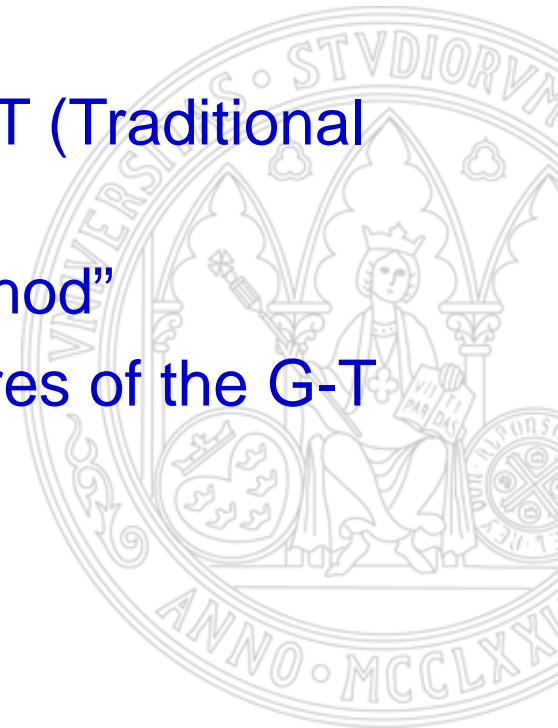


**BLOCK 3.**  
**Back to the past (2).**  
**The 19<sup>th</sup> century:**  
**The century of “methods”**

**Sub-block 3.1.**  
**The Grammar-Translation Method (G-T).**  
**Ahn’s and Ollendorff’s “practical method”**

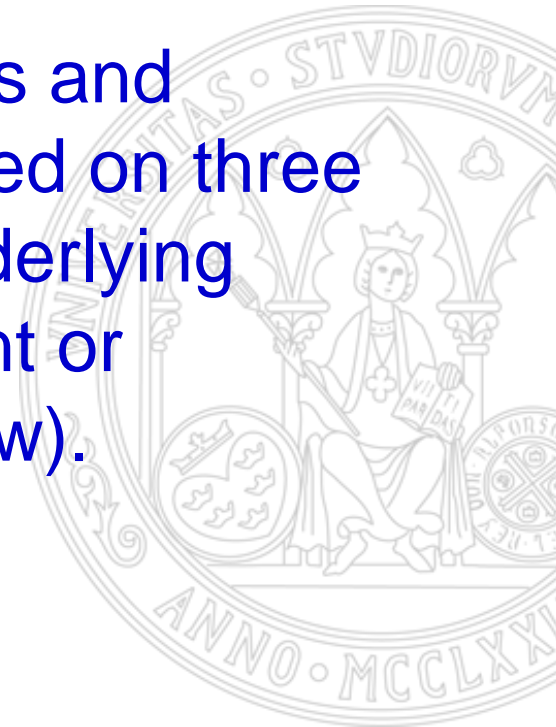
# Outline

1. Objectives of this unit
2. Goals of the G-T
3. Historical background of the G-T
  - 3.1. Introduction: the Classical Method
  - 3.2. From the Classical Method to the G-T (Traditional Method)
  - 3.3. Ahn's and Ollendorff's "practical method"
  - 3.4. Consolidation and prototypical features of the G-T
4. Analysis of the components of the G-T
5. Critical assessment of the G-T



# 1. Objectives of this unit

1. Know the origins and distinctive features of the G-T and Ahn's and Ollendorff's "practical method".
2. Critically analyse the G-T and Ahn's and Ollendorff's "practical method" based on three components of method: sets of underlying principles and beliefs (why), content or objectives (what) and activities (how).



## 2. Goals of the G-T

1. Directly, individual learning of the foreign language as an academic subject (Cook, 2008: 241): To enable students to read (literature) in the FL and to translate from the FL into the L1.
2. Indirectly, ability to use the FL (Cook, 2008: 241).
3. To benefit from intellectual development (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011: 13).

