CHAPTER 1

THE GRAMMAR TRANSLATION METHOD

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Learning Goals

In this chapter, we will first present the development of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) from a historical perspective. We will then discuss the underlying theoretical principles, followed by a description of the instructional techniques used in this method. The chapter will end with a sample lesson. After reading and working through this chapter, students should be able to:

1. Talk about the historical development of the GTM;
2. Discuss the instructional principles related to the GTM;
3. Describe the techniques typically used in contexts where the GTM is used;
4. Prepare and teach a lesson plan that is designed in accordance with the GTM.

A Historical Perspective on the Grammar Translation Method (GTM)

In Medieval Europe, learning Classical Greek and Latin was regarded as an essential aspect of education for those who were privileged enough to receive formalized schooling. As Celce-Murcia (1991) explains, higher learning, particularly in Europe, was conducted primarily in Greek and Latin well into the 19th century. Because the majority of scholarly activity at the time typically involved translating the classical works of the Greek and Roman philosophers and scientists, the so-called Classical languages were primarily studied for the purpose of interpreting scientific and philosophical texts.

> *Think and Answer*
>
> Helena Muffy, in 1912, wrote the following in her diary:
>
> *We had a test in three of our studies today. Didn't make a very good mark in Caesar, but because I omitted to look up some rules, so you see whence I got to today, I was at a loss what to write.*
>
> The lesson she was referring to can be seen below, in Figure 1. Study the lesson and make note of how it differs from the textbooks you followed while learning English.

Chang (2011) writes that in the 18th and 19th centuries, this approach– known as the Classical Method – became the prevalent mode of language instruction, particularly in contexts where the main objective of language learning was developing reading proficiency, rather than oral communication. Because accurate translation through close analysis of grammatical structures was the standard by which success was measured, the Classical Method was also widely known as the GTM. During this time period, the educational policies of the Ottoman Empire embraced the GTM as a primary means of foreign language instruction. As Balcı (2006) explains, the first translation office was established in Istanbul under the name of *Babıâli Tercüme Odası* in the year 1821; this office oversaw the translation of official and legal documents from French and English into Turkish. These languages were taught to young Ottoman diplomats who were to be sent to Europe.

As far as we understand, the GTM was used in *Babıâli Tercüme Odası*, as can be inferred from the names of the French and English language courses taught in 1856:

namely, Fransızca İnşa (Writing), Hüsn-i Hat (Calligraphy), Şifahen Tahrir (Oral-writing/dictation), Çeviri ve Konuşma (Translation and Speaking), and İngiliz Sarfı (English Vocabulary/Lexicology). Furthermore, Işıksalan (1997) points out that in the teaching of Turkish and literature, the Ottoman schools that were established in accordance with movement of modernization in the second half of the 19th century followed a method that can be summarized as "reading, writing, and memorizing" (p. 169). Balcı (2008) likewise notes that French language instruction during the Ottoman period comprised teaching its "grammar and translation" (p. 92).

Figure 1: An elementary Latin course (1909) by Franklin Hazen Potter

As a language teaching approach, the GTM is considered as coming from the "pre-scientific" era, because little or no research was conducted in terms of the underlying pedagogy or learner outcomes (Razmjoo, 2011). To put it more simply, we really do not know, in scientific terms, how this method functioned from a learning perspective, to what extent its aims and goals were reached, and or whether or not learners benefited from GTM as intended by its methodologists and teachers. The working philosophy behind teaching the Latin and ancient Greek languages was that such a learning activity constituted mental training. As Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) explain, foreign language instruction was believed to help learners "grow intellectually." While they had no expectation of using these languages in everyday life, "the mental exercise of learning it would be beneficial" (p. 13). This view has been shared by other academics, such as Demircioğlu (1949), who wrote in Turkey approximately 70 years ago that learning Latin according to GTM practices resulted in the ability to make "correct sentences by working the mind correctly" (p. 180).

Instruction via GTM followed a simple formula whereby learners "were given explanations of individual points of grammar, and then they were given sentences which exemplified these points" (Harmer, 2007, p. 63). Harmer notes that what made the GTM different from the methods and approaches that followed it is that the language was taught at the sentence level only. As students' knowledge of the language developed gradually, they were given lengthier texts; but still, the sentence was the main unit of study. Moreover, there was little interest in developing speaking

skills, since grammatical and lexical accuracy was the major goal of instruction.

