

A fordítás lehetséges szerepe a magyar mint idegen nyelv órán

A Stipendium Hungaricum ösztöndíjas hallgatók magyar nyelvóráinak tapasztalatai a hallgatók és a nyelvtanárok szemszögéből

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Összefoglalás

A kutatás célja feltérképezni egy nagy múltra visszatekintő, de a modern nyelvpedagógiai irányzatok mellett napjainkban kissé elavult és háttérbe szoruló irányzat, a nyelvtani-fordító módszer helyét és szerepét a kezdő magyar nyelvórákon. Kérdőíves kutatás keretein belül a Magyar Agrár- és Élettudományi Egyetemen a kezdő magyar nyelvórákat elvégző Stipendium Hungaricum ösztöndíjas hallgatók (95 résztvevő) és az egyetem öt campusán dolgozó magyar mint idegen nyelvet oktató nyelvtanárok (5 résztvevő) véleményét és benyomásait vizsgáltam a témával kapcsolatban.

Az eredmények alapján elmondható, hogy az intézményben oktató tanárok kiválóan használják a modern nyelvpedagógia eszköztárát, de nem zárkóznak el a nyelvtani-fordító módszer pozitív elemeinek használatától sem a tanulási folyamat elősegítése érdekében. A kezdő magyar nyelvórán bár a közvetítőnyelv nélküli oktatásra törek-szenek, a tervszerűen és konkrét tanulási célok érdekében történő fordítás és a nyelvtani elemzés is hasznos lehet bizonyos esetekben. A diákok és a tanárok konkrét nyelvtani elemekkel és a fordítás gyakorlati megvalósulásával kapcsolatos véleménye a legtöbb esetben hasonló képet mutat, de az összehasonlító elemzés során fény derült néhány fontos különbségre is a két csoport nézőpontja között.

Kulcsszavak: *nyelvpedagógia, magyar mint idegen nyelv, Stipendium Hungaricum, nyelvtani-fordító módszer, szakmódszertan*

The role of translation in the Hungarian as a foreign language class

A case study of Hungarian language classes of Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship holders from the perspective of the students and the language teachers

Márton Zsolnai

Abstract

The purpose of the research is to map the place and role of the Grammar-Translation method in Hungarian language classes. This is a method with a long history, but it is considered outdated among the modern trends of language pedagogy. In my research, I used a questionnaire survey to examine the attitudes and impressions of the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship holders (95 participants) who take beginner Hungarian language classes at the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences and those of the language teachers who teach Hungarian as a foreign language (5 participants) on five campuses of our university.

Results show that the language teachers at the institution know the principles of modern language pedagogy well, but in order to support the learning process more, they may use the positive elements of the grammar-translation method as well. In the Hungarian classes for beginners, although it is more professional to teach without an intermediary language, planned translation and grammatical analysis for specific learning goals can also be useful in certain cases. The beliefs of the students and the teachers regarding grammatical elements and the practical implementation of translation in the language classes in most of the cases show a similar pattern. However, the comparative analysis also revealed some important differences between the viewpoints of the two examined groups.

Keywords: *language pedagogy, Hungarian as a foreign language, Stipendium Hungaricum, Grammar-Translation method, methodology*

Introduction

Thanks to the Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship programme, an increasing number of foreign university students are coming to our country every year. Also, the Hungarian University of Agricultural and Life Sciences has a large number of other foreign students, which is why the Department of Foreign Languages offers a two-semester mandatory course of Hungarian as a foreign language (HFL) and culture on all campuses.

The tempus Public Foundation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade are the two organisations which run the scholarship programme and make recommendations on which universities should hold the courses. The details of the curriculum of HFL courses are the responsibility of the higher education institution itself. During the two semesters, students should reach level A1 in Hungarian and learn about the most important cultural and national characteristics of Hungary. The teaching of Hungarian as a foreign language and the design of the course may differ from one institution to another. Experience shows that the effectiveness of the course largely depends on the institutional strategy, methodology and professional expertise of the Hungarian language teachers.

