

UDC 372.881.1

Benefits of grammar-translation method in teaching foreign languages

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Abstract

Within this paper grammar-translation method is taken up as a means of conceptualizing both the approaches and techniques that represent the levels of teacher's decision making for teaching a foreign language and defining the necessary and obligatory minimum of learning material. This paper demonstrates the impact that grammar-translation method has on language proficiency, evaluated through consciously regulated intellectual activities, and how it shapes both classroom activities and students' intellectual development. The key objectives of the research were to: 1. Critically evaluate perceptions of the nature of grammar-translation method. 2. Evaluate the impact of grammar-translation method on classroom activities when a foreign language is a non-core (secondary) subject. 3. Evaluate the benefits of grammar-translation method from the point of view of interdisciplinary approach and grading homework. 4. Make recommendations of using of grammar-translation method for mutual benefit of students and teachers. The paper demonstrates the differences between approaches, methods and techniques, as well as principles and techniques of grammar-translation method. Then, the main characteristics, bases and features of grammar-translation method from the point of view of interdisciplinary approach and grading homework are considered, with their contributions and limitations. Finally, as a recommendation and conclusion, a connection is established between grammar-translation method, innovation and classroom research, as a way of teacher development and improving student achievement.

For citation

Aisner L.Yu., Bershadskaya S.V. (2018) Benefits of grammar-translation method in teaching foreign languages. *Pedagogicheskii zhurnal* [Pedagogical Journal], 8 (2A), pp. 153-158.

Keywords

Foreign language teaching methods, grammar-translation method, foreign language proficiency, educational practices, educational goals, secondary subject, graded homework, interdisciplinary approach.

Introduction

The key objective of the current paper is to provide a critical evaluation of the role played by foreign language teaching methods (FLT) in any educational setting, as well as an account of grammar-translation method. Knowledge of the methods gives foreign language teachers practical tools to develop effective educational practices, and in addition helps them understand the aspects of learning that appear to be universal in much of formal schooling.

The paper demonstrates the differences between approaches, methods and techniques, as well as principles and techniques of grammar-translation method. Then, the main characteristics, bases and features of grammar-translation method from the point of view of interdisciplinary approach and grading homework are considered, with their contributions and limitations. Finally, as a recommendation and conclusion, a connection is established between grammar-translation method, innovation and classroom research, as a way of teacher development and improving student achievement.

The concepts of approach, method and techniques

In any educational setting FLT require sensitive and sensible application and continuing evaluation. The concepts of approach, method and technique which are mutually related represent three levels of teacher's decision making for teaching a foreign language. To put it briefly, an approach is the most abstract category which refers to psycho- and sociolinguistic principles underlying methods and techniques. A technique, on the other hand, the narrowest of all three, is just a single procedure to use in a classroom. A method serves as a mediator between theory (an approach) and classroom practice (a number of techniques), and thus a method is between an approach and technique. In this sense FLT are considered to be representations of language knowledge for pedagogical purposes which have appeared as a result of the application of the theoretical findings [Sierra, www].

Principles and techniques of grammar-translation method

Traditional or grammar-translation method has been the most widespread method used since times immemorial and is still in use today. With the rise of communicative approach (with its stress on the fact that it can introduce a better level of language reflection and awareness in a foreign language later) traditional grammar-translation method has been labeled as an obsolescent one [Asl, www]. But this popular idea is in need of revision, particularly given the number of important contributions of the method. One of the main principles of the grammar-translation method is that the student's native language is not only a medium of instruction, but it is used alongside with the possibility to compare with the language studied [Lazarenko, Mykytiuk, 2016]. Another principle worth mentioning here is the necessity to know grammar paradigms (rules and instructions, i.e. some elements of theory) and apply them appropriately [Dmitrieva, 2015]. And finally, successful learners are those who are able to translate/interpret from one language into the other which means usage of reading, writing and speaking skills. The main technique used is translation/interpreting ideas presented in the classroom [Richards, J., & Rodgers, T., 2001]. As with any FLT, grammar-translation method can be effectively or ineffectively applied, and the results may vary accordingly.

Non-core subject

The value of education is defined from the point of view that it forms the new person able to adapt to life in society. Numerous studies support the obvious idea that those students, who really understand the purpose of education, are better learners. A foreign language is an integral part of the curriculum but being a secondary subject, it is often treated by the students as an additional work load; besides the number of hours of study for the subject “Foreign language” is very limited. Thus, the primary difficulty is to define the necessary and obligatory minimum of learning material to study/to review and appropriate learning activities. What and how it should be taught is a problem of paramount importance. On the one hand, teachers have to take into account characteristics of the core subjects; on the other, the foreign language learning material should include the necessary minimum and at the same time it should further deepen knowledge of a foreign language and train students to use it as a means of communication. Practical experience has shown that to fulfill the above-mentioned requirements is rather a challenging endeavour. In this context grammar-translation method can develop and organize programmes to promote academically stimulating conditions and activities in a systematic manner. Teachers can suggest specific activities likely to promote students’ learning in school and what is probably more important at home.

Graded homework

Students become better learners when they complete homework which is graded, commented upon and discussed by their teachers. Numerous studies of the effects of homework in various subjects have shown that the assignment and completion of home work yield positive effects on academic achievement. The effects are doubled/tripled, etc. when teachers take time to grade the work, make corrections and comments on improvements that can be made, and discuss problems and solutions with individual students or the whole class. In terms of learning a foreign language regular homework is the proven way to lengthen study time and increase achievement. The quality, content and completion of the homework are also important. Again, in this sense grammar-translation method provides a sound feedback. The role of a teacher in providing feedback – in reinforcing what has been done correctly and in re-teaching what has not – is an educational practice that generally improve learning. In this way, effective homework is relevant in keeping with students’ abilities.

