Colloquium Area "The Role of Translation in Language and Literature Education"

GRAMMAR TRANSLATION AND PRAGMATIC MEANING NEGOTIATION IN FRANCOPHONE AFRICAN EFL PEDAGOGY: CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES



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Abstract

Multilingualism as well as cultural diversity in Francophone Africa brings along particular challenges in the process of implementing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. The use of

French as the widely recognised foreign language, as well as other local African languages and cultural practices, can create barriers in the process of communication in the classroom when purely English models are used. This research critically reviews the role of the Grammar Translation Model (GTM) of instruction in foreign language learning as well as the role of the pragmatic approach in foreign language instruction in particular, based upon a documentary research methodology related to existing theory and research in the area. The result shows that the Grammar Translation Model promotes vocabulary and grammar but lacks the process of communication, as it mainly practices learning, making the learner passive, less motivated, and unconcerned. The pragmatic approach, along with the process of active learning, faces various challenges as it includes the issue of cultural diversity.

Keywords: *Francophone Africa, EFL pedagogy, grammar translation method, pragmatic meaning negotiation, communicative competence*

Introduction

English has emerged as a major tool of international communication, and hence learning it has become a necessity in non-English-speaking regions. According to Elmayantie (2015, p. 125), the world era elevates English to be of great importance when it comes to communication between nations around the globe. Encouraging English as a Foreign Language (EFL) literacy is the key to academic and professional inclusion in African francophone countries. However, the teaching of EFL under this situation is highly peculiar due to linguistic and cultural complexity. Francophone Africa is characterised by a multilingual and multicultural environment in which French serves as a lingua franca to many indigenous languages. This diversity tends to disturb the classroom communication in cases where English-only strategies are used (Bahremand, 2015, p. 6; Bedu, 2024, p. 284).

The issue is that old-fashioned teaching techniques are not sufficient to solve such problems. The Grammar Translation Method (GTM), most commonly applied in Francophone Africa, focuses more on vocabulary and grammar than communicative competence, which leads to passive learning and low motivation (Milawati, 2019, p. 187; Eisa, 2020, p. 382). Pragmatic approaches, alternatively, are rooted in socio-constructivist principles and aim to facilitate interaction and contextual sense-making (Leech, 1983; Mey, 2006). Recent research indicates that technology-based pragmatics and translanguaging strategies can improve pragmatic competence and intercultural communication (Taguchi, 2023; Qi & Chen, 2025; Huang & Chalmers, 2023). Although these developments were made, the relational pedagogical meaning of GTM and Pragmatic Meaning Negotiation in Francophone Africa has had little literature, and so the study aims to fill this gap.

This research is aimed at critically analysing the strengths and weaknesses of GTM and Pragmatic Meaning Negotiation in Francophone African EFL classrooms using a documentary analysis. Specifically, it attempts to: (1) determine how effective GTM is in promoting linguistic competence; (2) determine the role of pragmatics in promoting communicative competence, and (3) suggest methods of combining both strategies to strengthen EFL pedagogy.

The research questions that guided this research are:

1. How does GTM affect EFL learning outcomes in Francophone Africa?
2. What are the pedagogical strengths and weaknesses of the pragmatic approaches in this regard?

3. What are the ways of combining these methods to maximise communicative competence?

The research is important, as it fulfils a severe gap in the need to have culturally responsive and context-driven approaches to EFL pedagogy. It helps enhance the language teaching practices and learners' outcomes in multilingual environments by offering evidence-based recommendations. The research area is confined to a documentary review of theoretical and empirical literature on GTM and pragmatics, with a focus on the Francophone African situation. There is also a lack of primary data collection and reliance on existing research, which limits generalisability.

This paper is organised to offer a survey of the theoretical background and literature on GTM and pragmatics. It then proceeds to give the methodology, and then it presents the findings. Implications and recommendations are discussed in the next section, and the paper ends by giving suggestions on how future research should be conducted.

