What do you understand by the term *consciousness-raising*? To what extent is a grammar-translation approach based on consciousness-raising?

By Paul Butler-Tanaka

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1. Introduction

1.1 For most people the term "consciousness-raising" implies a connection with types of political and sociological activities that have become part of the zeitgeist of the past thirty years or so. It is probably quite likely that most people would not associate the term with language teaching. Even amongst language teachers and linguists there may be confusion over the term's relation to language teaching, as there appear to be somewhat conflicting views as to what constitutes consciousness-raising. This paper will set out to examine those conflicting views.

Furthermore, this paper will also assess the extent to which a Grammar-Translation (GT) approach is based on consciousness-raising (C-R). With that in mind the paper will look at what constitutes a grammar-translation in an attempt to highlight any connections between such an approach and the views of C-R put forward by its principal proponents.

1.2 The conclusion of this paper will attempt to answer the direct questions in the title and will also offer an opinion as to the degree of similarity between the two approaches. It is the author's view that whilst one idea may appear to be similar to another that does not guarantee that there is a connection between them which may lead one that one idea is based on the other.

2. A Brief History and Definitions

2.1 It appears to be generally accepted that the teaching of grammar has been around for two thousand years or more. Odlin (1994: 7) refers to the study of Sanskrit in India and to the later study of Greek and Latin elsewhere. Rutherford (1987: 27) refers to the 2,500-year history of language teaching.

The Grammar Translation Method, on the other hand, has a much shorter history. According to *The Oxford Companion to The English Language*, it came into being in the late eighteenth century in Germany as a result of opposition to the Literary Method which had been in ascendancy for hundreds of years previously. Richards and Rodgers (1986: 3-5) point out that GT was initially known in the United States as the Prussian Method. They also list seven principal characteristics of the GT approach, which are an expansion of the more succinct list of characteristics offered by Prator and Celce-Murcia (1979: 3):

1. Classes are taught in the mother tongue, with little or no active use of the target language.
2. Much vocabulary is taught in the form of lists of isolated words.
3. Long elaborate explanations of the intricacies of grammar are given.
4. Grammar provides the rules for putting words together, and instruction often focuses on the form and inflection.
5. Reading of difficult classical texts is begun early.
6. Little or no attention is paid to the context of texts, which are treated as exercises in grammatical analysis.
7. Often the only drills are exercises in translating disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue.
8. Little or no attention is given to pronunciation.

A more detailed description of GT approach would state that it involves a detailed analysis of the grammar rules of the language under study and then applies that knowledge to translating sentences and texts into and out of that language (Richards and Rodgers, 1986: 3). The major focus of GT was reading and writing in order to be able to read the literature of the language in question. Therefore it is difficult to suggest that such an approach would enable a learner to actually learn a language, at least not in the sense of language becoming acquisition. A lesson employing GT would use the same procedures that were once used for teaching Latin. According to Richards and Rodgers (1986: 2-3), textbooks would consist of "chapters or lessons organized around grammar points. Each grammar point was listed, rules on its use were explained, and it was illustrated by sample sentences". The choice of vocabulary in the sample sentences bore very little relation to language used in actual communication and it created what to us appear as amusingly bizarre sentences but which were probably quite vexing for the students.

The vocabulary used was in fact based on the reading texts used and words were taught by means of bilingual lists, dictionary study, and memorization. In a lesson using GT approach most of the lesson time would be spent translating sentences and, according to Richards and Rodgers, it is this focus on sentences that is a distinctive feature of the approach. It was, apparently, an attempt to make language learning easier (Howatt, 1984: 131). Other features were the emphasis on accuracy, the fact that lessons were conducted in the students' native language, and that grammar was taught deductively.

2.2 Whilst a definition of GT may be easy to provide it is not such a simple task in relation to C-R. Therefore, in an effort to define C-R, it may be best to briefly summarize the views of the principal researchers in the field and to then consider each of them in more detail.

