same time capable of transferring their knowledge and skills to another. Here lies the demand of developing communicatively efficient workers who can be performing very well in both knowledge of work and language skills.

Task-Based Learning in ELT

In the TBLT approach, Willis, as cited by Brumfit, the focus is on providing communicative activities needed for English language learning, performing tasks using the target language (English) and using the English language in other ways for learning tasks. Examples would be having learners buy postage to mail a letter by first teaching them the structures and language needed to perform the task, then actually having them do it. Another example would be teaching learners the needed English to order a meal in a restaurant, or make a shopping purchase, then allowing them to complete such tasks on their own using unguided or free speech.

Here lies the various communicative drills designed by language teachers in the classroom. By providing the students with a variety of speaking and listening exercises copied from real-life scenarios, English language teachers were able to let the students experience the use of the target language.

Caveats

A major criticism of CLT is that of a clash of theory and practice. Theoretically all learners should learn to say and do what they personally want to do, but practically the syllabus mostly prescribes the lexical and grammatical items which they have to learn at a given stage of the course. Correspondingly the learners are constantly called upon to imagine and pretend that they are in a situation in which they want to say what the textbook prescribes they have to say. Critics also point to the danger that learners may be tempted to simply memorize certain phrases which prove to be useful in recurring communicative situations without, however, learning to creatively construct new grammatical forms that might serve their speech intentions better.

Brown (1994:78-80) warns that there are certain caveats in the field of language teaching when it comes to discussing CLT and one’s support of the approach, saying that that support or belief needs to be “qualified”. He warns against:

1. Giving “lip service” to the principles of CLT (because “no one these days would admit to a disbelief in principles of CLT; they would be marked
as a heretic")) without actually grounding one’s teaching techniques in those principles, or making sure one indeed understands and practices according to the characteristics that make CLT what it is.

(2) Overdoing certain CLT features, for example engaging in real-life authentic language to the exclusion of helpful devices such as controlled practice, or vice versa. Moderation is needed in combination with common sense and a balanced approach.

(2) The numerous interpretations of what CLT actually “is”. CLT is often a catch call term, and does not reflect the fact that not everyone agrees on its interpretation or application. Teachers need to be aware that there are many possible versions, and it is intended as an “umbrella” term covering a variety of methods.

Conclusion

The goal of language teaching is to develop what Hymes (as cited by Rao, 1996) referred to as “communicative competence.” This could be done with activities which involve authentic communication to promote learning. Giving the learners practice activities designed to stimulate “real life” communication problems was the obvious way to bridge that gap. In the process of learning a foreign language, “learning by doing” benefits our students through opportunities to interact with one another and perceiving meanings on their own. Another argument focuses on the assumption that the opportunity for learners to negotiate meaning during meaningful interaction is of crucial importance for language learning in the classroom.

In the process of language acquisition, it is insufficient for students to simply have knowledge of target language forms, structures, and functions. Students must be able to apply this knowledge in negotiating meaning. During the negotiation of meaning, the learners can learn directly from each other, sharing information and knowledge they have either missed or misunderstood.

Language teachers should see teaching methodology as their own personal domain, certainly open to outside influences and examples, but theirs to experiment with and develop. Decide what your language learning principles are and select techniques from various “methods” that appear to match them. Try adapting/experimenting with those techniques before you prematurely discard them after one attempt. Try using various techniques in a variety of combinations. Observe your learners closely, and invite them into the process by eliciting their feedback on the range of techniques you use. Try not to misinterpret what the role of a language teacher is - you are not some “authority” given a mandate to tell learners how they should think. You are a facilitator and a guide, and an ongoing “learner” yourself.
REFERENCE


