

TEACHING APPROACHES: THE GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION METHOD

The Grammar Translation method embraces a wide range of approaches but, broadly speaking, foreign language study is seen as a mental discipline, the goal of which may be to read literature in its original form or simply to be a form of intellectual development. The basic approach is to analyze and study the grammatical rules of the language, usually in an order roughly matching the traditional order of the grammar of Latin, and then to practise manipulating grammatical structures through the means of translation both into and from the mother tongue.

The method is very much based on the written word and texts are widely in evidence. A typical approach would be to present the rules of a particular item of grammar, illustrate its use by including the item several times in a text, and practise using the item through writing sentences and translating it into the mother tongue. The text is often accompanied by a vocabulary list consisting of new lexical items used in the text together with the mother tongue translation. Accurate use of language items is central to this approach.

Generally speaking, the medium of instruction is the mother tongue, which is used to explain conceptual problems and to discuss the use of a particular grammatical structure. Millions of people have successfully learnt foreign languages to a high degree of proficiency and, in numerous cases, without any contact with native speakers of the language.

Without a sound knowledge of the grammatical basis of the language it can be argued that the learner is in possession of nothing more than a selection of communicative phrases which are perfectly adequate for basic communication but which will be found wanting when the learner is required to perform any kind of sophisticated linguistic task.