Although the GTM is often regarded as a "dead" method, in contrast to more modern instructional approaches (perhaps because it has historically been used for the teaching of "dead" languages such as Greek and Latin), variations on GTM are in fact still in use worldwide, although with minor changes or the addition of instructional techniques borrowed from other methods and approaches. For instance, according to Chang (2011), although university-level English teaching in Taiwan has experienced substantial changes over the past decades, current grammar teaching is still carried out through the use of the GTM.

Instructional Practices in GTM

A typical GTM lesson involved lists of vocabulary items to be memorized, with sentence translation as the main classroom activity; little place was given to developing speaking and pronunciation skills (Hişmanoğlu, 2005; Rivers, 1981). Prator and Celce-Murcia (as cited in Brown, 2001) outline the following major characteristics of the GTM:

1. Classes are taught in the mother tongue, with little active use of the target language.
2. 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 the texts, which are instead treated as exercises for 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 (pp. 18-19).

However, despite the lack of emphasis on pronunciation, students are expected to articulate the language in an intelligible manner during reading-aloud exercises. Therefore, classroom teachers may guide students in accurate pronunciation of lexical terms.

Within the framework of the GTM, some common learning tasks are described by Larsen-Freeman (2011). These may include, for instance, the translation of a literary passage; reading comprehension questions; a discussion of antonyms/synonyms and cognates; deductive application of rules, fill-in-the-blanks exercises, memorization of lexical items and rules of grammar; using words in sentences, and composition (pp. 20-21). Additional activities may include reading aloud and error correction.

Students' and Teachers' Roles

Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) describe the regard roles of the students and teacher in the GTM classroom as highly traditional. The teacher acts as an an authority figure, instructing students in the grammatical rules that are the focus of a given lesson, and the students work to internalize this information. The learners are then asked to apply these rules to practice exercises that are similar to examples provided in the lesson. There is little interaction between the students and the teacher; the flow of communication is almost entirely from the teacher to the learners. The GTM does not account for issues such as students' affective needs or differences in learning styles.

Instructional Materials

Teaching materials employed in the GTM classroom typically consist of literary texts written in the target language. These are not necessarily intended for use by foreign language users, but they are chosen for instructional purposes as exemplifying a particular set of grammatical structures. Students may also be given reading comprehension questions and lists of vocabulary items related to the text. See Figure 2 below for suggestions for teachers who will use the GTM.
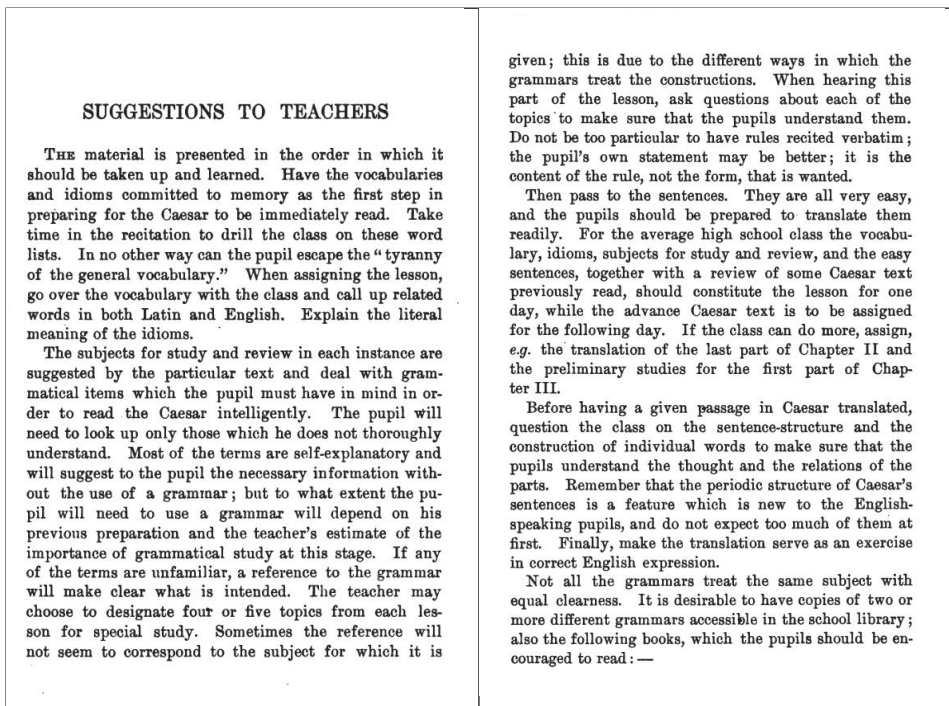

SUGGESTIONS TO TEACHERS

THE material is presented in the order in which it should be taken up and learned. Have the vocabularies and idioms committed to memory as the first step in preparing for the Caesar to be immediately read. Take time in the recitation to drill the class on these word lists. In no other way can the pupil escape the " tyranny of the general vocabulary." When assigning the lesson, go over the vocabulary with the class and call up related words in both Latin and English. Explain the literal meaning of the idioms.

