Introduction

In order to assess the issue of whether grammar and translation have made a comeback, it is necessary to look at the importance of grammar and translation from different perspectives. In particular, we will examine the relevance of grammar and translation for the learning of English as a foreign language against the background of teaching methodology as well as current political and social developments. The first part of the article provides a survey of some key issues in the teaching and learning of grammar. It briefly sketches the importance of grammar and translation against the backdrop of different language teaching methods, discusses the aim of teaching grammar and translation and considers various approaches towards teaching and learning grammar. It will also discuss to what extent grammar and translation are helpful when learning a foreign language and how the teaching of grammar has been influenced by insights from second language acquisition (SLA) research. The second part of the article reports on a small-scale project investigating students' and teachers' attitudes towards grammar and translation and, based on the results, suggests some tentative implications for the teaching and learning of a second language.

1. To Teach or Not to Teach – Grammar and Translation in the Modern English Language Class

1.1 Grammar and Translation Against the Background of Different Methods

Over the past two centuries, the teaching and learning of foreign languages has been based on different principles, which means that different functions and goals of teaching and learning a foreign language determined the way it was taught. With regard to grammar and translation, the three most prominent methods are the grammar-translation method,2 the reform/direct method and the audiolingual method.3 Particularly in the case of the audiolingual method, there is a strong emphasis on grammatical correctness and, at the same time, on oral competence in the foreign language. Owing to the influence of the communicative approach and its overarching goal of communicative competence the focus of language teaching shifted from form to message (Piepho 1974). Thus, instead of taking grammatical structures as the starting point of language teaching, meaning is seen as primary for communication resulting

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1 We are grateful to Moya Irvine for making improvements on language and style. Naturally, we are solely responsible for any remaining infelicities.
2 Interlinear translation, which by nature is a word by word translation and consequently retains the original sentence structure, can also be seen as a strong candidate for translation as a method. In the 19th century interlinear translation was used as a teaching approach known as the Toussaint-Langenscheidt method (Howatt and Widdowson 2004).
3 For a more detailed presentation of the different teaching methods the following references are recommended: Byram (2000); Rogers (2000); Richards and Rodgers (2001); Fotos (2005, 66ff.); Gnutzmann and Salden (2010).
in a notional-functional (vs. structural) syllabus,\(^4\) which, not surprisingly, runs the risk of passing over the formal side of communication. However, a sharp binary distinction between structural and communicative approaches in language teaching, which can be explained as a reaction to outdated teaching methods, is ultimately ill-conceived because it denies the complementary relationship between form and function for communication (cf. Gnutzmann and Stark 1982, 23).

From the current point of view, largely restricting the teaching of language to listening and oral skills is no longer regarded as a suitable goal that adequately meets the communicative needs of many learners. Making writing a significant aim of teaching is justified given its important function in professional, social and educational contexts. It has, therefore, been rightly observed that people who lack the ability to write are condemned to remain social outsiders (Winkler 2003, 87). Especially in times of world-wide communication through the medium of English, the ability to write adequately has also become an important aim in the teaching of a foreign language. Given that the standard variety of a language provides access to written knowledge, which is a key to education and a prerequisite for a person’s social development, there is a good case for taking the standard variety as a teaching model, especially for the written language. After all, the standard variety, although not monolithic but stylistically differentiated and including spoken manifestations of language, is primarily based on the grammar and lexis of the written language and accordingly codified in grammar and dictionaries.

The question of whether or not grammar and translation should be part of the syllabus depends not only on their roles in the respective teaching methods but also on the goals of foreign language teaching in general. When we compare the three methods referred to above with the approaches used today, we can observe a significant shift originating from advancements in the disciplines of learning psychology, education, applied linguistics and sociolinguistics and resulting in giving the following key developments a more prominent place in foreign language pedagogy: cognitive turn and cognition, learner-centredness, multilingualism, intercultural communication, devaluation of the native speaker principle.