1. Methods

The present research used a documentary analysis methodology, which is generally known to synthesise available theoretical and empirical information in answering research questions in language pedagogy (Bowen, 2009). Documentary analysis is the systematic examination of existing publications, theoretical approaches, and empirical studies that can be used to draw patterns, gaps, and implications to the research goals. The choice of this technique was based upon the character of the research issue which presupposed the critical analysis of pedagogical techniques instead of the gathering of primary data.

The review was based on a substantial collection of resources, such as the scientific foundations of pragmatics and language teaching (Principles of Pragmatics by Leech, 1983, and Concise Encyclopedia of Pragmatics by Mey, 2006), which present information on pragmalinguistics and socio-pragmatics. The pedagogical research papers on the Grammatical Translation Method, including Milawati (2019) and Eisa (2020), were reviewed to understand its strengths and weaknesses in EFL. Besides this, recent research on pragmatic strategies, such as Taguchi (2023), Qi and Chen (2025), and Huang and Chalmers (2023), was examined to investigate such innovations as technology-enhanced pragmatics and translanguaging methods of intercultural communication. Historical and conceptual analyses by Bahremand (2015) and Akpaca (2024) were also considered for their relevance to translation as a pedagogical tool in Francophone Africa.

The sources were chosen based on their relevance to the EFL pedagogy in multilingual and multicultural settings, and preference was given to the works that focused on the Francophone African-based classrooms or a similar environment, studies published in peer-reviewed journals, and works that included comparative perspectives on GTM and pragmatic approaches. This was done through the qualitative synthesis of the findings in terms of pedagogical implications, contextual challenges and integration strategies. The linguistic competence, communicative competence, learner motivation, and cultural adaptability are some of the thematic

areas which were identified and coded based on the reviewed literature so as to inform the comparative discussion in the further sections.

Being a documentary study, the research does not involve the collection of primary data, and the conclusions are based on secondary sources, which can be a deficiency in generalizability. Nevertheless, a combination of theoretical and empirical artefacts improves the validity and gives the recommendations in this paper a solid background.

2. Results

The results from the documentary analysis are discussed in three thematic areas, which also happen to be the broad dimensions of this study. The first theme presents the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) as a method with some strengths and limitations for use in Francophone African EFL classrooms. It discusses structural strengths but communicative limitations associated with GTM. The second presents Pragmatic Meaning Negotiation as an alternative, more interactional and socio-constructivist approach that cultural and linguistic constraints may challenge. The third gives a comparative synthesis between these two approaches based upon transdisciplinary perspectives to bring out their complementarities and suggest integrative strategies towards effective EFL pedagogy within multilingual contexts.

2.1. Critical Overview of Grammar Translation Method in EFL Pedagogy in Francophone Africa

This study centres on key concepts such as Grammar Translation and Pragmalinguistics. It aims to gauge their significance to, as well as their limitations in, EFL pedagogy in a francophone African context. Grammar Translation, in essence, consists of directly transferring the content message from one language (source) to another (target). Akpaca (2024) demonstrated translation as a facilitator of EFL pedagogy in the francophone context, all the more as it helps resolve classroom communication deadlocks when they occur. For Milawati (2019:187): "Some EFL teachers perceive that among the language teaching methods, the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is the easiest method for the English teacher to achieve their target language through the importance of vocabulary and grammar rules." As reported in Bahremand (2015, p. 7), according to Howarth (1998), the Grammar Translation Method was implemented in the latter part of the nineteenth century as a method of teaching a foreign language to Westerners interested in learning classical languages, such as Greek and Latin (Brown, 2000). Its twofold leading goal was to teach students a foreign language by means of intense grammatical analysis and to jointly familiarise them with the grammar of their native language and the foreign language. For this purpose, it introduces lists of vocabulary items in order to teach them to read and write classical materials in a foreign language in order to pass standardised exams (Zimmerman, 1997).

However, it is important to specify that GTM generally operates as a mechanical process, presuming the source language to be taken for granted. Accordingly, it imposes intellectual compulsion on EFL learners to keep the meaning of words and phrases in the target language with its inherent syntactic rules of configura-

tion, that is, its word linearization principles. According to Eisa (2020, p. 382), in Grammar Translation, "language is seen as a collection of words which are isolated and independent". As such, an EFL class sounds like a complex science stereotype in which learners have to commit data to memory. This calls for some solemnity in the classroom social climate, requiring learners to be silent and submissive. In the course of a critical analysis of compositional lexical semantics in natural language inference, Pavlick (2017, p. 6) claims that lexical semantics relate to the meanings of and relationships between individual words, while compositional semantics deals with how the meanings of individual words combine to produce the meanings of larger phrases. In other words, the GTM highlights the syntactic configuration of the language.

