

Reevaluating the Grammar Translation Method: Its Effectiveness in Enhancing Interactional Speaking Skills of Junior High School Students

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INFO ARTIKEL

Sejarah artikel:

Diterima 10 Oktober 2025

Disetujui 04 November 2025

Diterbitkan 30 November 2025

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ABSTRACT

The English curriculum at the junior high school level in Indonesia requires students to have interactive speaking skills in both formal and informal contexts. However, in reality, many students still have difficulty speaking accurately and coherently, especially in oral interactions. This study aims to analyze the effect of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) on the interactive speaking skills of eighth-grade students and to compare the effectiveness of GTM with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This study uses a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test-post-test control group pattern. The research sample consisted of 60 eighth-grade students from two classes taught using GTM and CLT. Data were collected through dialogue-based speaking performance tests and analyzed using paired sample t-tests and independent sample t-tests. The results showed that students taught using GTM experienced a more significant improvement in grammatical accuracy, vocabulary mastery, and interactional strategies, while CLT students excelled in speaking fluency. These findings indicate that GTM is still relevant and effective as a supporting method in the development of interactive speaking skills, especially when combined with a communicative approach.

Keywords: Grammar Translation Method; interactional speaking skills; Communicative Language Teaching; English language learning; junior high school students

INTRODUCTION

Recently, there has been a strong focus in language education on communicative competence, particularly in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (A. Kaharuddin & Arafah, 2017). In the case of Indonesia, the junior high school students' curricula expect learners to acquire the ability to use English for both academic purposes and in informal conversations. By the end of Grade 8, students are expected to perform several speaking functions outlined in the national curriculum, like greeting, introducing interlocutors, engaging in small talk, asking clarifying questions, and giving opinion in a dialogue. Unfortunately, this expectation is far from the reality for many students, who are unable to speak, either fluently or accurately within the required time in an interaction.

One important reason for the lack of fluency in real time interaction is the lack of a solid grammatical and lexical foundation and the resources to formulate coherent and context-appropriate utterances. While, communicative activities "teaching speaking" is a rationale for many teachers, students are not often given the opportunity to participate in speaking tasks for which they understand the purpose of the task and the language structures required. They tend to perform interactional speaking tasks in a formulaic way which is limited in scope and contains a high frequency of errors.

The effectiveness of the Grammar Translation Method, even in a hybrid format, could create opportunities for advancements in teacher education, training, and curriculum and instructional design (Kaharuddin et al., 2020). They may also help settle a persistent issue surrounding "accuracy" and "fluency," illustrating that the two can be developed simultaneously through careful methodological blending.

As communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches symbiotic practices nurtured

by communicative competence, communicative language teaching does not respond to the insecurity learners feel around a variable low-proficiency situated context. This warrants the question, should the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) which has a tendency to anchor form and structure, be entirely discarded in new EFL classrooms?

GTM has a tendency to be criticized and dismissed as a relic of the past and one that introduces no communicative synergy (Arafah et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the more structured and rule-bound approaches found in GTM may serve as a precursor to greater communicative autonomy that some, like Bahar (2013), suggest. Given the lack of research on this topic, GTM may serve as a dormant, or as many would argue, dormant, the basis as many would argue, the basis that underlies the work to be done at the plane of real-time interaction with the spoken form. Interaction. The current research focuses on the interactional speaking skills of second-year junior high school students. Particularly, this research aims to observe the extent which a method which has been classically associated with reading and writing instruction may be of value in spoken communication practices.

There is a specific rationale behind focusing on interactional speaking in this case: instead of examining transactional dialogues that seek information exchanges, this study investigates whether students can manage conversations, appropriately react to social signals, and articulate their thoughts in everyday interpersonal situations. The study examines if GTM, in the context of oral interaction preparation, has a positive effect on students' speaking skills development.

This research is anticipated to highlight the value of traditional approaches like GTM in EFL learning and teaching to curriculum developers and educational policy makers. Although communicative methods will most likely continue to dominate instructional practices, there seems to be pedagogical wisdom in their use, alongside more rigid instructional methods, especially for beginner to intermediate learners who, due to a lack of the necessary interactive scaffolding, struggle with spoken interactivity.