In general, learning research takes the view that learning does not start from scratch but that learners make use of the knowledge they have acquired beforehand combining it with the newly accumulated knowledge. Knowledge acquisition is seen as a highly individual process in which learners develop their own strategies for processing new knowledge. This also implies that learners should be encouraged to take a more autonomous approach to learning, reflect upon their learning processes and adjust them accordingly. However, as regards the use of grammar and translation in language classes there can be no generally valid procedure, rather, the success of their application will very much depend on the type of learner and their learning styles; whether they follow, for example, a concrete, analytical, communicative or authority-oriented learning style (cf. Ellis 1994, 507). Ideally, teaching materials and accompanying tasks will have to be prepared in line with the respective learning styles of the individual students.

As English is a truly global language used by more and more non-native speakers, a reassessment of the role of the native speaker is apposite. Insisting on an inflexible

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native speaker norm – at least in spoken communication – is no longer acceptable in a teaching context in which pupils are prepared to interact with people of different cultural, social, racial or ethnic origins. That is why in intercultural communication involving the use of English as a lingua franca the aim of native-speaker-competence can easily become inappropriate and may even be dysfunctional when an interlocutor's proficiency is only weakly or partially developed. Since the acquisition of foreign language writing competence may be an overambitious goal for many learners outside advanced secondary schools, a more realistic aim in such cases would be to take a more lenient attitude to grammatical errors and to give classes a more communicative orientation at the expense of grammatical accuracy.

As the native speaker is no longer the exclusive point of reference when teaching English to non-natives, the use of the mother tongue in foreign classes has to be viewed in a new light, leading to the question of whether translation should continue to occupy a marginalised and underprivileged position in the foreign language classroom. Due to the cognitive turn, activities demanding a high degree of cognition and awareness on the part of the learners are gaining wider acceptance, and such activities also include grammar and translation.

1.2 Goals of Grammar Teaching

It would obviously be inadequate to assume that the aim of grammar teaching can be reduced to the cognitive knowledge of the structures of a language, and hence it is not acceptable to equate the teaching of grammar with the mere teaching of linguistic structures without students being able to recognize and apply the meaning-making function of grammar. This, however, seems to be the case with a lot of grammar teaching and certainly contributes to pupils' negative perception of foreign language grammar classes. The concept of grammaring defined as "the ability to use grammar structures accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately" (Larsen-Freeman 2003, 143) could serve as an effective antidote to a one-sided structural view of grammar because it bridges the gap between grammatical knowledge and the productive use of language.

The question of whether explicit knowledge of grammar can be turned into automated language proficiency is still unresolved although a major justification of grammar teaching is still based on the validity of this so-called interface hypothesis. 'Radical' SLA researchers have argued that the development of a second language, in particular its syntactic structures such as negation, question formation or clausal word order, follows a natural, predetermined sequence which cannot be influenced by instruction (Dulay et al. 1982). The more moderate teachability theory\(^7\) assumes that a grammatical structure is teachable but only if learners have reached a certain stage in their acquisition of this structure. The weak interface model of L2 acquisition (Ellis 2002) implies that explicit L2 knowledge may support the acquisition of implicit L2 knowledge. This can be achieved through consciousness-raising activities designed,

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5 Bausch et al. (2006) give an account of the impact of cognition in foreign language research in Germany.
7 Cf. Pienemann (1989); for a full-scale application of this theory to grammar teaching see Keßler and Plesser (2011).
for example, to help learners notice features of L2 which otherwise would have passed unnoticed. An additional impetus in favour of the weak interface model has been given by form-focused teaching practices (Doughty and Williams 1998) that, however, do not give up their communicative orientation.

1.3 Goals of Translation

Translation, in its wider sense, refers to the meaning transfer of written or spoken texts from one language to another. In its narrower sense, translation is restricted to the written medium and interpreting is used for spoken meaning transfer. The term mediation or Sprachmittlungskompetenz (Königs 2010) is used in plurilingual settings when two people do not share a common language and need a third person who has access to both languages and thus can act as mediator to ensure understanding between the other two. In the more recent curricular guidelines and textbooks mediation has secured a place as the fifth communicative skill alongside listening-comprehension, speaking, reading and writing.