"Like so many other terms in language pedagogy, the term 'grammar consciousness raising' is rather vague and is used with very different meanings" (Ellis, 1993). So what does the term mean to Ellis? He draws the distinction between the teaching of grammar through practice and the teaching of it through consciousness-raising. The former, according to Ellis, has as its objective the production of "sentences exemplifying the grammatical feature that is the target of the activity", while the latter attempts to provide a learner with an understanding of a particular grammatical feature but does not require the learner to manufacture example sentences. Ellis' view of C-R also allows for learners being presented with explicit grammar rules. Sharwood-Smith (1981) however, takes the view that requiring learners to absorb, and be able to articulate, rules may hinder their understanding of the grammatical feature which is the focus of attention. Sharwood-Smith's view of C-R also involves what he terms as explicit and implicit knowledge, the former being thought of as what has been taught and learnt, and the latter thought of as intuitive. Sharwood-Smith maintains that it is the interaction between explicit and implicit knowledge that leads to acquisition. This view is not shared by Krashen, who distinguishes between learning and acquisition (1982). Krashen's views are also at odds with those of another proponent of C-R, Rutherford (1987), whose version of C-R is neatly summarized by Yip (1994):

> "It focuses on aspects of grammar without necessarily using explicit rules or technical jargon. Instead of trying to impart rules and principles directly as in the traditional grammar lesson, it seeks to help learners discover for themselves by focusing on aspects of the target structures. On the other hand, it differs from pure communicative approaches by telling learners which structures are ungrammatical and providing the grammatical counterparts."

Another writer who warrants inclusion in a paper on C-R, even though what he writes about is a form of CALL which he has named 'data-driven

learning' (DDL), is Johns (1991 a and b). A brief synopsis of DDL is that it is an approach which utilizes computer-generated concordances in an attempt to encourage learners "to see patterning in the target language and to form generalizations to account for that patterning". John's likens DDl to a new style of C-R which reduces the teacher's role and raises that of the learners' by making whatever assumptions that the learners formulate from the data provided become the focus of the learning process.

3. A More Detailed Examination of Aspects of C-R

3.1 Firstly, although some may think this too obvious to require stating, C-R is an inductive method. Brown (1994) defines inductive reasoning as storing "a number of specific instances" and inducing "a general law or conclusion"; which could just as easily serve as a definition of C-R. Rutherford (1987: 152-3) talks of "instruments" and "modes of operation" which are other ways of referring to the tasks learners perform which would, it is hoped, lead them to induce an appropriate generalization. Rutherford goes on to state that "C-R activity ... asks that the learner not only 'notice' but also perform some an operation of some kind." From that he asserts that C-R is task-oriented and that the learner is actively engaged in solving problems. In other words it is an inductive method.

3.2 Universal Grammar (Chomsky, 1981a) also has a role to play in C-R. Chomsky's concept of UG is based on what he terms as principles and parameters; the former being stored knowledge which does not vary from person to person, whilst the latter are settings which do vary dependant upon a person's native language. Shortall (1996) provides an easily understood explanation of principles and parameters in UG using prepositions as an example. In his words parameters are like switches which, at an early age, are set to particular positions dependant upon ones mother tongue. Therefore, given that individuals of differing nationalities

will have had their UG parameters set at differing positions well before they embark on L2 learning it is necessary to take account of those settings. In fact it maybe possible that C-R might not be required due to the UG parameters of the learner and of the L2 coinciding in certain areas. However, as Rutherford (1987: 140) points out, there remains much to be examined both in the field of UG and in its relation to C-R.

3.3 A further feature which may be said to typify C-R, is its rejection of the PPP approach in favour of a discovery-oriented approach. Ellis (1993) quite strongly rejects PPP and suggests that through grammatical consciousness-raising learners can come to "understand a particular grammar feature, how it works, what it consists of, and so on" without having to "produce sentences manifesting that particular structure". One way of achieving this, Ellis suggests, is through what he terms as a "focused communication activity" where the teacher's role is to "request clarification" each time a learner makes an error in the grammatical structure which is the focus of the lesson. However, to this writer and others (Hopkins and nettle, 1994) this seems less like a communication activity and more like excessive error-correction which can only serve to hinder communication. One might even go so far as to say that it is a deceitful form of drilling in that whilst the learners believe they are carrying out a communicative activity the reality is that they are being corrected again and again until they get it right, in a manner which is reminiscent of the Audio Lingual Method and its insistence upon accuracy.

3.4 Rutherford (1987) makes the point that both product and process oriented activities are necessary to aid acquisition of an L2 and that favouring one at the expense of the other does not benefit learners. Such a viewpoint would, therefore, seem to support the validity of Ellis'

"focused communication activities" and their insistence upon accurate production.