This study aims to analyze the effect of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) on the interactive speaking skills of eighth-grade junior high school students. In addition, this study also aims to compare the effectiveness of GTM with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in improving student performance in dialogue-based speaking skills. Furthermore, this study seeks to identify the elements of interactive speaking skills that are most influenced by the application of GTM, such as grammatical accuracy, vocabulary mastery, fluency, and interactive strategies. The conclusion should contain confirmation of the problem that has been analyzed in the results and discussion sections. It is prohibited from displaying statistics. The conclusions presented must answer the research objectives. It is not recommended that the conclusion be written in several parts or points. It is important that the conclusion does not leave any questions unanswered. Write a conclusion concisely and clearly.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Grammar Translation Method (GTM): Origins and Pedagogical Assumptions

The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is one of the oldest language teaching methods. It originated with the teaching of Latin and Ancient Greek in the 18th and 19th century European educational systems. It is predicated on the idea that learning a language is about learning its grammar and vocabulary, and can, to a great extent, be acquired by translations of texts from the language to be learned and the native language (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In GM, reading and writing are prioritised over listening and speaking. The classes are often teacher-centred, and middle-of-the-road emphasis is placed on the memorisation of vocabulary, grammar, and the translation of sentences in a bilingual format (A. Kaharuddin, 2018). It is argued that the method develops no communicative competence, and translation students may master the translation of texts, but fail to meaningfully use the language in conversation (Brown, 2007).

Nonetheless, there are some scholars who have argued differently, claiming that GTM's methodical emphasis on grammar could serve as a solid groundwork for acquiring a

second language, specifically in cases where learners have restricted access to genuine language (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). In such cases where classroom teaching is the main and possibly the only source of English input, more traditional approaches like GTM might provide cognitive clarity and linguistic precision that the more communicative approaches might fail to offer in the initial stages. GTM is still more or less spontaneously integrated in different EFL settings, particularly in Asia and more specifically in Indonesia, Japan, China, and Iran, where the dominant assessment of the education system focuses on written grammar and reading comprehension (Ismail et al., 2020; Li et al., 2024). This complicates the blending of teaching methods because teachers are likely to combine other approaches with GTM without awareness, and this clearly points out the need to explore how GTM could be consciously combined with other more communicative approaches (A. Kaharuddin & Arafah, 2017).

Understanding Interactional Speaking in EFL Contexts

Speaking as a productive skill can be categorised into two broad categories. One is transactional speaking which comprises the exchange of information such as giving directions or ordering food. The other is interactional speaking which encompasses the maintenance of social interaction and the management of conversation (Brown, 2007). While transactional speaking is more organised and predictable, interactional speaking is a lot more spontaneous, requires a lot more quick responsive action, and a greater command of pragmatic language (Bahar, 2013).

Burns (2010) describes interactional speaking as involving a range of discourse and conversational skills that enable speakers to participate effectively in social interaction. These skills include the ability to appropriately open and close conversations, manage turn-taking, interrupt and respond to others, and show interest through devices such as back-channeling. In addition, interactional speaking requires speakers to manage communication breakdowns by, for example, asking for repetition or clarification, as well as to express empathy or emotion in order to maintain interpersonal relationships during interaction.

These functions can be particularly taxing for EFL learners, who must master lexical and syntactic dimensions, and then apply real-time socio-cultural triggers in the interactional frame. Finally, interactional speaking is, for the most part, reliant on spontaneity and the free exercise of one's mental faculties, which in most cases, is a product of passive or mechanical exercise (K. Kaharuddin & Ismail, 2021).

According to the Indonesian EFL curriculum, students in Junior High School are expected to perform dialogues that depict everyday social interactions (Yassi & Kaharuddin, 2018). Nevertheless, speaking continues to be in the lower tier for students because of their minimal exposure to spoken English, little opportunity to engage in classroom discourse, and lack of linguistic scaffolding (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020). This poses a crucial pedagogical question: how can teachers give students the necessary framework of language to master accuracy while fostering the growth of interactional competence?

GTM and Speaking Development: Bridging the Gap

Whereas GTM has typically been seen as irreconcilable with instruction in speaking, recent research indicates that, if adapted slightly, it could become an effective auxiliary method for instruction in spoken production. For example, Cook (2010) maintains that translation exercises help learners understand language contrasts, build metalinguistic awareness, internalise grammatical structures, and thus speak with greater confidence and accuracy. Mahmoud (2006) found that students doing bidirectional translation produced more grammatically accurate oral presentations than students taught with only communicative tasks. In the same way, Glušac et al. (2023) noted that translation exercises helped university students more readily construct sentences during discussion, which suggests that GTM has a role in aiding learners in developing speaking readiness.