With regard to translation, observations in the foreign language classroom provide evidence that using the mother tongue in the English classroom is a natural process enabling learners to understand unknown words faster and more easily. As a rule, learners feel more secure when they can “locate new lexical items from L2 within the lexical system of their mother tongue” (Gnutzmann 1995, 55). In addition, translation can help the teacher to find out whether learners have really understood a complete text or a text excerpt. A translation into L1 can be a very effective way of testing reading comprehension and it can contribute to improving learners’ stylistic competence in their mother tongue. Translation can also be helpful in making learners aware of the peculiarities of both languages, e.g. the phenomenon of untranslatability, as in the case of proverbs, metaphors or idioms with strong cultural associations (Gnutzmann 2009).

As there is never just one correct translation, translation exercises can invite learners to discuss linguistic correctness, semantic equivalence and stylistic adequacy as well as cultural appropriateness. Especially from a linguo-cultural perspective, translation can thus be considered a highly communicative activity (cf. Gnutzmann 2009 and Cook 2010) allowing participants to explore the receptive and productive potentials of bilingual language use.

1.4 Implications for the Teaching/Learning Situation

For the teaching of grammar and translation four factors are relevant: the problem of the importance of attaining native-speaker competence, the role of the teacher, the role of the learners and tasks/exercises. It has already been pointed out that insisting on native speaker norms without paying attention to the context the language is used in can be counterproductive leading to misunderstanding, for example, in lingua franca communications between non-native speakers of widely diverging competencies. Enabling learners to work out a common communicative platform and helping them to adjust to their interlocutor would be more fitting goals in such cases. Shifting the focus away from native-speaker competence and thus from “dogmatic” to “enlightened” monolingualism in the classroom makes a more frequent use of the mother tongue permissible in English lessons, creating the possibility of working with both
languages more effectively (Butzkamm and Caldwell 2009). In addition to being proficient in "grammaring," i.e. being able to demonstrate the mutual relationships between the linguistic accuracy, meaningfulness and appropriacy of grammatical structures, language teachers should also have a good command of the foreign language which is, in fact, an essential prerequisite of grammaring.

The learners themselves must be open to the acquisition of new linguistic structures and should be ready to accept that the system and the structures of the foreign language are different to their mother tongue and that some cognitive effort has to be invested in order to acquire a new language. However, this implies that learners see the necessity of learning new grammatical structures in order to use them in communication situations which are of personal importance to them. Mere pattern drill, although its usefulness cannot be completely denied, will hardly lead to any kind of intake of grammatical structures. Instead, learners should play a more active part by having, for instance, the opportunity to put forward hypotheses about the grammar of the target language on the basis of input data, i.e. extracting the grammatical rules themselves. In the course of their acquisition process learners will confirm, modify or reject hypotheses as they become exposed to other data.

Task-based learning is generally targeted on the non-linguistic outcome of the task, but the idea of language learning tasks which "aim at developing discrete language skills in areas of grammar, phonology, lexis and semantics" (Legutke and Howard 1991, 56) is also supported. Language learning activities as opposed to tasks focussing on meaning are seen as a condition of establishing the linguistic prerequisites for learners, enabling them to produce meaningful messages, and are indicative of a view of language learning that emphasises the complementarity of form/accuracy and content/message.

As pointed out before in the context of mediation, the increase in intercultural communication situations demands the development of interlingual exercises that fill the gap between exclusively monolingual exercises and traditional translation exercises, as intercultural contacts demand "more and more specific communication strategies for mastering the process of mutual adaptation, integration and mediation" (Müller-Jacquier 2000, 295).