Interdisciplinary approach

When teaching a foreign language as a minor it is vitally important to employ knowledge that students receive while studying their core subjects. In this way, it is necessary to choose those issues which imply the necessity to use knowledge across different curricular disciplines as well as issues which would further be developed. Thus, we have come up with the idea of a method which could be used to teach a unit across different curricular disciplines. Interdisciplinary approach – is an approach to curriculum integration that generates an understanding of themes and ideas that cut across disciplines and of the connections between different disciplines and their relationship to the real world [International Bureau of Education]. It aims at statement of problem, question, or task for students which suggest usage and synthesis of knowledge across different subjects as a consequence. Systematic interdisciplinary approach gives possibility to use a foreign language, maintain communicative process and, finally, combats clip thinking. Again, from this perspective grammar-translation method allows students finding correlations between various subjects and fields of knowledge, understanding of them thereby enabling students to become well supported and better learners [Bim-Bud, 2002].

Language proficiency

Language proficiency means the ability to choose the form of producing ideas in a foreign language in accordance with the intentions and content which means the necessity to know that form and its variations. Language proficiency in this sense is a rather long way from understanding attributes and characteristics of foreign language units and how these units function to the ability to use a foreign language. Thus, knowledge of the rules of the language or it's better to put it like foreign language characteristics and paradigms is one of the ways of mastering a foreign language. Development of speaking habits is an integral part of developing education. Whether the students are able to speak/to produce ideas in a foreign language is not only an indicator of the students' development of but also an indicator of pedagogical skills of the teacher who has taught or has not managed to teach the student this kind of activity. The main factor of development thinking is systemacy of training which is expressed in mastering of the concepts arranged in certain sequence. For full-fledged mastering of learning material, it is necessary that the system of concepts has formed a structural skeleton of knowledge on these or other topics.

Development of foreign language speaking habits is the system of consciously regulated intellectual activities. Mastering the methods of independent mental activities is a component of analytical learning. Conscious attitude to learning is successful application of knowledge, skills, abilities in practice; the ability to deeply and comprehensively analyze the facts gained through experience. The principle of consciousness in foreign language teaching is one of the leading principles of education. It assumes understanding (comprehension) by students the units which constitute the content of what is said in a foreign language and the ways of using such units while speaking a foreign language. Besides, the principle of consciousness provides for the conscious attitude of students to the process of mastering a foreign language. Comprehension of the ways of usage of speech units creates preconditions for practical mastering of a language as means of communication. The principle of consciousness according to the given point of view depends on analysis and synthetic activities of students. Rules and instructions, i.e. some elements of theory, associated with the grammar-translation method, are used with the practical purpose in the measure that promotes the best way to master of a foreign language [Kanda, Beglar, 2004]. Such understanding of the principle of consciousness allows drawing the conclusion that mastering a foreign language has conscious character, and its proficiency is of direct and intuitive character. Grammar-translation method which implies general education of students, development of their logical thinking as the result of interpreting ideas into or from a foreign language and the possibility to rely upon the native language correlates with the idea and to some extent underlies aforementioned conscious methods of foreign languages training.

Conscious teaching and grammar-translation method imply: (1) organisation of classroom activities in sequence from the message of knowledge to formation of speaking habits; (2) differentiation of the learning material intended for mastering of a foreign language; and (3) the possibility to rely upon a native language which is highly important when students have to speak a foreign language only in school or while doing their homework [Zainieva, 2016].

Conclusions

The sustainable development of education assumes constant increase of efficiency of educational process. The basic components of an efficient curriculum – (1) purpose of education, (2) learning materials and (3) result evaluation – should work simultaneously to achieve efficiency of educational process. Classroom activities that correlate the purposes of education and understanding of how these purposes could and should be reached by students (i.e. definition by the teacher of the most effective

strategy of carrying out of classroom activities) considerably raise efficiency of educational process. The root cause of poor results in studying a foreign language is when the students cannot use it either because they do not know how to do it or they do not see the purpose. Those students, who are actively involved in purposeful types of activities and are actively focused on educational goals, do best in mastering a foreign language showing better results. Learning activities should reflect educational goals. In this way, grammar-translation method of teaching a foreign language can take the lead on teaching and find a niche that can work for mutual benefit of students and teachers.

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Эффективность грамматико-переводного метода в обучении иностранным языкам

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Аннотация

В статье проведен анализ грамматико-переводного метода обучения иностранным языкам, как одного из способов формирования иноязычного речевого умения и как средства концептуализации принципа сознательности в обучении, к компонентам которого относятся овладение приемами самостоятельной умственной деятельности. Авторы рассматривают эффективность грамматико-переводного метода с точки зрения использования принципа сознательности в формировании иноязычного речевого умения и предпосылки для практического владения языком как средством общения. Основными задачами исследования были: 1. Проанализировать основные принципы грамматико-переводного метода. 2. Дать оценку эффективности грамматико-переводного метода как одного из способов интеграции профильных и непрофильных дисциплин. 3. Дать оценку эффективности грамматико-переводного метода с точки зрения осуществления межпредметных связей в обучении и оценивания качества выполнения обучаемыми самостоятельной работы. 4. Дать рекомендации по использованию грамматико-переводного метода.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

Айснер Л.Ю., Бершадская С.В. Эффективность грамматико-переводного метода в обучении иностранным языкам // Педагогический журнал. 2018. Т. 8. № 2А. С. 153-158.

Ключевые слова

Методика преподавания иностранного языка, грамматико-переводной метод, иноязычное речевое умение, образовательные технологии, цели обучения, непрофильный предмет, оценивание домашнего задания, межпредметные связи.

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