Bagheri & Fazel (2011) conducted an experimental study in which Iranian students receiving a modified GTM scored markedly higher in oral performance than peers receiving

instruction only through communicative methods. The researchers expected that the students gained enough control over form and were using advanced structures in complex tasks during the monotonous dialogue tasks, which contributed to the advanced speech, although they noted fluency was slightly lacking compared to the control group. Finally, it is worth noting that translation tasks could precede oral interaction. One example of a classroom activity could start with a translation of a conversation from L1 to English, then a role-play of the same conversation, followed by improvisation (Bahar, 2013). This sequence enables learners to first process the linguistic forms and then use them in real-time interaction. While some critics claim that the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) forestalls natural communication (Harmer, 2007; Yassi & Kaharuddin, 2018), the evidence presented here indicates that GTM might actually facilitate learners' readiness for communicative use of the language by equipping them with the necessary structural features. For lower-level learners especially, GTM can establish foundational mastery given that, in most instances, accuracy precedes fluency.

Previous Comparative Studies: GTM vs. CLT

Numerous comparative studies have examined the effectiveness of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in relation to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), particularly with regard to students' grammar mastery and speaking skills. For instance, found that Iranian high school students taught through CLT demonstrated greater fluency and a more diverse use of vocabulary than those taught through GTM, although the GTM group showed higher levels of grammatical accuracy. Similarly, Saricoban (2012), in a study involving Turkish EFL learners, reported that while CLT was more effective in promoting fluency, GTM yielded better results in structured speaking tasks that required grammatical precision. More recently, Kumar & Ilankumaran (2025) observed that Indian students taught using GTM were able to construct sentences more confidently and produced significantly fewer errors in grammar-focused speaking tasks, indicating stronger control over form despite engaging in oral production. Nonetheless, these pieces of research maintain that GTM, even in traditional form, does not wholly aid in the development of speaking skills. To be truly effective, it requires the addition of oral practice, contextual dialogues, and the communicative scaffolding of dialogue. The concept of integrating GTM with CLT is consistent with Nation & Newton (2009) model of language learning, which proposes equilibrium between meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning (including grammar teaching), and fluency work.

Theoretical Framework

This research relies on DeKeyser (2007) regarding Skill Acquisition Theory, specifically that the learning of a language advances through the stages of declarative knowledge (knowing about grammar) to procedural knowledge (using grammar in real time) and that this movement occurs through practice. At this point of the grammar-translation method (GTM), the learner is reaching the declarative stage of knowledge and the communicative practice that follows is aimed at proceduralisation. Lantolf & Thorne (2006), drawing on Vygotsky, argue for the value of a learner having structured input and scaffolding during the pre-independent performance stage. Controlled and spontaneous interaction through dialogue practice can, for example, translation activities, serve as scaffolding tools.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a quasi-experimental design with a pre-test–post-test control group pattern because the subjects could not be randomly assigned to treatment groups Abidin & Kaharuddin (2021). The study aims to examine the effectiveness of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) on students' interactive speaking skills compared to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

The population of this study was eighth-grade students at a public junior high school in Makassar, Indonesia. The research sample consisted of 60 students from two existing English classes, each with 30 students. One class was designated as the experimental group

taught using GTM, while the other class was designated as the control group taught using CLT. All students had a relatively uniform background in English learning and were taught by the same teacher to maintain consistency in learning.

Data collection was conducted through pre- and post-treatment speaking performance tests, in the form of structured role plays that assessed students' interactive speaking skills. The assessment covered aspects of grammatical accuracy, vocabulary accuracy, fluency, and interactive strategies using an analytical rubric adapted.

The data were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics to describe student learning outcomes. The paired sample t-test was used to determine the difference in pre-test and post-test scores in each group, while the independent sample t-test was used to compare the post-test results between the experimental and control groups. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 25 at a significance level of $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Overview of Data Analysis

This segment details the study's qualitative and quantitative findings regarding the effect of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) on second-year Junior High School students' interactional speaking skills. The experimental group (GTM) and the control group (Communicative Language Teaching CLT) are compared on their pre-test and post-test scores, and then followed with a component-based description on the grammatical accuracy, the use of various lexical resources, fluency, and interactional strategy. Additional observations are discussed entered qualitatively concerning the students' involvement and the language they employed throughout the intervention.