The Relevance of Methods and Approaches in Modern Language Teaching

Methods and approaches in language teaching have a long and interesting history dating back to the previous centuries. The presence and importance of the different approaches and methods change in time: „*As time passes, new methods are created and others fall into disfavour.*” (Larsen-Freeman – Anderson, 2011) These days at all levels of language teacher training courses, students get acquainted with some of the most important methods and approaches. It helps to understand their future profession in depth and form their beliefs and knowledge about language learning and also create their own teaching style.

According to Westwood (2008), teaching principles and procedures are determined not only by the subject matter to be taught, but also by the beliefs of the teacher and current theories about language learning. All these variables influence the content and the methodology of language teaching.

Also, it is important to know the methods and approaches which are less frequently used, because some good practices and useful thoughts of these methods and approaches could be applied in foreign language classes. These days, we live in a post-method era with a strong emphasis on Communicative Language Teaching. As Vassilakou (2019: 8) states „*a principled, eclectic approach is based on post-method pedagogy and eclectic teachers review, select, adapt and combine the best characteristics of mainstream methods and approaches.*”

According to Alharbi (2017), principle-eclecticism is a student-centered approach which classifies, selects, and sequences classroom activities in order to reach the goals of coherent and pluralistic language teaching.

In order to reach these goals, it is important to use all methods that may work in the classroom. Grammar-Translation Method is certainly not a fashionable method in the 21st century, but some of its elements may help students to learn a foreign language in an integrated and well-planned way. The variety of methods, as well as the wide range of activities and good practices that can be borrowed from traditional methods, can help to overcome the most common difficulties in foreign language teaching, such as unmotivated students, learning difficulties, incoherent groups and so

on. There are language learning activities that help and scaffold students to learn a new foreign language.

Grammar-translation: Characteristics and Some Advantages

The most important characteristic of the Grammar-Translation Method is the focus on grammatical rules and translation from a second language to a first language, and from a first language to a second language (Musumeci, 2011). What is translation? Translation is a complex mental activity while the meaning is translated from one language to another. These days Grammar-Translation Method is seen as an outdated method of language teaching, although some of its activities can be efficient in the foreign language class.

Research shows some advantages of Grammar-Translation Method in the language class: GTM is a good opportunity for students to translate sentences directly for practising translation and learning how to apply grammar tenses. The three important strategies of Grammar-Translation Method are the usage of the mother tongue of the students, the rich vocabulary and understanding of the structure of the words. These strategies are impossible to separate in order to reach the goals of language learning. The mother tongue or the current language of instruction is a very important factor which scaffolds students to understand the meaning. For a successful learning process, a very rich vocabulary is also needed, and the knowledge and skills of how to put the words together (Milawati 2019).

A Case Study of Teaching Hungarian as a Foreign Language

Compared to research and methodology of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), there are less language-specific research and fewer background theories on teaching Hungarian as a foreign language, despite the fact that there are some methodological handbooks for HFL, such as Dóla (2020).

Nagyházi (2016) details the structure of the teacher training programs of HFL, and also describes the main methodological tendencies: most of the learners of Hungarian as a foreign language are young adults. They come to Hungary because they want to study at university. This is why, the focus of teacher training programmes was on young adult language learners.

The groups of learners of HFL at Hungarian universities are not homogenous, due to several factors, such as their rather diverse age, cultural background, mother tongue, motivation and experience in language learning. Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship holders are coming from more than 80 different countries of Asia, South-America and Africa, with a diverse language learning background, this is why HFL teachers cannot treat them as a homogenous group.

The Method of Translation in the Classroom

Using a third language as an intermediary language in the HFL classroom can be useful or useless, required or unnecessary depending on the background of participants and the purposes of the course. Modern language pedagogy usually tries to avoid using an intermediary language in the foreign language classroom, however, in some cases, it can be useful for explanations and making the meaning of some abstract words clear at the beginner level.

