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Choosing the right methods during the formation of speaking skills

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Abstract; This article examines the selection of effective methods for developing speaking skills in English language education, with a particular focus on the grammar-translation method. While this traditional method supports foundational vocabulary and grammar acquisition, it presents challenges in fostering oral communication and active speaking skills. Through a survey of third-year English language teaching students, this study identifies both the advantages and limitations of the grammar-translation method in achieving balanced language proficiency. Additionally, the role of idiomatic expressions and cultural context is explored as essential components for enhancing communicative competence in language learners.

Keywords: Grammar-translation, language learning, teaching methods, idiomatic expressions

Understanding Methods in Language Education

Given the global importance of English, it is essential to focus on effective methods for its study. English is widely used across numerous fields, including science, technology, politics, and economics. In science, for example, English proficiency is often associated with intellectual and worldly competence, as researchers, scholars, and professionals need to access, contribute to, and engage with international knowledge bases (Celik, 2019; Nurutdinova et al., 2016). This prevalence has established English as a lingua franca, facilitating communication across diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Consequently, the importance of effective English teaching methods has gained attention not only in English-speaking countries but also in regions where English is taught as a foreign or second language.

Throughout history, a variety of methods have been employed to teach and learn English, each offering unique techniques, advantages, and limitations. These methods reflect different linguistic theories, cultural contexts, and educational philosophies. For instance, some methods prioritize grammatical accuracy and vocabulary retention, while others focus on developing communicative skills and cultural understanding. Scholars have defined the term "method" in various ways to capture these nuances: Collins describes it as a specific approach to achieving a goal, while Brown considers it a set of instructional guidelines designed to meet linguistic objectives in the classroom. Jayaratna (as cited in Dinçay, 2010) defines a method as an "open way of structuring thought and action," implying that teaching methods are adaptable frameworks rather than rigid protocols.



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Among the many approaches to language learning, the grammar-translation method has endured as one of the most prominent. Historically used to teach classical languages like Latin and Greek, the grammar-translation method, or "classical method," has been in practice since the 19th century. Latin, being the language of academia, business, and government in 18th-century Europe, required a teaching approach that emphasized reading comprehension and grammatical accuracy. Education during this period was deeply valued, with the belief that it endowed individuals with willpower, emotional resilience, and intellectual discipline, thus preparing them for civic life. The grammar-translation method catered to these educational values by focusing on textual analysis, translation, and grammatical structure, elements deemed essential for intellectual cultivation. Consequently, this method dominated European and foreign language education from the 1840s to the 1940s and remains prevalent in some regions today (Dinçay, 2010).

As language teaching evolved, other methods emerged in response to perceived limitations in the grammar-translation method. For instance, the direct method, developed in the early 20th century, shifted away from translation exercises to emphasize direct oral interaction in the target language. Similarly, the communicative approach, gaining prominence in the 1970s, focused on real-life language use and interaction, promoting skills such as speaking, listening, and cultural fluency. Despite these innovations, the grammar-translation method has maintained a foothold in language instruction, particularly in regions where reading and writing skills are prioritized over speaking and listening.

In Azerbaijan's educational system, significant attention is given to English language instruction, as student interest in learning English continues to grow. English has become a critical subject in schools, with increasing numbers of students pursuing English proficiency to enhance their academic and professional prospects. To support this demand, English teachers regularly receive training, participate in certification exams, and integrate global methodologies into their teaching. However, the prevalence of traditional methods like grammar-translation persists, partly due to historical teaching practices and the focus on grammatical knowledge and exam preparation.

According to educational expert Elmin Nuri, foreign language instruction in Azerbaijan has traditionally been approached in a one-sided manner, with a primary focus on reading and writing skills. However, the role of English in the curriculum has evolved; it is now one of the three primary subjects included in final exams, underscoring its impact on overall academic performance. Nuri emphasizes that English instruction must be taken seriously to enhance general education outcomes, as proficiency in English contributes to students' success across other subjects and disciplines (Aliyeva, 2024). This shift has encouraged educators to explore and implement a broader range of teaching methods that address all language skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—thus moving beyond the constraints of traditional grammar-translation.

Today, language education in Azerbaijan reflects a blend of traditional and modern approaches. Teachers are encouraged to adapt their methods to the needs of their students, often incorporating elements of communicative and task-based learning into their grammar-focused curricula. For example, while students may study grammar rules and vocabulary through translation exercises, teachers also integrate conversation practice, role-playing, and cultural discussions to enhance students' communicative competence. These combined approaches aim to provide a more holistic language learning experience, equipping students with the practical skills needed to navigate an increasingly interconnected world.