2. Project

2.1 Participants and Format of Questionnaire

In order to shed some light on possible present-day attitudes towards the teaching and learning of grammar, 38 German teachers of English as a foreign language working in three different grammar schools in North Rhine-Westphalia were given a question-

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8 Cf. also Müller, who fundamentally criticizes "communicative English teaching" for not giving proper consideration to the language "system" (2010, 142).

9 This idea goes back to the first discussions of interlanguage (Selinker 1972), for a more recent account cf. Selinker (1992).

10 Because of the relatively small sample of English teachers and students, our study does not intend to lay any claim to generally applicable conclusions. Its aim is rather to present certain tendencies as regards teachers' and students' attitudes towards grammar and translation in English classes at German secondary schools.
naire\textsuperscript{11} of which twenty-seven were completed and returned. A slightly adapted version of the teachers' questionnaire was administered to 214 pupils from grades 7 (73), 8 (66) and 9 (75). The questionnaire distributed to pupils and teachers consisted of two main parts, in which the participants were asked to express their opinion on selected issues of grammar (aims of grammar, importance of grammar, ways of teaching grammar) and give their views on different aspects of translation and the use of the German language.

2.2 Results of Pupils Survey

As regards the teaching of grammar, most of the pupils (76.6\%) indicated that grammar would enable them to communicate in the foreign language. Knowing and using the correct grammatical terminology were also considered an important goal in the teaching of grammar. Nearly 50\% indicated that grammar contributed to getting them interested in the language. Furthermore, 44.3\% of the respondents held the view that grammar helped them to understand the structure of the foreign language and 34.5\% thought that learning rules was necessary.

A large majority, 81.3\% of the pupils, thought it was important to master English grammar as well as possible. The majority were also of the opinion that they should be able to express themselves in English, with grammatical accuracy seen as very important, while 78.5\% of the respondents said that a good knowledge of grammar was needed for using English appropriately.

With regard to grammar lessons, 52.4\% thought that the teacher should be more active than the pupils, whereas 47.6\% said that pupils should be more active. More than a quarter of the pupils indicated that they learnt best when the rules were presented and they had to find the examples. Only 11.2\% stated they first needed the examples to find the rules. Asked about the way grammar lessons should be conducted, 75.7\% of the pupils indicated that the teacher should explain the rules. 47.6\% preferred cooperative forms of learning, while only 7.9\% were of the opinion that pupils should work on their own to find the rules.

A great majority stated that each pupil should have their own way of learning rules. Fewer than half, 44.8\%, thought that rules should always be written down, while 43.9\% of the pupils pointed out that rules should be visualized and 33.1\% were of the opinion that rules should be learnt by heart. When they think about grammar, most pupils (82.7\%) associate it with doing exercises, followed by learning rules by heart (74.2\%). Sitting tests (59.3\%) and getting marks – whether good or bad – are also frequently associated with grammar. One third of the pupils linked grammar to boring lessons whereas only 6\% thought grammar lessons were exciting.

The majority (39.7\%) did not know whether teaching grammar took up more time than teaching vocabulary or working with texts. Only a quarter of the respondents agreed that teaching grammar needed more time, while nearly one third disagreed and the rest “did not know.” According to 64.4\%, grammar had always been part of the teaching programme, which underlines its importance in the teaching of the English language.

As regards translation, the majority of pupils (76.1\%) indicated that being able to translate was a useful goal of foreign language learning. For over half of the pupils

\textsuperscript{11} Due to lack of space, the questionnaire is not attached to the article. Those who are interested in it may contact one of the authors.
translation contributes to a better understanding of the structures of the English language, which is confirmed by the fact that nearly half of the pupils agreed with the statement that translation increases their knowledge of language. A great majority held the view that translation helped them to comprehend words, sentences and texts.

