

## GRAMMAR TRANSLATION

### Sample answers

#### 1. What are the characteristics of this method?

##### *Translation of a Literary passage*

Either from native to target or vice versa. The translation is to be written or read aloud. Literal translation is not necessary as long as the meaning is accurate. The passage is to include some specific vocabulary and grammatical structures that are to be studied afterwards.

Goal: The passage chosen is literary, which is considered superior to spoken language. The aim is to develop translation skills. In this case, the students are considered successful learner if they can translate well.

##### *Comprehension questions: 3 types*

1. Questions to test the students' comprehension of the text.
2. Questions whose answers are not in the text, but which call upon the students' deduction/inferencing skills.
3. Questions which link the passage to the learner's own experiences.

Goal: to develop the students' comprehension, reading and writing skills.

##### *Antonyms/Synonyms*

The instructor asks the students to find antonyms and synonyms in the text. A similar exercise could consist in asking a definition from the students of certain words.

Goal: helps the students improve their vocabulary and create connections between the words of each language.

##### *Cognates*

If the two languages share some similarities as regards sounds, the students are taught and required to memorize specific sound patterns. It is the occasion for the teacher to point out the cognates that look similar in the two languages but whose meaning differs.

Goal: Facilitate learning by demonstrating the similarities between the two languages.

### ***Deductive presentation of rules***

Grammar rules are presented with examples and exceptions are pinpointed. The rules are then to be used in different examples.

Goal: The learners acquire the structure of the target language. Using the rule helps stimulate their deductive skills and makes them use it automatically.

### ***Fill in the blanks***

Sentences with words missing. The sentences are supposed to be completed with a particular vocabulary item to be used or with specific grammatical structures: in this case, phrasal verbs.

Goal: Helps practice grammar or retain the meaning of particular vocabulary.

### ***Memorization***

It can be lists of words with their translations or grammatical rules and verb conjugations. Goal: A good mental exercise and students retain grammatical rules.

### ***Using words in sentences***

The language learners to use the new lexical items in sentences.

Goal: To help memorization and make sure the meaning is well understood.

### ***Composition***

Either the teacher gives the learners a topic relating to the passage studied that is to be written in the target language, or asks them to make a summary.

Goal: Develop writing skills.

### ***In what ways is this method of teaching helpful?***

Students are learning a sophisticated variety of the target language by studying its literature. Grammar is taught to them so they learn the basis of the foreign language and many exercises are practiced which are a good stimulant to develop their inferencing abilities. The fact that the students are mobilized to answer when a classmate gives a wrong answer gives more room for their deduction instead of passively waiting for the teacher to give the correct answer. Lots of exercises consisting in translating or writing provide the students with a good mental practice in order to improve the ease of switching from one language to the other.

*What are the weak points of the Grammar translation method?*

The teacher is the “sage on the stage:” the students learn from him/her but it doesn’t work the other way around. Little or no interaction occurs between the students during the class either. Since it is a rather literary language that is taught, culture appears to matter here, yet this has little to do with learning a language. Reading and writing are emphasized to the point that less attention is given to the listening and speaking capacities of the learners, although learning a language is also a matter of being able to interact with native speakers. The teacher also has the tendency to speak in the native language (less focus on listening practice), and to give a direct translation instead of making the students infer the meaning of some words.

Exercise conceived and analysed by Charles-Hélian Cédelle (3rd year English student, University of Nice) based on the Grammar-Translation chapter in Diane Larsen-Freeman’s 1986 textbook, *Techniques and Principles of Second Language Teaching* (New York: Oxford University Press).

### 2. How does this method fit with a cognitive approach to second language teaching?

The method is based on explicit teaching of prescriptive grammar rules: as such, it is not a cognitivist method. It does not seek to take advantage of the innate cognitive capacities which drive language acquisition in babies and untutored second language learners. Grammar-translation does not allow for complex linguistic phenomena to be assimilated through implicit learning, or seek to facilitate such natural processes through noticing exercises or focus-on-form in meaningful contexts.

Some grammar-translation activities rely on behaviourist or audiolingual methods, involving the contrastive analysis of source and target languages. However, the method’s insistence on the presentation, practice and production of grammar rules is unlike audiolingualism, which aims to teach patterns without explaining rules. Grammar-translation shares its reliance on presentation-practice-production (PPP) techniques with other second language teaching methods.

You may wish to read more on this method from the links on the Grammar Translation activity page, or compare it with other methods such as the Audiolingual Method or Communicative Language Teaching.