The subjects for study and review in each instance are suggested by the particular text and deal with grammatical items which the pupil must have in mind in order to read the Caesar intelligently. The pupil will need to look up only those which he does not thoroughly understand. Most of the terms are self-explanatory and will suggest to the pupil the necessary information without the use of a grammar; but to what extent the pupil will need to use a grammar will depend on his previous preparation and the teacher's estimate of the importance of grammatical study at this stage. If any of the terms are unfamiliar, a reference to the grammar will make clear what is intended. The teacher may choose to designate four or five topics from each lesson for special study. Sometimes the reference will not seem to correspond to the subject for which it is given; this is due to the different ways in which the grammars treat the constructions. When hearing this part of the lesson, ask questions about each of the topics to make sure that the pupils understand them. Do not be too particular to have rules recited verbatim; the pupil's own statement may be better; it is the content of the rule, not the form, that is wanted.

Then pass to the sentences. They are all very easy, and the pupils should be prepared to translate them readily. For the average high school class the vocabulary, idioms, subjects for study and review, and the easy sentences, together with a review of some Caesar text previously read, should constitute the lesson for one day, while the advance Caesar text is to be assigned for the following day. If the class can do more, assign, *e.g.* the translation of the last part of Chapter II and the preliminary studies for the first part of Chapter III.

Before having a given passage in Caesar translated, question the class on the sentence-structure and the construction of individual words to make sure that the pupils understand the thought and the relations of the parts. Remember that the periodic structure of Caesar's sentences is a feature which is new to the English-speaking pupils, and do not expect too much of them at first. Finally, make the translation serve as an exercise in correct English expression.

Not all the grammars treat the same subject with equal clearness. It is desirable to have copies of two or more different grammars accessible in the school library; also the following books, which the pupils should be encouraged to read: —

Figure 2: Suggestions for teachers who will use the GTM.

Relationship between the Target and Native Language

Instruction according to the GTM is carried out mainly in the students' mother tongue (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). The target language is treated as an object of study, and students are not necessarily expected to produce the language for communicative purposes. The main objective is developing mastery of grammar and accuracy in translation.

Learner Outcomes and Consideration for the Turkish Context

Richards and Rodgers (2001) point out that the existing literature offers little in the way of a pedagogical foundation for the success of the GTM; however, in certain instances, a case has been made for its success. For example, a study by Chang (2011) revealed that learners who were taught according to the GTM exhibited more advanced grammar skills than an experimental group taught via Communicative Language Teaching. While this does not mean that the GTM is an ideal method for teaching a foreign language, it does indicate that when grammar is considered as an important aspect of learning, the GTM may serve the purpose well. In point of fact, it remains widely popular, in large part because testing and assessment are easily carried out in foreign language teaching contexts where performance on standardized exams is the primary measure of learner achievement. Constructing exam questions around grammatical structures, reading comprehension and accuracy in translation is relatively straightforward, and such tests can be scored objectively (Brown, 1994).

This is an important point when it comes to English language education in Turkey, because if we look at the question types found on standardized national exams in English, we can see that reading comprehension and translation questions are still formulated as if they were extracted from a foreign language classroom in which the GTM is used.

What do you think?

Is it possible to learn a foreign language in a classroom in which the GTM is the primary means of instruction? Can we learn a foreign language by studying grammar rules, memorizing the words that were used in a literary text, and translating the text into our mother tongue? In many cases, yes! The GTM has often been shown to work perfectly well, when considering to what extent learners have achieved what was expected from them and to what extent the aims of instruction have been reached. The major goal of GTM was to enable learners to understand and interpret passages in the target language well enough to translate it accurately, and in many instances, learners did this very well; and even long after the completion of instruction, they could remember the sentences they had memorized.

"Amo, amas, amat, amamus amatis amant... Amo, amas, amat, amamus, amatis, amant..."

"Qui, quae, quad. Cuius, cuius, cuius. Cui, cui, cui. Quem, quam, quad. Quo, qua, quo..."

For example, although it has been more than 20 years since I was taught Latin, I remember many of the sentences, grammar rules, and lexical items I learned. "*Graecia est terra. Graecia et Italia sunt terrae. Diligisne linguam Latinam? Diligo.*" I cannot use these sentences or questions on the street these days, but I was not expected to use them in everyday communication. Thus, I can surely say that some of the goals set by my Latin teacher were reached; therefore, in that sense, the method worked well.