When it comes to the use of the German language in English lessons, 71.9% of the pupils indicated that it was used when they had difficulty in understanding something. Nearly half of the pupils reported that German was used to explain grammar and 40.6% said that German was used to explain vocabulary. 41.1% reported that German was spoken when pupils and teachers talked about things not directly connected with English lessons, e.g. talking about school trips, dates for class tests or discipline problems, and according to more than a quarter of the respondents German was never used in their English lessons. However, 50.4% of the pupils indicated that they translate from English to German in their English lessons and 40.6% reported that translations from German to English took place. Only 35% said that there was no translating in their English lessons at all.

2.3 Results of Teacher Survey

An overwhelming majority of 96.2% of the teachers thought that mastering grammar was important, and (85.1%) agreed with the statement that pupils should master English grammar as well as possible. 40% of those surveyed indicated that pupils should be able to express themselves in English, with grammatical accuracy being important. However, more than 50% also thought that grammatical accuracy was less important for the ability to express oneself in English.

The majority of teachers (62.9%) were of the opinion that pupils should have the more active part in grammar lessons. With regard to methodology, 55.6% of the teachers said that rules should be found with the help of examples. More than half of the teachers indicated that pupils should work with a partner or in groups in order to find out rules. However, 44.4% thought that each pupil should work on his own to discover the rules, whereas 44.4% said that pupils should have the rules explained by the teacher.

The majority of teachers stated that rules should be visualized. Two thirds of the teachers also thought that rules should be written down and another two thirds were of the opinion that each pupil should have his own way of learning rules. A quarter of the respondents were in favour of learning rules by heart.

Nearly all the teachers stated that grammar is taught in order to help pupils to communicate in the foreign language and to help them to understand its structure. Most teachers (75.1%) indicated that grammar teaching should arouse pupils’ interest in the language, and 37.1% stated that knowing and using the correct grammatical terminology is an important goal. Another third of the teachers considered the learning of rules an important goal in the teaching of grammar.

A total of 96.3% were convinced that a good knowledge of grammar is needed for using English appropriately. Thus 96.5% indicated that grammar had always been part of their teaching programme. This conviction that grammar is a relevant goal in language teaching is underlined by the fact that 66.7% of the teachers like teaching grammar a lot. Only 22.2% indicated that they did not object to teaching grammar, but did not really enjoy it. Although the great majority liked teaching grammar, only
11.1% stated that teaching grammar took up more time than teaching vocabulary or working with texts.

The majority of teachers considered translation a useful aim in the teaching of a foreign language, less than a quarter of the teachers did not think so. More than half of the respondents indicated that translating into English was important; 40.7% said that it was less important. As for translation into German, 62.9% held the view that it was less important. Only a quarter of the teachers thought that translation into German was relevant.

Regarding the function of translation, a considerable majority of teachers held the view that it helps learners to understand the different forms and structures of German and English, and that it might increase the learners’ knowledge of language. However, a quarter of the respondents did not agree with the statement that translation increases the learners' knowledge of language and a further 29.6% did not know.

The majority of the teachers (77.8%) use the German language in English classes when they talk about things that are not directly connected with English lessons and when pupils have difficulty in understanding something. Half of the teachers admitted to using German when explaining grammar and only 18.5% said they used German when explaining vocabulary. A minority stated that German was never used in their English lessons. 40.7% of the teachers reported that translations from English to German took place in their English lessons and 37.1% said that they translated from German to English. Only 22.2% of the respondents stated that there was no translating at all in their lessons.

2.4 Interpretation of the Results

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that “grammar need no longer be the major bugbear for language learners” (Butzkamm and Caldwell 2009, 103) as the importance of grammar is positively acknowledged by pupils as well as by teachers. This result is in line with earlier observations by Bade (2008, 178).

Most of the teachers expressed their liking of teaching grammar. However, pupils did not have a very favourable perception of grammar teaching. For many it only implied learning rules by heart, sitting through boring lessons or doing exercises. There are similarities between the attitudes expressed by pupils in our study and those described by Zimmermann (1991, 154) who also assessed grammar lessons as boring because they thought they hindered them from participating actively. Zimmermann ascertains a considerable dissatisfaction with grammar lessons and one might note that – at least with regard to students’ attitude towards grammar – not much seems to have changed in the last 20 years.