The grammar-translation method remains particularly valuable for beginners who benefit from structured, rule-based learning. However, as students progress, a more interactive approach that



incorporates real-life language use becomes essential. Integrating communicative techniques within a grammar-translation framework allows for a gradual transition from passive knowledge acquisition to active language use. Such blended approaches highlight the adaptability of teaching methods and underscore the importance of tailoring language instruction to meet the evolving needs of students in diverse educational contexts.

So, understanding the strengths and limitations of different language teaching methods is essential for educators striving to provide effective instruction. By balancing traditional approaches with modern, interactive techniques, teachers in Azerbaijan and beyond can foster comprehensive language skills that empower students to engage confidently in academic, professional, and social settings.

Approaches and Techniques in English Language Learning

According to educational experts, learning English should aim not only at acquiring necessary language skills but also at introducing students to the culture and traditions of English-speaking countries. Language is deeply embedded within the cultural and social contexts of its speakers; thus, learning English effectively requires more than just memorizing vocabulary and mastering grammar. Exposure to cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, and everyday conversational norms is essential for achieving communicative competence. Moreover, effective English instruction should foster language perception, develop memory, and enhance logical, critical, and creative thinking alongside communicative skills in speech activities, equipping students with the skills necessary to engage in meaningful, real-world communication (Aslan, 2021; Aliyeva, 2024).

One of the most widely used approaches in English language teaching is the grammar-translation method. This traditional method involves presenting students with a piece of literature or an excerpt from an author's work, which they are instructed to read and translate. The chosen text typically includes specific grammar rules and vocabulary that students are required to learn and understand. Once the text is translated, the teacher explains the relevant grammar rule, providing students with both linguistic structure and lexical knowledge. This approach allows for texts from various subjects, not just literature, to be utilized, providing a versatile way to expose students to new vocabulary and grammatical structures. It can be applied to scientific texts, historical documents, and even practical written materials, offering students a broad spectrum of language exposure (Celik, 2019).

While the grammar-translation method is foundational for many language programs, several other approaches are widely recognized for their effectiveness in developing communicative and practical language skills. For instance, the direct method, developed in the late 19th century, focuses on immersion and oral practice rather than translation and grammar explanation. This method emphasizes teaching language through direct interaction in the target language, with minimal to no use of the native language. Vocabulary and phrases are introduced through demonstration, visual aids, and repetition, promoting a more natural acquisition process. Students are encouraged to think in English, responding in full sentences and engaging in dialogues, which can improve fluency and listening comprehension skills. Although this method can be challenging for beginners, it has proven effective in immersive environments where students can practice consistently.

Another influential approach is the audio-lingual method, which emerged in the United States during the 1940s and 1950s as a response to military needs for rapid language acquisition. Based on behaviorist theories of learning, the audio-lingual method uses repetition, drills, and reinforcement to build language patterns. Students listen to recordings, repeat phrases, and engage in structured dialogues,



developing automatic responses to common language structures. This method places heavy emphasis on pronunciation and listening skills, which are often overlooked in traditional grammar-translation classes. Although it has limitations in fostering spontaneous language production, it has been valuable in language programs focused on oral proficiency.

The communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, which became popular in the 1970s, represents a shift from structure-based to meaning-based instruction. CLT emphasizes interaction as the primary goal of language learning, focusing on the ability to communicate effectively in real-life situations. In this approach, activities are designed to simulate authentic language use, such as role-playing, group discussions, and problem-solving tasks. Students are encouraged to use English in varied social contexts, developing both linguistic competence and sociolinguistic awareness. CLT also integrates listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, fostering a more balanced language development that includes both fluency and accuracy. Unlike the grammar-translation method, CLT places greater responsibility on students to actively participate, which can enhance engagement and retention.

An evolution of CLT, task-based language teaching (TBLT), takes this approach a step further by organizing language learning around specific tasks rather than linguistic forms. In TBLT, students engage in activities that have real-life applications, such as planning a trip, giving directions, or conducting a survey. Language is learned as a means to complete these tasks, rather than as an end in itself. This approach aligns closely with constructivist principles, where students learn through experience and interaction, making it especially effective for adult learners or those preparing for professional settings. By focusing on practical communication, TBLT allows learners to develop problem-solving skills and adapt language use to various contexts, which is particularly beneficial in preparing students for real-world situations.

Despite the wide variety of available methods, the grammar-translation method remains popular, particularly in contexts where reading and writing skills are prioritized, or where resources for more interactive approaches are limited. For example, in countries with large class sizes and limited access to native English-speaking teachers, grammar-translation offers a structured, manageable approach that allows teachers to guide students through the complexities of English grammar. However, as the demand for communicative competence increases globally, there is a growing interest in combining traditional methods with communicative approaches to meet diverse learning needs.