3.5 Ellis also refers to another type of classroom activity, one that he somewhat prosaically labels a "grammar consciousness-raising activity" (1993). He defines such activities as ones which encourage learners to learn facts about a grammar-point for themselves. In fact he goes so far as to suggest that such activities "help learners to construct their own explicit grammar", however this writer is unsure of what Ellis means by "explicit" grammar. Perhaps he is using the term in the same way as Sharwood-Smith (1981) did when he spoke of "explicit knowledge". Hopkins and Nettle (1994) also make the point that although Ellis mentions "Discover English" (Bolitho and Tomlinson, 1980) when talking about consciousness-raising grammar activities, he fails to mention several other books which also have similar C-R activities. However, the point here is not to criticize Ellis but to focus on the type of activity he posits as being a "grammar consciousness-raising activity". As an example of such an activity he suggests asking learners to sort a list of sentences into two groups and then have them explain how the two groups differ. A further example is asking learners to use an explanatory diagram, provided by the teacher, to decide whether the given sentences are grammatical or ungrammatical. The latter approach would appear to be not dissimilar to a PPP approach where learners are first presented with a rule pertaining to a grammar-point which is the focus of the lesson. That would of course be at odds with Ellis' view (1990) that PPP does not achieve what it sets out to achieve.

3.6 One discrepancy between Ellis' "focused communication activities" and his "grammar consciousness-raising activities" is that whilst the latter are typical of other C-R activities, such as Johns' DDL, by virtue of their being learner-centred, Ellis' activities do appear to be somewhat teacher-

led. Ellis makes the point that in some activities the teacher, to some extent, misleads the learners into believing that they are carrying out a communicative activity when they are really involved in a grammar activity. In the experience of this writer, if the activity were presented to the learners explicitly as a grammar activity it may well be met with a negative response. The "clarification" or error-correction involved in such activities also indicates that the activities are being controlled and led by the teacher and not by the learners, which would be contrary to contemporary views of C-R. Rutherford (1987: 154), in his view of C-R methodology, states that:

> "...teacher-directed learning is of course incompatible with the whole concept of the learning and teaching of second-language grammar that we have been developing throughout these chapters."

3.7 Rutherford's principal view of the objectives of a grammar-centred approach is that it teaches learners how to learn rather than teaching grammatical concepts in and of themselves. It is a means to an end and not an end in itself. To illustrate this Rutherford (1987: 154-5) divides views of grammar-centred approaches into two groups, mechanic and organic, the former being the traditional approach and the latter being Rutherford7s own view.

3.8 One area where all of the principal researchers on C-R appear to agree is that learner production and articulation of rules is not a necessary element. However, there does not appear to be such general agreement concerning learners being provided with rules in order to carry out C-R activities, e.g. Ellis' "explanatory diagrams". Furthermore, in some instances learners may already have knowledge of a rule and therefore the objective of the C-R activity in such cases would be to verify whether their understanding of the rule is accurate or, as with Johns' DDL work with his Remedial English class, to verify whether or not the rule itself is

faulty. Therefore, it may be possible to argue that C-R is not always an inductive method.

4. C-R as a Possible Basis for a Grammar-Translation Approach

4.1 At first glance one might find it difficult to be able to specify any way in which a GT approach might possibly be based on C-R. Whereas C-R is almost exclusively an inductive approach, grammar-translation is a decidedly deductive one. It is taught by the presentation and study of grammar rules, which are then practiced by means of translation exercises. In a GT approach grammar is taught in an organized and systematic manner whereas C-R is less systematic as it may not be necessary to raise to consciousness all aspects of the grammar of the target language. If one were to refer to Rutherford's list of "mechanical" and "organic" grammar-centred pedagogical programmes one would be able to isolate features that clearly relate to a GT approach (mechanical) and find them in opposition to those that relate to a C-R approach (organic). For example, it could well be argued that a GT approach is both necessary and sufficient with regard to its main purpose of reading literature in the target language whilst C-R is a means not an end and is therefore necessary but not sufficient. A further point of opposition concerns whether an approach is teacher or learner organized. In GT it is the teacher who organizes, controls and leads the lesson by means of systematically organized textbooks and translation exercises, whilst in C-R there is a much greater likelihood that the activity will be organized by the learners as it is they who are interpreting the data presented to them and drawing conclusions based on their interpretations.