In a meta-analysis of Frege's (1892) work on compositionality entitled 'On Sense and Reference', Bahremand (2015) argues that the meaning of a sentence is determined by the meaning of its parts and their syntactic structure. In the same vein, Montague Grammar focuses on formal semantics to explore compositional meaning. It considers the meaning of a sentence as the arithmetic summation of what is borne in its individual constituents and their typical syntactic configurations (Montague, 1970, 1973; Bahremand, 2015).

As a result, this Grammar Translation Method disregards active classroom interactions. The ability to communicate in the target language is not a priority in language-teaching instruction. Very little attention has been paid to speaking and listening, and roughly none to pronunciation. In addition, the teacher is the absolute authority in the classroom, and what matters to him is that students get the correct answers to his instructions. A critical analysis of its application in Saudi secondary schools led Eisa (2020) to conclude that it negatively affects pupils' motivation and does not favour the enhancement of speaking and writing skills. In truth, this systematised method would help students learn the language without gaining its communicative potential.

Conversely, for Harmer (2007, pp. 48-49), GTM is still relevant. He claimed that learners translate in their heads at various stages and can learn a lot by comparing parts of the English language with their mother tongues. He reckons, anyway, that "Total concentration on Grammar Translation stops students from getting the kinds of natural language inputs necessary for them to acquire language". Moreover, Elmayantie (2015, p. 127) concludes that the danger with Grammar Translation is that it teaches the students about language but fails to help them to communicate. Moreover, what is the benefit of EFL learning, if not amenable to communication literacy?

According to Brown (2001), there are diverse methods of EFL teaching and learning. Other than GTM, include the Direct Method (DM), Total Physical Response (TPR), Whole Language Approach (WLA), and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The first excludes translation in a roughly waterproof manner and prioritises the spontaneous use of the target language for communication. Therefore, no place was offered for grammatical concerns. The second claims that "having fun makes language learners interested in learning a foreign language".

This requires teachers to design funny physical activities to alleviate stress in EFL learners. The third claim is that language should be learned in an active and meaningful manner. Therefore, this study focuses on the social construction of meaning and understanding. This implies that teaching should align with real-life situations. Fourth, language is a means of communication. Therefore, an EFL classroom must be actively interactive, allowing learners to practice the language.

In all four methods, a significant tribute is paid to communication in EFL classes with primacy toward the target language. Considering the TPR and WLA approaches, they would help not only to teach language but also to impact the personality of learners by influencing their moral and cultural setup. Through fun-making in combination with real-life experiences, EFL teachers can both magnetise learners and format their psyches at will. Success in such a venture depends mainly on pragmalinguistic strategies, although there are still some pitfalls to handle.