The coursebook that we use in the classes of HFL is *Jó reggelt!* (Hetesy–Gyöngyösi, 2022). At the end of the chapters of the coursebook, there is a wordlist in Hungarian and blank cells for the translation of the words into the mother tongue of students, which should be done at home or in the classroom. In the coursebook, new vocabulary items are introduced by using a set of pictures, in which cases translation is not needed, because students can see what is in the picture. On the other hand, the meaning of some words is not so obvious, and translation can make the meaning of the word clear. The same is true for abstract adjectives, whose meaning is difficult to convey and explain.

This is a list of creative tasks that I use sometimes use in the class of Hungarian as a foreign language:

- Students should find 5 interesting words while they are walking in the city. They should take a picture, use their phone to translate the words, and in the next class, they share the words and relevant information about the context of the words with their group mates.
- When we teach a new grammar rule and students memorize it, the task is to find and underline all the occurrences of that grammar rule in the text of the coursebook as fast as possible. Students count the underlined words and the winner is who shouts out the correct number first.
- A group of students with the same mother tongue teach some important phrases to the whole group using Hungarian as an intermediary language, while translating these phrases.
- The teacher reads some keywords in English, and groups or pairs of students build Hungarian sentences by translating, conjugating and combining the English words.
- As a strategy to check students' understanding of the new grammar rule, students are asked to summarize and write down the grammar rule in English.
- Online or offline matching and memory tasks are often used, in which students have to connect English and Hungarian words of the same meaning.
- Students should use the photo translate function of Google to translate a Hungarian text. In this task, they watch the text on the screen for one minute, then look at the original Hungarian text again and translate as many words to English as they can.
- Students receive sentence pairs in two lines above each other in English and Hungarian, and they have to match the words, suffixes and prepositions, so they can observe the differences between the word order in the different languages and the different usage of grammar.

Material and method

The research involved five language teachers from the Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences, who teach Hungarian as a foreign language courses to Stipendium Hungaricum scholarship holders on all campuses of the university. Their attitudes and beliefs were examined using a questionnaire. The questions referred to their experiences of learning and teaching Hungarian at the university and their attitudes towards grammar and translation.

The SH students of MATE were asked to fill in the same online questionnaire at the end of the second semester, right after finishing the course of Hungarian language and culture. The online questionnaire consisted of short answers on Likert-scales of 5 and 7. The questions were the same for HFL teachers and foreign students, so the differences or similarities between the students' and the teachers' points of view could be compared.

5 teachers and 95 foreign students filled in the questionnaire, which is more than half of the total number of foreign students at MATE in the academic year of 2022/2023. These students attended BSc or MSc courses in Gödöllő (53%), Budapest (28%), Gyöngyös (11%), Kaposvár (6%) and Keszthely (2%). As SH allows students to apply from more than 90 countries or regions, the diversity of students is quite high: their mother tongues were Arabic (22%), Chinese (9%), Lao (6%), Spanish (6%), and other languages (57%).

Results

The results of the questionnaire are shown in the following two subchapters. The perspective of the students and experiences of HFL teachers were analysed separately, but the similarities and differences between the attitudes of the two groups were compared as well. Not all answers are discussed in the article, but I wanted to show the most important and thought-provoking results I received.

The Perspective of the Students

After finishing the Hungarian as a foreign language course, students reported different levels of confidence. Their task was to evaluate their own level of Hungarian knowledge by completing the sentence *After one year of learning Hungarian now I can...* Some of them were quite confident about the level of Hungarian that they reached in two semesters, but there were also students who didn't evaluate their knowledge very highly. Table 1 shows the most common and most interesting and thought-provoking answers of the students.

Based on the answers, I set up the following three independent categories: negative and positive self-assessments of their Hungarian language skills, and of their practical language use in everyday life. From the 95 answers, it seemed that most of them feel that they know what they are expected to know after one year: speaking, reading, writing, understanding the Hungarian language to some extent and communicating at level A1.