4.2 The list of differences is extensive, however the question at hand concerns the extent to which GT is based on C-R and not the extent to which it is not based on it. With that in mind there are two aspects that we

will examine. The first concerns the bizarre meanings of the sample sentences in a grammar-translation approach. It could be argued, perhaps, that the translation of sentences such as, "The philosopher pulled the jaw of the hen" (Titone, 1968: 28) forms a type of consciousness-raising. The vocabulary used in the sentence and the juxtaposition of the verb-phrase "the philosopher pulled" and the noun-phrase "the lower jaw of the hen" is so bizarre that the sentence could not possibly occur in a natural setting. Therefore, when the sentence is in the target language it would be almost impossible for a learner to understand it using his/her knowledge of the target language's vocabulary. The learner would then be compelled to use his/her knowledge of the target language's grammar, and probably an L2 to L1 dictionary, in order to begin to make sense of the sentence and translate it. So, thus far there is a limited form of C-R taking place in that the learner is having to call upon information stored in his/her memory; Sharwood-Smith's "explicit knowledge"; in order to complete the task.

However, the C-R element of the task may be taken a step further if the sample sentence is one of a number of sentences that the learner is asked to translate and sort into two groups. It may be the case that the learner is, by means of this task, being introduced to the simple past tense. He/she would, therefore, group the sentences into the known and the unknown, or in Sharwood-Smith's terms, explicit and implicit knowledge. In this case the two groups would be the simple present (the known) and the simple past (the unknown) and the learner would, it is hoped, have the latter raised to consciousness as a result of this activity.

The above of course assumes that the learner has not been presented with the rule for the formation of the simple past in the target language. However, this being a GT approach it would be safe to assume that the rule had been presented earlier and therefore that would dilute such a task as a form of C-R. Nonetheless, although the simple past may not now be classed as unknown it is still not yet part of the learner's interlanguage

and the task would play its part in helping to embed knowledge of the simple past into the learner's consciousness; for learning to become acquisition in other words.

4.3 The second aspect concerning the extent to which grammar-translation is based on C-R is the concept of Universal Grammar.

If one accepts that UG has a role to play in C-R, in at least as much as helping to determine what is to be raised to consciousness, then one may also posit that GT has its own version of a "universal logic" (Richards and Rodgers, 1986: 32) namely, Latin. Rutherford (1987: 29) also draws a connection between UG and Latin as a "general grammar" and refers to Kelly (1969: 55) who noted that the use of Latin as general grammar created "the illusion that all languages shared a basic grammar". The analysis of Latin grammar was the model for foreign language study using GT. Therefore, it may be argued that so far as GT and C-R share a concept of universality then the Grammar Translation approach could, to a limited extent, be said to be based on C-R.

4.4 There are forms of C-R, most notably those espoused by Ellis and Jones, where learners are presented with data from which they extract patterns of grammar and draw conclusions. There is a similarity here, although not great, with GT in that in the latter the learners are presented with data in the form of sentences. However, in C-R it is hoped that learners would deduce concepts relating to meaning and use, whilst in GT learners are expected to deduce an L1 translation of L2 data. Therefore the parallel does not extend so far as to imply that a GT approach is based on C-R.

5. Conclusion

5.1 A summary of the author's perception of C-T covers eight principal points.

1. It is an inductive approach which does not usually present learners with rules.
2. It observes the principles of Universal Grammar.
3. It rejects PPP in favour of activities that promote understanding of grammar.
4. It is learner-directed.
5. It teaches learners how to learn.
6. It is process and not product oriented.
7. It presents learners with data and invites them to make conclusions based on the data.
8. It is a means to an end and not an end in itself.

From the above it can be gleaned that the main differences between C-R and more traditional approaches to grammar teaching are the absence of practice and production in C-R and the extent to which it is learner-directed.

In assessing the extent to which a GT approach is based on C-R it is the author's view that despite having presented some links between the two those links are tenuous at best. As was stated earlier, the most obvious disparity lies in C-R being inductive and GT being deductive. Thus the suggestion that the strangeness of the lexis used in GT data could be a form of C-R does not hold water when one considers that in a GT lesson learners are provided with texts explaining the grammar rules of the language under study. If anything is being raised to consciousness then it is the rule itself in its L1 form and not an understanding of how the rule works. In such a process no conclusion is arrived at based on new data, instead an answer is found based on already-known data. Additionally, when one compares a GT approach with the principal points C-R listed above it is apparent that not only is there no basis for the

former being based on the latter, but there is also sufficient basis for concluding that the two approaches are in opposition to each other. For example, if it is correct that C-R teaches learners how to learn then it must also be correct that GT only teaches how to translate. Similarly, the contrast between the emphasis on product in GT and the emphasis on understanding in C-R is a further indicator of how dissimilar the two approaches are.

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