2.2. Critical Overview of Pragmatic Meaning Negotiation in EFL Pedagogy in Francophone Africa

Pragmatics is a relatively complex linguistic discipline related to meaning in a language at work. Pragmalinguistics and socio-pragmatics are two of its many variants; the present study preferably focuses on these. According to Leech (1983), pragmalinguistics is also known as 'text linguistics'. It deals with a more linguistic end of pragmatics, as it focuses on an abstract study of linguistic communication in terms of conversational principles, rhetorical models of pragmatics, and so on. Thus, stylish detours in the literature can be showcased in EFL pedagogy to provoke fun for learners. Socio-pragmatics focuses on what language is used to do in society. Halliday and Hasan (1985/1989, p. 44) would contend that: "We study language partly in order to understand language and how it works, and partly in order to understand what people do with it." With a stronger emphasis, Halliday (1973, p. 20) claims that "language is as it is because of what it has to do." This implies that syntactic configurations are not ex nihilo. Instead, they are tributaries of communication intentions. These forms and functions operate in conjunction. As such, an imperative verbal form, for instance, cannot be taught effectively or understood adequately without the operative context of use. Even in the simple teaching of negativization, either grammatically or semantically, EFL teachers may fabricate adjunct classroom scenarios to challenge learners' critical thinking ability. This may help to grow in them the ability to identify when and how to say 'no,' either frontally or disguisedly, depending on prevailing contexts such as who says what to whom, when and why. It is a life skill worth fostering for learners with the aid of their appropriate use of language in real-life situations. This is only one example of how pragmatics can contribute to enhancing socio-constructivist pedagogy in EFL classes. Other supportive works on this trend of pragmatics include Leech (1983) and Mey (2006). For such a scholar, the depth of meaning in communicative language ranks far above semantic meaning, as can be calculated from syntactic and semantic configurations, that is, from grammar and vocabulary. Therefore, understanding human language calls for activating its social context of use, for example, the study of parole or language at work. The implication

is that for it to prove patents and be more captivating, a language study should be in vivo, delving into its ad hoc context of use. In Hymes's (1972) terms: "There are rules of use without which rules of usage are useless". To this, claims Nerlich (2006, p. 114) adds that: "Meaning depends on the information people can take out of an utterance, rather than the information that is already in it" (See Mey, 2006). This means that brooding over meaning, as can yet be found in dictionaries, may rapidly turn an EFL class tedious. So, the actual meaning of language in use goes far beyond the prima facie message, the ostentatious significance of words." In this regard, when studying a literary text in an EFL class without infusing tedium in learners, teachers must adopt a functional approach by setting language at work through the presentation of interesting and captivating stories. This alludes to the Total-Physical-Response approach presented earlier, with its inherent ludic feature creating fun for learners.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that applying pragmatics to African Francophone EFL pedagogy is not a hazard-free venture. First, a class is generally composed of learners with discrepant intellectual abilities and emotional intelligence. While some are soon moved by the teacher's coined story and are prone to learning from it, others may remain unmoved. The multiplicity of such an emotional discrepancy inherent in a classroom context offers surplus challenges for EFL teachers, bringing additional complexity to the teaching job. Africa is typically characterised by significant cultural and linguistic diversity. In exploring obstacles impeding the workability of AI translation machines in Africa, Bedu (2024, p. 284) claims that this project is supported in only 25 out of over 2000 languages on the continent. The point of interest here is the large linguistic diversity with which the continent is blessed. With a classroom being a melting pot in manifold regards, this multilingual background can influence EFF pedagogy diversely – even with their inherent cultural gadgets, likely to corrupt message content as may be understood by learners. As a one-man, no EFL teacher can fit in all cultural variants when the need arises to stray from French to explain better typical aspects marked with cultural prints. Many African-originating texts bear features of what is called "Pragmatic transfer" (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), that is, paraphrasing local realities into English. Thus, although produced in English, it would make no deep sense to a reader not embedded in the culture at stake. In this event, verbatim English-French translations can remain shallow, no matter how hard the teacher may try to turn his pedagogy functional.

2.3. Transdisciplinary Comparative Exploration of Data

According to Halliday and Hasan (1985/1989, p. 44), "we study language partly in order to understand language and how it works, and partly in order to understand what people do with it". This implies that language studies have a two-fold mission. It should cover both the forms and functions. On that ground, Grammar Translation, as meant in essence to labour on language parts and their syntactic configuration, bears some stakes for francophone classes. This helps create an itemised view of language configuration. However, this method has striking limitations. With the current EFL pedagogy being assigned the mission of en-

hancing communication literacy, GTM sounds are insufficient and lame. As such, when translating a source language into a target language – chiefly navigating through English and French for the scope of interest of this work – there is an absolute need to abide by a functional approach, given that no text can make meaning as it is not produced for any target function to satisfy.