In the context of Azerbaijan, the grammar-translation method has long been favored due to its compatibility with examination-oriented education. However, the educational landscape is evolving, with an increasing number of teachers incorporating elements of communicative language teaching and task-based learning to address students' needs for spoken proficiency. In recent years, workshops, training sessions, and resources have been provided to English teachers in Azerbaijan to encourage a shift towards more interactive methods. As a result, while the foundational role of grammar-translation remains, teachers are now more frequently blending this method with techniques that encourage active communication, such as group work, role-play, and discussions on cultural topics.

In summary, while each method has its unique advantages, a well-rounded language program often combines multiple approaches to cater to different aspects of language learning. For beginners, the grammar-translation method provides a solid foundation in vocabulary and grammar, enabling them to comprehend the structural aspects of English. As students advance, incorporating direct, audio-lingual, and communicative techniques becomes essential to ensure a balanced development of all language skills. This blend of methods allows for a comprehensive approach that respects the strengths of each technique while



addressing their limitations, ultimately supporting students in becoming well-rounded, confident English speakers.

Assignments within the grammar-translation method typically follow a structured order:

1. A dictionary of new vocabulary words from the text is provided to students.
2. Students create sentences using each new vocabulary word.
3. Students answer comprehension questions in English based on the text.
4. Students identify antonyms or synonyms for words in the text.
5. A cloze passage (text with blanks) is given, and students fill in the blanks.
6. A grammar exercise is assigned, requiring students to apply the relevant rule (Dinçay, 2010).

For example, phrasal verbs from the text are categorized as either separable or inseparable, with separable phrasal verbs commonly used with pronouns (e.g., “wake her up” as separable, “get on the bus” as inseparable).

Table 1: Examples of Separable and Inseparable Phrasal Verbs

<i>Separable</i>	<i>Inseparable</i>
Put away	Look into
Turn down	Get over
Take in	Fade out

Teaching Idioms and Grammar Using the Grammar-Translation Method

Idioms presented in a foreign language can sometimes be challenging to translate directly into a native language, often requiring the teacher to provide context and explanations. Due to a lack of consensus among linguists, estimates suggest that English contains over 10,000 idioms, with around 103 of them considered essential for basic proficiency (Brenner, 2003). These idioms often cannot be translated literally; instead, equivalent phrases are used to convey a natural meaning. For example, the English idiom "walk on eggshells" can be translated in Azerbaijani to imply "being very careful." Additionally, suffixes such as "-ness" in English are often presented with their Azerbaijani equivalents, like "-lik" in the word "happiness." Some terms, such as "system," remain consistent across languages, further easing comprehension.

Grammatical rules in the grammar-translation method are typically learned deductively, with learners observing rules provided by the teacher before applying them. These instructional components are key features of the grammar-translation method.

In this method, the teacher plays a central role, leading the classroom and focusing primarily on the teacher-student relationship. The teacher provides vocabulary and grammar rules, aiming to help students understand the grammar of the target language while also reinforcing their knowledge of native grammar. Accuracy in grammar and vocabulary is highly emphasized, with primary focus on developing reading and writing skills (Aliyeva, 2024; Celik, 2019). Vocabulary and grammatical structures are prioritized, making this method effective for building a foundational understanding of the language.



However, the grammar-translation method has notable limitations. The teacher's dominant role limits opportunities for student-student interaction, as students primarily follow the teacher's instructions. Communication is generally conducted in the native language, leaving little space for English conversation. While vocabulary and grammar rules are thoroughly explained, speaking and listening skills tend to be neglected, and pronunciation is rarely addressed.

To understand which methods are perceived as most effective, I conducted a survey among third-year English language teaching students. Involving forty participants, the survey asked students about the methods their teachers employ to teach English.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the grammar-translation method remains a foundational approach in teaching English, particularly useful for building vocabulary and grammatical understanding. This method allows students to grasp structural aspects of English while often drawing comparisons to their native language, reinforcing their comprehension through translation exercises. While it is beneficial in developing reading and writing skills, the method has limitations, particularly in fostering oral communication and listening skills, which are essential for fluency in a global language like English.

By highlighting both the strengths and drawbacks of the grammar-translation method, educators and language learners can make informed decisions about its application. As shown through student feedback in the survey, there is a growing recognition of the need for more communicative and interactive approaches that promote real-life language use. Nevertheless, when complemented with modern techniques and resources, the grammar-translation method can still play a valuable role in language education, especially for beginners who benefit from structured, rule-based learning.

Incorporating cultural elements, such as idioms and contextual vocabulary, further enriches the learning experience, making language acquisition a more holistic endeavor. With a balanced approach that includes various methods, English language education can continue evolving to meet the diverse needs of students, ultimately enhancing both linguistic skills and cultural understanding.

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