Pre-Test Results

Pre-instructional assessment for both groups involved the interactional speaking test outlined in Section 3.4. This assessment provided the basis for analysing the speaking ability equivalence for both groups. The pre-test results are consolidated in Table 1:

Table 1. Pre-Test Speaking Scores (N = 60)

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Experimental (GTM)	30	62.53	6.01		
Control (CLT)	30	63.20	5.88	0.44	0.66

The independent samples t-test indicated no statistically significant difference between the two groups, prior to the intervention ($t = 0.44$, $p = 0.66 > 0.05$). This demonstrates that the two groups had comparable interactional speaking proficiency at the beginning of the study.

Post-Test Results

Students were reassessed after the intervention using a parallel form of the interactional speaking test. Post-test results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Post-Test Speaking Scores

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Experimental (GTM)	30	74.30	5.22		
Control (CLT)	30	72.03	5.45	2.20	0.031

The experimental group had a larger mean increase in speaking scores when compared to the control group. The independent samples t-test produced statistically significant results ($t = 2.20$, $p = 0.031 < 0.05$) indicating that the GTM had a greater impact on the students' interactional speaking performance.

Gains in Each Component

An analysis of post-test scores by individual components of speaking grammatical accuracy, vocabulary, fluency, and interactional frameworks was undertaken to gain deeper insights into the nature of the improvement. These findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Post-Test Component Scores (Means)

Component	Experimental (GTM)	Control (CLT)
Grammatical Accuracy	4.2	3.6
Vocabulary Appropriacy	3.9	3.8
Fluency	3.4	4.0
Interactional Strategy	3.8	3.7

Considering Grammatical Accuracy

The experimental group managed improvements in grammatical accuracy most substantially, surpassing the control group by a learning differential of 0.6 points. The GTM group exhibited an ability to formulate more complete syntactically accurate sentences, as well as a reduction of more errors pertaining to the agreement of entities in the sentences, and in the tenses, as well as articles. The result showcases the reinforcement of rule-based language through translation as projected by Cook (2010).

Considering Vocabulary Appropriacy

The results pertaining to vocabulary cohesively weighted towards the GTM group. This showcases that the drills successfully abstracted the meaning of the vocabulary while the CLT group communicative tasks had lexically adequate exposure. Nevertheless, the students of GTM exhibited more precision towards the choice of vocabulary in the dialogues, as well as in the use of more advanced synonyms and functional lexical units. The results pertaining to vocabulary cohesively weighted towards the GTM group. This showcases that the drills successfully abstracted the meaning of the vocabulary while the CLT group communicative tasks had lexically adequate exposure. Nevertheless, the students of GTM exhibited more precision towards the choice of vocabulary in the dialogues, as well as in the use of more advanced synonyms and functional lexical units.

Considering Fluency

As expected the CLT group did better in fluency. This is a result of instruction that emphasized the production of speech to be spontaneous, natural and free-flowing (Brown, 2007). This is contrasted to GTM students who would stop more often and revert to structures that had been previously learned. This exchange of fluency and accuracy is a norm encountered in second language teaching (Skehan, 1996). As expected the CLT group did better in fluency. This is a result of instruction that emphasized the production of speech to be spontaneous, natural and free-flowing (Brown, 2007). This is contrasted to GTM students who would stop more often and revert to structures that had been previously learned. This exchange of fluency and accuracy is a norm encountered in second language teaching.

Considering Interactional Strategies

Interestingly, the GTM group had a higher use of interactional strategies. This was likely due to the use of interactional strategies contained and rehearsed in translated dialogues. This aligns with what Nation & Newton (2009) suggested, that learning that focuses on forms may aid in strategy deployment in learner output.

Qualitative Observations

Qualitative observations obtained from classroom observations and teachers' reflective notes provide a more in-depth picture of student engagement and behavior during the learning process. The results of the observations show that students in the CLT group experienced an increase in confidence and consistency in speaking, particularly in initiating dialogue and maintaining continuity of conversation. Several students stated that translating sample dialogues into English helped them feel more confident and able to control their use of language in oral interactions. In contrast, students in the CLT group tended to experience difficulties in open-ended speaking tasks, even becoming passive or silent on several occasions, and using limited and repetitive language. Teachers observed that although the CLT approach was effective in improving the abilities of students who were already relatively fluent, students with lower abilities experienced obstacles and difficulties when the demands for improvisation increased. In addition, although not the main focus of the study, observations also noted an increase in pronunciation and fluency in speaking among students in the GTM group as a result of controlled speaking exercises and repetition of model sentences.