Table 1. After one year of learning Hungarian now I can...

<i>Negative assessment</i>	<i>Positive assessment</i>	<i>Practical language usage</i>
<i>I'm still on a reallyyy basic level where I might look at some text and identify some grammar that we learned in class, but regarding communication, only Jo napot szia köszönöm</i>	<i>Speak and understand the talking.</i>	<i>Probably introduce myself, understand greeting in hungarian, write few words, buying food with less translation from google translate,..</i>
<i>I canno't speak in Hungarian alot.. just say simple and basics pbrases.</i>	<i>understand and speak a little bit in Hungarian</i>	<i>Have (kinda) successful interactions while shopping</i>
<i>Less than A1</i>	<i>Read, write and speak a little bit</i>	<i>Greet someone, understand the menu in the restaurant, buy something in traditional market</i>
<i>Telling my name</i>	<i>I can understand and speak a few sentences</i>	<i>Pick a few words from Hungarians when they communicate and try to understand what they are trying to communicate.</i>
<i>Nothing</i>	<i>Know a lot of words, and basic communication</i>	<i>I can introduce myself and have basic conversations about some everyday topics.</i>

<i>Speak like a 2 year old</i>	<i>Speak Hungarian very well</i>	<i>Now i can ask the price when i go to the market to buy something</i>
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Source: Own questionnaire research, 2023

Later on, their task was to rate their language skills in Hungarian (Figure 1). Generally speaking, a lot of students avoided the answer *very easy*, and in the previous question, they also referred to Hungarian as a complicated language.

The weighted average shows the difficulty of the language skills in increasing order: reading (3.71), speaking (4.01), writing (4.32), pronunciation (4.41), communication (4.46), listening (4.52), understanding what Hungarian people say (4.96) and using grammar rules (4.98). The easiest language skill seems to be reading, because students have more time to re-read the text several times and think about its meaning. Surprisingly, speaking is not as hard for the students as it seems for the first time. Based on the averages of the answers inquiring about the difficulty of understanding what Hungarian people say and using grammar rules, oral comprehension and grammar proved to be the most difficult skills.

Rate how difficult the following skills are for you when you think about learning Hungarian! (1 = very easy / 7 = very difficult)