Besides, in exploring the communicational potential of human language, Yule (1996, p. 127) contends that "more gets communicated than is said". This implies that every language in use has a second-degree meaning. This behind-the-scenes meaning is what Akmajian (2001, p. 381) has dubbed "Indirect communication". It is also referred to as "invisible meaning" (Yule, 1996, p. 127) or "meant-but-unsaid" (Horn & Ward, 2006, p. 1). Thus, EFL pedagogy should rank above linguistic competence and focus on enhancing communicative competence; that is, "the ability to use language appropriately in a social context' (Stockwell, 2007, p. 43). Hymes (1972) and Stockwell (2007) discussed "strategic competence". With regard to Halliday's (1990, p. 34) SFL theory, it is particularly suitable for the type of investigation that enables us to analyse any passage and relate it to its context in the discourse, as well as to the general background of the text, for whom it is written, and what its angle is on the subject matter. This contention offers evidence of the centrality of context to meaning negotiation in human communication. Meaning ranks beyond the evident significance of words, which some scholars refer to as "Compositional meaning". Indeed, we have to differentiate between two major models of communication: the "Code model" (See Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Gerbner, 1985) and the "Inferential Model" (Halliday, 1975; Akmajian *et alii*, 2001; Leech, 1983).

In a word, the first one proves by far poorer than the second, which requires further quibbling over the ostentatious message and is worked out through Mey (2006a)'s "Pragmatic acts". This activates learners' reflections and causes them to participate actively in classroom activities. In such a process, EFL learners cannot simply sit in class as passive receptacles to welcome their teacher's message. Instead, there is an active co-construction of knowledge and experience, with the teacher just acting as a coach or a guide to channel learners into the planned track to achieve their pedagogical objectives. This is the ontological essence of the socio-constructivist pedagogical approach. Only this way can an EFL class prove active and save from tedium and resentment. This trend can help foster learners' motivation and commitment to language. The task is then simplified for a teacher who has much less to do on the class walls once positive emotions and inclinations are triggered in the learners.

2.4. An Overall Appraisal and Suggestions of the Findings

Modern EFL pedagogy is assigned an ontological mission to enhance communication literacy among learners. Moreover, the wealth of human language cannot be sufficiently scavenged by means of syntactic and semantic tools alone, as supported by the Grammar Translation Method. A language is learned to be spoken and not known about. Moreover, human communication is often dominated by behind-the-scenes meanings, whose appropriate value is almost exclusively dic-

tated by ad hoc discourse contexts and calls for negotiated or calculated meaning or conversational value. This beyond-semantics specimen of meaning is known as "contingent proposition" (Trauth & Kazzazi, 1996, p. 248) or "implicit content" (Green, 2006, p. 179) as referred to in Mey (2009). Accordingly, Yule (1996, p. 134) claims that: "Understanding how people communicate is actually a process of interpreting not just what speakers say, but what they intend to mean". This is what Odebode and Odesanya (2015, p. 108) call "the illocutionary functions of language in parroting Yule (1996) and Leech (1983)".

By way of instantiation, when faced with a saying like "A man does not hold a cutlass with the intention to pound yams" (Ahmed Yerima's The Liman and Ade Ire, 2004, p. 79; resorted to in Odebode & Odesanya, 2015, p. 110), a verbatim translation would sound shallow and tasteless. Readers must lean on context-supported inferential functions before attaining any plausibly allowable meaning in relation to readiness for vengeance or violence. An accurate understanding should be hooked to its functional context of usage. For Pavlick (2017, Ch. VI), "Many aspects of language understanding require deeper models of semantic meaning than those which can be easily derived from word co-occurrence alone".

In addition, EFL education from a whole-language perspective must shape learners' desired morality. For this purpose, Lakoff (1973) contends that "The Role of Politeness, or mugging the grammar, deals with politeness and pragmatic aspects of language". When teaching grammar using a functional approach, EFL teachers can format learners' personalities. By adequately handling the *face concept* inherent in the Politeness Principle (Brown & Levinson, 1978; Leech, 1983), EFL teachers can impact the moral setup of learners and shape them into ideal citizens for the good of community life.