This study found that half of the teachers consider grammatical accuracy less important. These findings are consistent with those of Bohnenstefen (2010, 158-159) who found that teachers practice tolerance towards mistakes, which all in all demonstrates that communicative success takes priority. Contrary to our expectations (and those of the teachers!), pupils want their teachers to be more active in grammar lessons. They certainly expect their teachers to provide the necessary material and to explain new grammar items to them because they are not so willing to find out the rules themselves, thus favouring a deductive rather than an inductive and interactive approach to grammar.
Concerning the (best) way of teaching grammar, teachers clearly support the inductive method, which differs from Newby’s (2000, 460) estimation that “grammar rules […] are explained by teachers and textbooks prior to the practical stage.” On the other hand, only a minority of 11% of the pupils prefer the inductive approach. This rather contradictory result might explain why many pupils do not like grammar lessons. They do not seem motivated enough to find rules themselves. For them it might be easier to find examples after being given the rules. However, motivation is of paramount importance in successful learning as it "bears a strong relationship to achievement in language learning" (Bade 2008, 180). Surprisingly, pupils believe that knowing and using grammatical terminology is important, whereas the teachers do not rank this aspect very highly. Knowing and using the correct terminology, however, might contribute to a better understanding of the language (cf. Budde et al. 2011, 138-139).

Pupils and teachers see important goals in translation, such as helping pupils to understand different forms and structures of German and English or increasing pupils' knowledge of language. Taviano (2010, 129) corroborates the importance of translation, viewing it "not only as the process of transferring a text from one language system to another but rather as a much more complex phenomenon at the basis of human communication," so that it is somewhat surprising that 22.2% of the teachers still do not have any translation in their English classes.

The results of this study – perceptions of a non-representative population – can illustrate the importance of also using the German language in English classes. Pupils and teachers alike use German when grammar is explained (cf. Bohnensteffen 2011, 126) or whenever there are problems in understanding. On the one hand, it could mean that teachers need to teach grammar in a more effective way. On the other hand, these results could suggest that pupils are in need of their native language to get a better understanding of the topics dealt with in English classes. Using the mother tongue may thus be understood as an additional strategy for learning a foreign language, particularly when grammar is concerned.

One unanticipated finding was that German is used when pupils and teachers talk about things that are not directly connected with their English lessons, e.g. school trips, collecting money, dates for class tests, and discipline issues. Unfortunately, the opportunities for the authentic use of English these situations provide are not seized.

3. Conclusion

This paper has given an impression of and the reasons for the use of grammar and translation in foreign language classes. With regard to both grammar and translation, positive attitudes have been adopted by pupils and teachers alike. From a methodical standpoint, the finding that students would like to see a much stronger role for teachers in explaining rules could be regarded as a call for action. Grammar and translation
deserve to be given their proper place and to be taught in such a way that they cooperate with other teaching elements. Grammar and translation alone are not able to develop learners’ communicative competence. With regard to the question in the title of this article, it cannot be said that grammar and translation have staged a comeback, as they never really vanished from language teaching. Our study was able to illustrate that grammar as well as translation have – with varying degrees – generally been considered as essential for the teaching and learning of foreign languages. This importance is underscored by linguistic research relating to the complementarity of form and function as well as by SLA research although in the latter case the research results have not always been consistent with each other. The complexity of SLA research results may also be a barrier for implementing them on a large scale in grammar instruction. Our study has confirmed that grammar as well as translation have generally been seen as desirable and effective components of foreign language teaching and learning. Naturally, the way grammar and translation are dealt with has changed over the years. On the one hand, the complexity of grammar has been recognized and grammar is no longer seen as the mere acquisition of linguistic structures. On the other hand, translation is no longer viewed as the mere transference of linguistic structures from one language to the other, but has rather taken on a functional-communicative meaning exemplified by the concept of mediation.

Works Cited