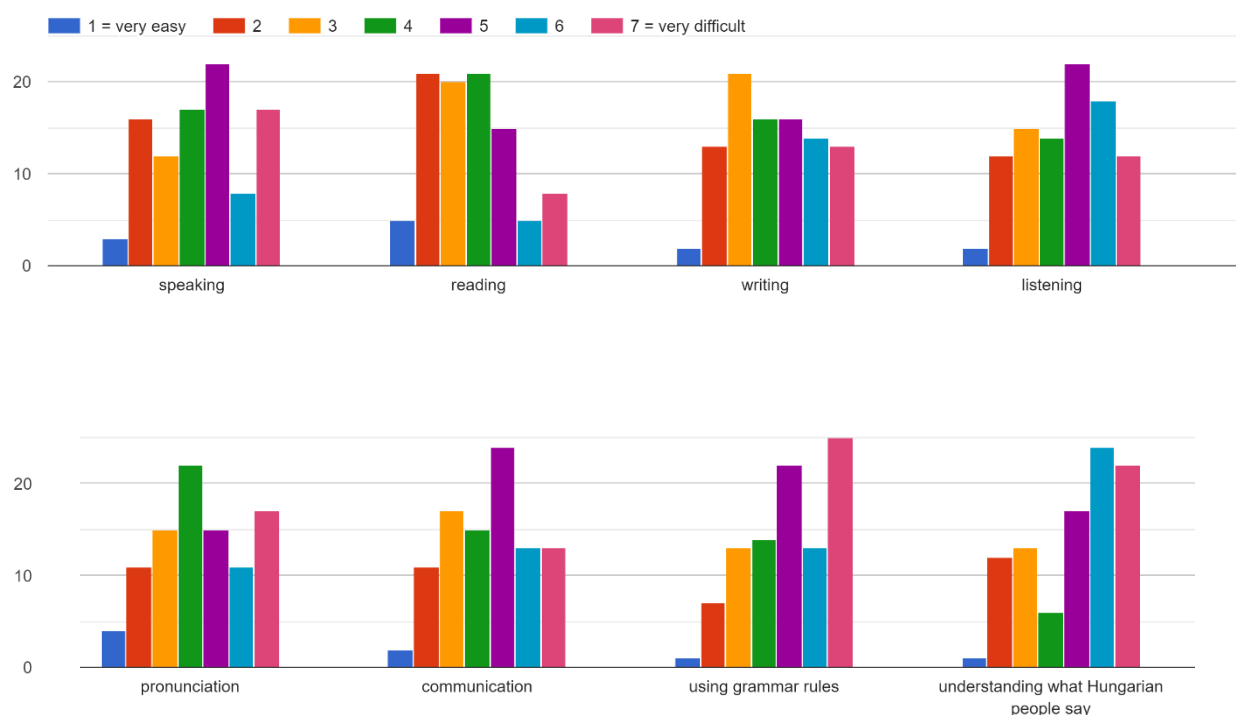


Figure 1. Skills (number of participants)

Source: Own questionnaire research, 2023

A very similar question was asked about grammar (Figure 2). Grammar seemed to be very hard for a lot of students. This result has motivated us to put more emphasis on grammar. I selected the grammar elements that need to teach in the beginner Hungarian language class, and asked students to rate these grammar elements by difficulty.

According to the answers in a rising order, definite article and indefinite article proved to be the most difficult for them (3,29), plural forms (3,89), locative suffixes (3,90), verb conjugation (4,08),

vowel harmony (4,22), understanding grammar rules in general (4,39), understanding when to use accusative case (4,55), learning Hungarian grammar (4,58).

It is important to draw attention to the fact that individual differences, such as their mother tongue, language learning background, their skills and cognitive abilities, determine the difficulty of specific grammar elements.

Rate how difficult the following grammar elements are for you! (1 = very easy / 7 = very difficult)