3. Discussion of the Findings

The results of the analysis of the documentary demonstrate that there is a strongly evident difference between the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and the Pragmatic Meaning Negotiation in the pedagogy of the EFL in Francophone Africa. GTM has strengths in building the competence of language in terms of vocabulary and grammar, since they are critical in basic language acquisition. However, its focus on memorising and syntactic accuracy leads to passive learning environments that do not promote communicative competence. This is in line with Eisa (2020), who noted that GTM could diminish the motivation of learners and may not necessarily enhance their speaking and writing skills. Similarly, Milawati (2019) states that despite being perceived as easy to implement by teachers, GTM does not prepare learners for communication in real-life situations.

In contrast to it, the pragmatic approach makes a dynamic option as it emphasises interaction, contextual meaning-making, and socio-constructivist tenets. Pragmatics in EFL pedagogy encourages active involvement and critical thinking and helps learners to negotiate meanings in real communicative situations. This observation echoes Leech (1983) and Mey (2006) who maintain that the social functions of language cannot be completely and satisfactorily understood without language. Additionally, recent research, such as Taguchi (2023) and Qi and Chen

(2025), indicates the ability of technology-enhanced pragmatics and translanguaging strategies to close cultural and linguistic gaps, which proposes that pragmatic strategies can be adjusted to contemporary pedagogical changes.

Although this has been advantageous, pragmatic meaning negotiation has been challenging in the French-speaking Africa because of the heterogeneity of the cultures and the multilingual classes. According to Bedu (2024), the linguistic diversity of Africa makes it difficult to apply similar approaches, and pragmatic transfer can cause misunderstanding when the local cultural realities are translated into English. Such complexity drives the importance of culturally responsive instructional approaches that would strike a balance between the soundness of language and communicative functionality.

Combined, these results hint at the fact that neither GTM nor pragmatics can be applied to address the pedagogical needs of the Francophone African EFL classrooms altogether. GTM offers structural knowledge, and pragmatics offers communicative competence and intercultural awareness. In this regard, a hybrid approach that synthesises the systematic rigour of GTM and the interactive and contextualised nature of pragmatics seems to be the most fruitful. Such a hybrid model could draw upon the principles of translanguaging and digital devices to create interactive, inclusive learning spaces that are culturally competent. The integration strategies are to be tested empirically in the classroom settings in future studies to prove their effectiveness and scalability.

Conclusion

Overall, this study laboured on a documentary comparative exploration of the strengths and weaknesses of Grammar Translation and Pragmatic Meaning Negotiation in EFL pedagogy in the African Francophone context. Cultural and linguistic diversity in Africa poses serious challenges to EFL pedagogy. Teachers have to navigate through ever-unstable linguistic interference, causing learners to show a diversity of speaking proficiency, with their mother tongues influencing their phonological setup and abilities. In such a situation, both approaches show pedagogical benefits and limitations for the conveyance of classroom activities. However, to enable EFL education to shape learners into world citizens, Pragmatic Meaning Negotiation sounds much more appropriate for trade. To date, EFL teaching should consolidate in learners not only communicative literacy, but also strengthen their moral setup, gregarious mind, and morality, as well as plenty of other life skills necessary to meet the requirements of modern job markets. If fluency in speaking and writing is known to be a great asset, knowing how to handle healthy interpersonal relations matters much further. While Grammar Translation in EFL pedagogy participates in oiling linguistic competence, pragmatics consolidates communicative competence. The contextual appropriateness of utterance is the lone benefit of language as a means of social cement, uniting people into a harmonious whole.

As is claimed by Halliday and Hasan (1985/1989, p. 44): "We study language partly to understand language and how it works, and partly in order to understand what people do with it". Moreover, for Widdowson (1988, p. 16) to corrobo-

rate the trade as follows: "In literary writings, it is common to find instances of language which cannot be accounted for by grammatical rules".

Beyond these observations, the findings underscore the urgent need for pedagogical innovation that integrates structural rigor with functional communicative strategies. Future research should move beyond documentary analysis to empirical classroom investigations, testing blended models that combine GTM's grammatical accuracy with pragmatics' interactive and context-aware features. This integration could utilise digital tools, translanguaging practices, and culturally responsive methodologies to boost learner engagement and intercultural competence. Ultimately, the success of EFL pedagogy in Francophone Africa depends on approaches that not only teach language but also empower learners to participate effectively in global discourse while safeguarding their cultural identity.

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