Learning of vocabulary, grammar and the sound system of a foreign language are what comprise the learning of a second or foreign language. Vocabulary plays a very important role in learning a second language, and it is one of the essential elements that make up the English language. There are a lot of methods that assist vocabulary learning. This paper focuses on two ways of teaching vocabulary, the Grammar Translation Method and Communicative Language Teaching, to Albanian students in order to assess the effectiveness of both methods. The essential objective of this paper is to show which of the two methods (Grammar Translation Method and Communicative Language Teaching) provides a better basis to learn new words. The findings show what vocabulary strategies students like to use in order to learn new vocabulary. Furthermore, the research tries to identify the effectiveness of one method over the other when referring to the learning of new words.

Introduction

English teaching methods have been the focus of the Albanian educational authorities in the last years in particular, by cultivating a high motivation in students to learn English. As traditional methods
have been widely used by Albanian teachers, nowadays the emphasis is being placed on the communicative approaches, which teach the actual communication, not just theories about it. Consequently, teachers are now inclined to teach communication, involving not only grammatical elements but also important features of culture and society, which help in learning an L2. Emphasis is being also put on the learning of vocabulary as one of the most important parts of learning a second language (L2). As GTM has been widely used in Albania, the focus has always been on grammar and little emphasis is put on vocabulary. Recently teachers have been trained and encouraged to use a wide variety of methods in the classrooms in order to encourage students to speak more. CLT as one of the communicative approaches is on the top list of the different methods used in teaching English. This method helps students develop the ability to communicate original messages in real life situations. Nevertheless, CLT is not widely used in the Albanian classrooms.

This study pays special attention to teaching new words via the two methods, GTM and CLT to Albanian students and then ask students about which strategies they find helpful in learning vocabulary.

Teaching new words via Grammar Translation Method and Communicative Language Teaching

The question “which method is most appropriate for teaching a second language” is still under debate. Therefore, foreign languages are learned and taught in various ways. Although none is perfect, some of these methods and approaches are more successful than others. In many schools in Albania, Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is still used by many teachers to teach foreign languages and especially English.
Grammar Translation Method (GTM) involves the translation of literary texts followed by explanation in the students' native language of rules of grammar. Although it dates back in the 16th century, Corder states that GTM is “the most deductive approach” (Allen & Corder 197: 13), and it may be true to say that the Grammar-Translation Method is still widely practiced. This method was used in order to help and encourage students to like and appreciate literature and very little teaching is done in the target language. However, another researcher, Cheng (2005), argues that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the best and most successful method in vocabulary teaching and learning.

Brown (2001) admits that GTM is so widely used because this method requires few specialized skills on the part of teachers, because they use their native language and so even teachers who are not fluent in English can teach via this method. But it is not only for this reason that this method has always been on the top list of the English language methods but for the students as well. In Albania the same idea exists for the students: they need to know linguistic details in order to learn a foreign language. For them it is easier to communicate in their native language and also the communication between them and the teacher does not cause any linguistic problem. Furthermore, the usage of the native language in the classrooms makes it impossible for students to give up the habit of thinking in their native language and then translating them, when they want to express something in a foreign language.

New words are learned through direct translation from the native language if Grammar Translation Method is used. In fact, both teachers and students of English in Albania frequently find it convenient to opt for translation. Teachers commonly attempt to explain a foreign word, phrase or sentence by giving a mother-tongue equivalent. This means that translation has been used to learn the new words. Students face difficulties in how the words are used and what emotions the words...
express. This method has generated a great number of skilled students
but only in grammar with a lot of difficulties in remembering new words
and consequently using them in patterns and collocations. Therefore
there is no connection between recall of word meaning and use of words
in context. But not always exact translation from one language to another
is possible. There are numerous lexical items in one language which
have no equivalents in another language.

As Krashen (1987: 128) points out, “It can be claimed that grammar
translation provides scraps of comprehensible input. The focus is entirely
on the form, and not on meaning … students are forced to read word by
word, and consequently rarely focus completely on the message”. But, as
Hiep (2007: 14) states, “in order to use the language effectively learners
need to develop communicative competence”. And one of the ways in
which this communicative competence can be achieved is through real
communication. This helps students when they are in a foreign country
and need to communicate with them in different situations.

Communicative Language Teaching is the method which may be used by
teachers who want to engage their students in real-life communication
in the target language. This real-life communication can help students
in their learning process in order to learn new words from the different
kinds of conversation that they may have with each-other or with the
teacher and remember what they learn for a long time.

On the other hand, virtually no class time or very little time is given to
students in order to produce their own sentences when they are taught
via Grammar Translation Method. It does not give pattern practice and a
little time is spent on oral practice whether productive or reproductive.
A lot of students might face a lot of difficulties related to the language,
because they do not have the possibility in the classroom to personalize
or develop their own style. A person can learn a language only when he
internalizes its patterns in order to form a habit. It is almost impossible
to learn a language only by rules. Practice is very important in learning a language and CLT is a method which can offer to students practice and real life communication.

In Albania the application of this method encounters almost the same difficulties because of large class size, inadequate resources, examination pressures, and learners’ concerns about the neglect of grammar.

Conclusions

This paper aims at finding which of the two methods is more effective in learning new words, based on different other researches and on our research made in Albania. Taking into account the data gathered from the research made at “Aleksandër Moisiu” University, Durrës, with first-year students of English Language, the conclusion is drawn that almost all the vocabulary strategies are used by students in order to learn new words, but the most preferred strategies for them are: “To paraphrase the word’s meaning to remember it” and “I repeat the new words a lot of times in order to remember them”. The most disliked strategies for the students are: “Before reading, I try to predict what the text will be about” and “To analyze the parts of speech (e.g. noun/verb) of unknown words when guessing their meaning”.

This paper has attempted to find out which method helps students more to learn vocabulary, although from the findings it is not clearly understood the effectiveness of one method over the other. Concerning the data gathered and analyzed from the students’ questionnaire this study fails to show the significant effects of one method over the other. As a result, language teachers need not only to develop an awareness of alternative vocabulary learning strategies in learners but also to
involve active processing of the target vocabulary. English language teachers need to make learners conscious of the need to develop an independent and structured approach to language learning as well as to learning vocabulary.

Bibliography


The total number of words is 1551

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