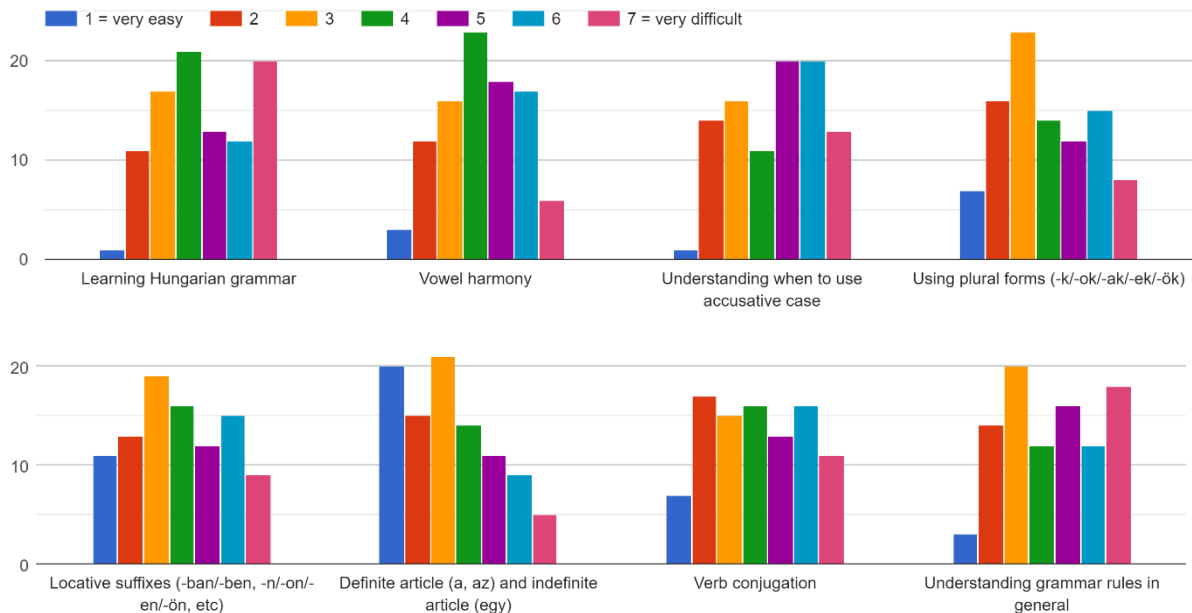


Figure 2: Grammar elements

Source: Own questionnaire research, 2023

The Experiences of Teachers of Hungarian as a Foreign Language

The teachers were asked how much they know about the Grammar-Translation method. They pointed out its positive and negative features. Some of their answers can be seen below:

- It is very time-consuming, outdated and does not serve to develop skills that are needed in everyday life.
- I primarily achieve my language teaching goals with the help of translation.
- It is good for expanding vocabulary.
- It can also have a place in the 21st century alongside communicative language teaching, but only within the framework of targeted lessons with goals of Grammar-Translation Method.
- This cannot be the only teaching method in classes, because communicative, spontaneous and fluent language use cannot be achieved without authentic situations.
- The Grammar-Translation method is a highly outdated language teaching method, excluding the development of speech comprehension skills and focusing only on grammatical correspondences.
- It is useless in the education of linguistically heterogeneous groups.
- I don't think I could use it effectively in my language classes.

Based on their answers it can be stated that HFL teachers in the department know the characteristics of the Grammar-Translation method, and they see the positive effects of using this method

in the language class, but they all agree that it is an outdated method of teaching which cannot be effective if this is the only method used in class.

The questionnaire inquired about the positive effects of the Grammar-Translation method asking the following question: *What are the benefits of the Grammar-Translation method?* The answers were the following:

- Easy expansion of vocabulary.
- We can compare the differences and similarities between the mother tongue and the target language - we can draw parallels at the logical level.
- They must be there, but I don't see them :-)
- There are students who find it reassuring to understand everything exactly.
- It makes the students feel safe and secure because they understand the exact meaning of the words.

They also gave some suggestions about the effective usage of this method answering the question *How would you use this method in the HFL class?*

- By translating short dialogues
- As a supplementary method - by no means to the detriment of the communicative method.
- I wouldn't be able to use it.
- To teach sentences regarding classroom language.

The teachers were asked to rate the difficulty of the different skills for their students in the classes of Hungarian as a foreign language. Figure 3. shows their opinions in comparison with the opinions of the students. According to the teachers, the difficulty of the skills by the weighted averages in increasing order is as follows: reading (4.8), communication (5.2), pronunciation (5.4), using grammar rules (5.4), listening (5.6), writing (5.8), speaking (5.8), understanding what Hungarian people say (6). If we compare these results with the answers of the students, it seems that teachers overestimate the difficulties of Hungarian language compared to their students. On a Likert-scale of seven, there is approximately one scale between the attitudes of two groups, and the order of difficulty is different as well.