Suggestions for Research and Further Study

Based on what you have read about the GTM, list three points that you have found to be interesting or note-worthy for classroom use. Explain your reasoning:

1. ....
....

2. ....
....

3. ....
....

Sample Lesson

Difficulty Level: Intermediate

Age of Students: 15+ years

Duration of Class Period: 50 Minutes

Language Skills: Reading and Writing

Language Aspects: Grammar and Vocabulary

Literary Text: *Etruscan Places*, by D. H. Lawrence

Teaching Techniques Used: Translation, reading comprehension questions, deductive explanation of rules, memorization, composition writing

Materials: Coursebook (including the literary text, the related grammatical structures and their explanations, the related lexis with meanings given in Turkish), whiteboard, board markers.

Learning Objectives: In the course of this lesson, students will:

- Learn about D. H. Lawrence and his famous work titled *Etruscan Places.*
- Translate sentences from the text written in the Simple Past Tense.
- Give the meanings for the following vocabulary items: destroy, lose, ultimately, race-consciousness, superstition, inert.

Phases and Time Allocated	Activity
Introduction *5 minutes*	The teacher greets the students in Turkish, reviews what they covered in the previous class meeting [The Simple Past Tense], and explains what they will be doing that day [learning more about the Simple Past Tense]. The teacher then talks about D. H. Lawrence as an author and moves onto teaching the Simple Past Tense using both Turkish and English.
Deductive Explanation of the Grammar Rule *10 minutes*	**The teacher writes on the board:** *S+V2+O → D. H. Lawrence <u>lived</u> in Italy before he <u>came</u> to England.* The teacher, in Turkish, explains that the verbs *lived* and *came* are V2; that is, they are used to describe past, completed actions. (Altını çizmiş olduğum "came" ve "lived" aslında "come" ve "live" fiillerinin geçmiş zaman halleridir. Cümlede "D. H. Lawrence İngiltere'ye gelmeden önce İtalya'da yaşardı" deniyor. **The teacher writes on the board as s/he continues explaining the Simple Past Tense:** Bazı fiillerin geçmiş zaman çekimleri, örnek cümleleri ve çevirileri şöyledir: go- went→ He went to Maryland in 1680. 1860'da Maryland'e gitti. write-wrote→ He wrote his first poem in 1862. İlk şiirini 1862'de yazdı. die- died→ He died in Boston. Boston'da öldü. Düzensiz olan bu fiiller istisnadır. Genelde Simple Past Tense kullanılırken fiillere –ed ya da -d takısı eklenir. Örneğin: learned, cooked, walked, started, shared, cared, stared, dared. Kısaca Simple Past Tense Subject+V2+Object olarak ifade edilebilir.

Vocabulary Memorization 5 minutes	**The teacher tells the students to copy down the bilingual equivalents of the words s/he has written on the board:** — destroy: yıkmak, yok etmek — lose: kaybetmek — ultimately: sonunda, nihayetinde — race-consciousness: ırk bilinci; ırk şuuru — superstition: batıl inanç; hurafe — inert: hareketsiz; tembel
Translation 15 minutes	**Having studied the grammar and vocabulary necessary to understand and translate the text, the teacher asks the students to translate the following exerpt taken from D. H. Lawrence's text titled "Etruscan Places."** "The Etruscans were not destroyed. But they lost their being. They had lived, ultimately, by the *subjective* control of the great natural powers. Their subjective power fell before the objective power of the Romans. And almost at once the true race-consciousness finished. The Etruscan knowledge became mere superstition. The Etruscan princes became fat and inert Romans. The Etruscan people became expressionless and meaningless. It happened amazingly quickly, in the third and second centuries B.C." **The students translate the paragraph and read aloud their translations sentence by sentence, and the teacher corrects students' errors one by one.**
Reading comprehension 10 minutes	**The teacher asks the students to copy down the comprehension questions s/he writes on the board and answer them by paying close attention to the text they have studied.** What happened to the Etruscans? Did the Etruscans' race-consciousness continue? What happened to the Etruscan princes? What happened to the Etruscan people? When did all these happen? The teacher collects the students' answers and corrects them.
Composition Writing 5 minutes + homework	**The teacher tells the students to copy down the instructions s/he is writing on the board.** What is meant by "And almost at once the true race-consciousness finished"? What happens to a social/cultural group whose race-consciousness is finished? Write a paragraph of 500 words, giving examples from history.

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