Discussion

The results show that the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is not outdated and/or irrelevant. With the proper communicative objective, GTM actually helps the development of interactional speaking. In and of itself, GTM does not promote spontaneous fluency, but it does provide a grammatical and lexical framework for the basic conversations that many EFL students encounter. This is consistent with Skill Acquisition Theory DeKeyser (2007), which posits that the procedural fluency comes from the repeated use of declarative knowledge. In guided conversation activities, GTM's structured input provided learners the "building blocks" for constructing precise sentences which they were later able to use.

This also bears on Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development Lantolf & Thorne (2006) theory, which argues that translation and controlled rehearsal are cognitive scaffolds that learners internalise later. While translation is a bridge to functional spoken language attainment, it is not the end goal. These findings are also in line with Bagheri & Fazel (2011), as they, too, reported measurable speaking gains from GTM-based instruction followed by dialogue tasks. The difference from those studies is that this research focused on the interactional components of turn-taking and responsiveness, which are aligned to contemporary EFL speaking expectations.

This study shows a number of practical implications for learning English as a foreign language. First, the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) should not be applied alone (monomethod), but rather combined with a communicative approach in order to achieve a balance between mastery of language forms and spontaneity in speaking (Ismail et al., 2020). Second, especially for beginner to intermediate learners, structured translation exercises can serve as an effective initial stage before students engage in more free speaking practice, as they help strengthen accuracy and readiness to interact. Third, planning and practicing dialogues by adding interactional expressions and discourse markers to translated dialogues has been proven to improve the coherence and acceptability of students' speech in conversations. Finally, in the context of language teacher education and training, GTM needs to be repositioned as a pedagogical tool albeit a traditional one with an emphasis on how to strategically integrate its elements into a more communicative and contemporary approach to language learning.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to determine the effectiveness of the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) on the interaction speaking skills of second-year junior high school students in an EFL context. For a considerable time, GTM has been viewed as not suitable for communicative purposes, but the findings from this study tend to offer a counter argument. Over the eight-week period of the study, students learning with the GTM method showed a greater improvement in the area of grammatical accuracy, the use of vocabulary and general performance in interaction compared to students in the communicative language teaching (CLT) method. This is an interesting finding as the students in the CLT method group did not generally perform poorly. Even though the CLT group attained higher scores on fluency, students from the GTM group excelled in accuracy and in the employment of interactional techniques, namely, clarification requests and discourse markers. This means that GTM likely provides important scaffolding from which learners are able to produce specific and purposeful speech. GTM is not obsolete. Instead, it aids the development of interactional competence in speech by providing a solid base from which learners can build spontaneous speech.

The findings indicate the necessity of reconsidering the strict boundaries between “traditional” and “communicative” methods in language teaching. It would be more productive to think about integrated models that combine GTM with speaking instruction by sequencing translation tasks and guided conversation. This model would offer great assistance to early and intermediate learners who frequently struggle with the requisite confidence and linguistic tools for fluent speech. In addition to teacher training in CLT techniques and approaches, language teachers also need to be trained in the integration of structured input techniques, translation, grammar clarification, and controlled dialogue rehearsal. Used purposefully, GTM can become a bridge from linguistic knowledge to communicative performance.

The study was confined to a small participant from a single private junior high school (SMP Tahfidz Mutiara Al-Akabar) in the city of Makassar, Indonesia. Furthermore, the length of the intervention was brief, and the oral speaking retention over a sustained period was not evaluated. Additionally, the aspects of pronunciation and the paralinguistic features were not evaluated in a formal manner. With respect to future implications, the sustained effects of the Grammar Translation Method in focusing on the development of spoken fluency and its efficacy at various levels of receptiveness to the target language, in addition to the interrelation with learner attributes of motivation, anxiety, and the styles with which they learn, remain to be explored. Further establishing the position of the Grammar Translation Method in contemporary language teaching would involve cross-regional comparative studies alongside differing educational frameworks.

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