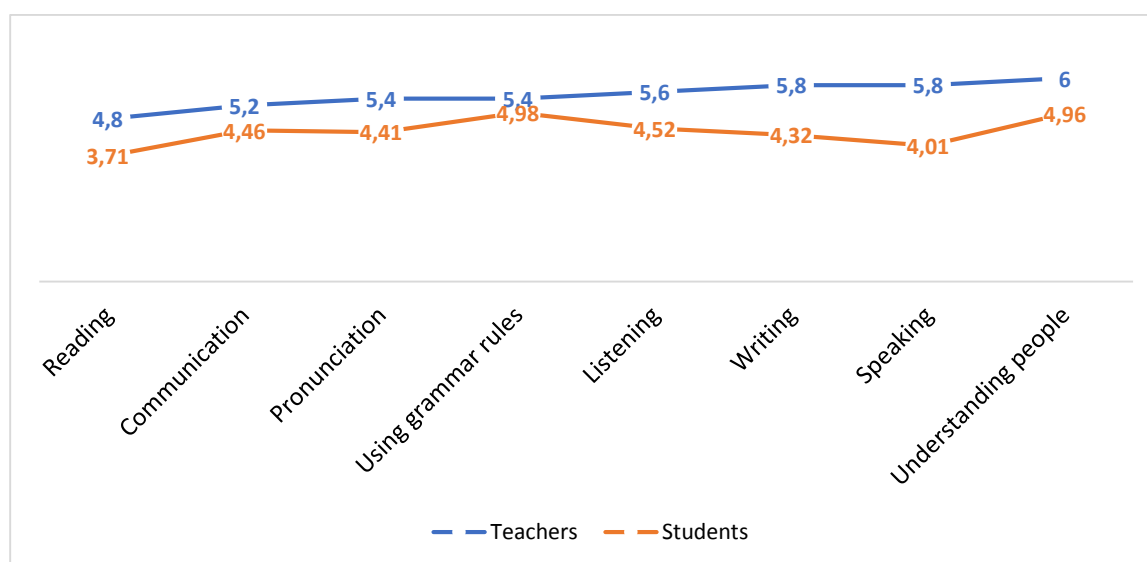


Figure 3: How difficult are the following skills? (0 = very easy, 7 = very difficult)

Source: Own questionnaire research, 2023

Regarding the grammar elements (Figure 4), the beliefs of the teachers were as follows: vowel harmony (3.4), definite article and the indefinite article (3.8), using plural forms (4), locative suffixes (4.2), understanding grammar rules in general (4.4), verb conjugation (4.8), learning Hungarian grammar (5), understanding when to use accusative case (5.6).

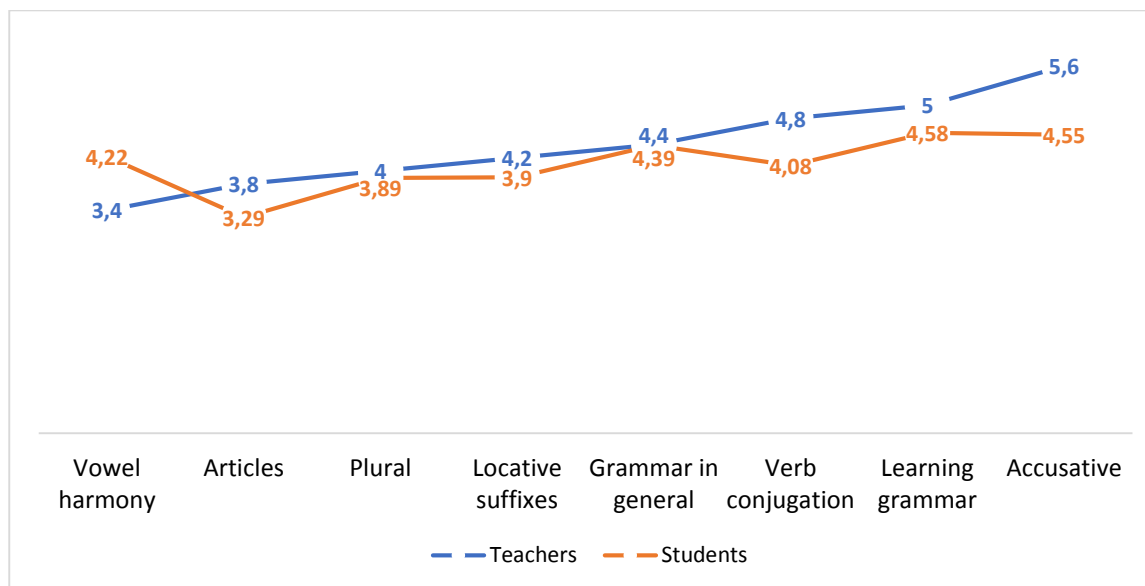


Figure 4: How difficult are grammar elements? (0 = very easy, 7 = very difficult)

Source: Own questionnaire research, 2023

Looking at Figure 4., the distance is even closer now, so the beliefs and attitudes of teachers are more similar to what students believe.

Teachers believe that vowel harmony is the easiest grammar among the given grammar categories, however, for the students it is not as easy as it seems for the teachers. In some languages, such as in Turkish, there is vowel harmony, but speakers who don't have experience in these languages may be concerned about this linguistic phenomenon and possibly need more time to understand it. Vowel harmony is especially important for the Hungarian language, as all the suffixes are formed according to this rule. Using accusative and verb conjugation are two very complicated topics according to both the teachers and students.

Table 2. shows the questions which asked about teachers' and students' attitudes towards translation in the class. Generally speaking, it seems that the opinions of the two groups are closer to each other than they were in the previous questions. The same question was asked from students and from the teacher, however, students were asked to answer the question in first person singular (I), and teachers were requested to begin their answer with *My students...* The weighted average is illustrated in the table.

It seems that most students appreciate the word list at the end of the chapter, which they can use to translate new words. They feel important to translate phrases in the coursebook. The teachers mainly ask students to translate the words and phrases into their mother tongue, but students more often translate the words and phrases into English. Students believe if teachers use English in the classroom, it helps them to understand the new words, but the teachers' opinion is different. Both of the groups disagreed with the statement that English is unnecessary in the classroom, but students had a stronger opinion about this issue.

Regarding online and printed dictionaries, most of the students use online dictionaries. The teachers underestimated the use of written dictionaries. Teachers also believe that knowing grammar rules make students more confident in learning Hungarian, but students slightly disagree. Regarding teaching grammar, students believe that teachers like teaching grammar a lot, although teachers are not so enthusiastic about teaching grammar.

Table 2: (1= I strongly disagree, 5 = I strongly agree)

Questions addressed to students and to teachers.	students	teachers
<i>I/my students feel that I have to translate everything in the coursebook.</i>	3,02	3,2
<i>I/my students find it useful if there is a Hungarian-English dictionary at the end of each chapter.</i>	3,8	4,2
<i>I/my students translate new Hungarian words to my mother tongue.</i>	2,92	4
<i>I/my students translate new Hungarian words to English</i>	4,01	3,8
<i>It helps if the teacher uses English in the classroom.</i>	4,08	3,4
<i>I/my students think English is unnecessary in the Hungarian class.</i>	1,95	2,8
<i>It helps me/my students to understand longer texts if we translate them in the class together</i>	3,98	3,6
<i>I/my students use online dictionary</i>	3,79	4,4
<i>I/my students use paper-based dictionary</i>	2,32	1,4
<i>Translating new words is more important than other tools that the teacher use (body language, synonyms, pictures, etc.)</i>	2,67	2,8
<i>I/my students need to know the exact meaning of the words to communicate in Hungarian.</i>	3,66	3
<i>It is important to teach grammar at the beginner Hungarian class.</i>	3,43	3,6
<i>Knowing grammar makes me/my students confident while using Hungarian.</i>	3,6	4,2
<i>My teacher likes/ I like to teach grammar rules.</i>	3,78	3,4

Source: Own questionnaire research, 2023

Implications and recommendations

As a conclusion, we can state that the Grammar-Translation method is an outdated method to teach a language, and it isn't worth using in the HFL class. Although, there are some elements that can be borrowed from this method, and can be applied in the language classes of Stipendium Hungaricum students as well.

The key is to know the positive and negative effects of the Grammar-Translation Method and use it only in a well-planned fashion and wisely. There are some interesting and creative ways to use some elements of the traditional methods and approaches of language teaching as well in order to support the language learning process of our students.

The differences and similarities between the opinions and attitudes of the teachers and the students regarding language learning seem to be an interesting topic to discover more and can add some empirical knowledge to the field of language pedagogy.

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