# 3. Historical background of the G-T

## 3.1. Introduction: the Classical Method

### a) Language Teaching in the Middle Ages

Latin: international language of communication and culture throughout Europe



### Classical Method

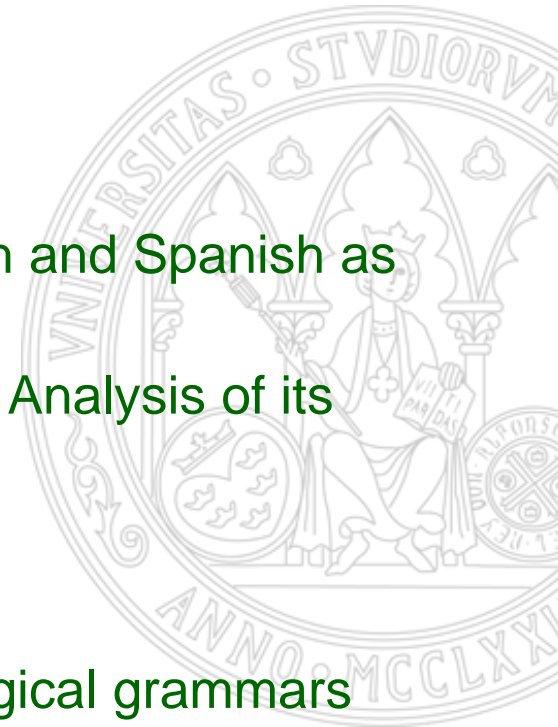
### b) Language Teaching in the Renaissance

- 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards: French, Italian, English and Spanish as vernacular languages
- Study of *classical Latin* (Virgil, Ovid, Cicero). Analysis of its grammar and rhetoric

### GRAMMAR TRADITION

### *Mental training*

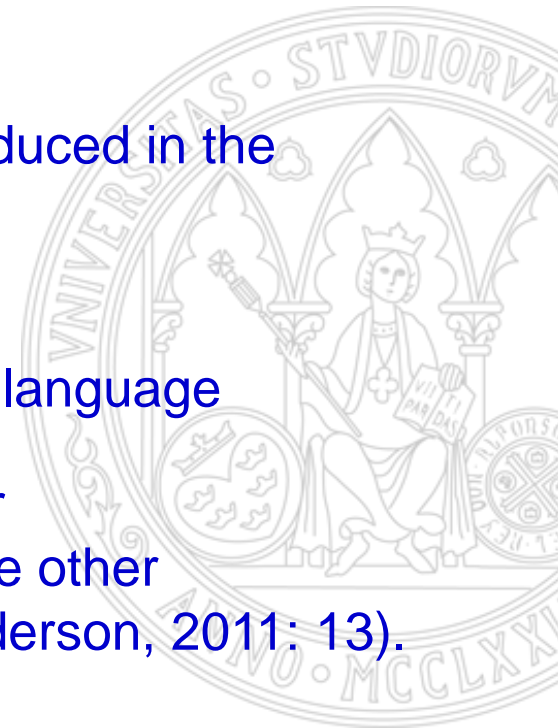
(but the conversational tradition and pedagogical grammars tradition were well alive too!)



# 3. Historical background of the G-T

## 3.2. From the Classical Method to the G-T (Traditional Method)

- 18<sup>th</sup> century textbooks consisted of:
  - statements of abstract grammar rules
  - lists of vocabulary
  - sentences for translation.
- 19<sup>th</sup> century:
  - Foreign languages started to be officially introduced in the language curricula of schools
  - Inherited teaching system: Classical Method
  - Objectives of the G-T:
    - Help students read and appreciate foreign language literature
    - Improvement of students' own L1 grammar
    - Ability to translate from one language to the other
    - Intellectual growth (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011: 13).
  - Emphasised skills:  
Reading and writing



# 3. Historical background of the G-T

## 3.2. From the Classical Method to the G-T (Traditional Method)

19<sup>th</sup> century:

- The G-T is consolidated thanks to the school system, which gained importance through
  - Increased number of students
  - Book industry
  - Prestige aura which embraces grammar in the academic world.



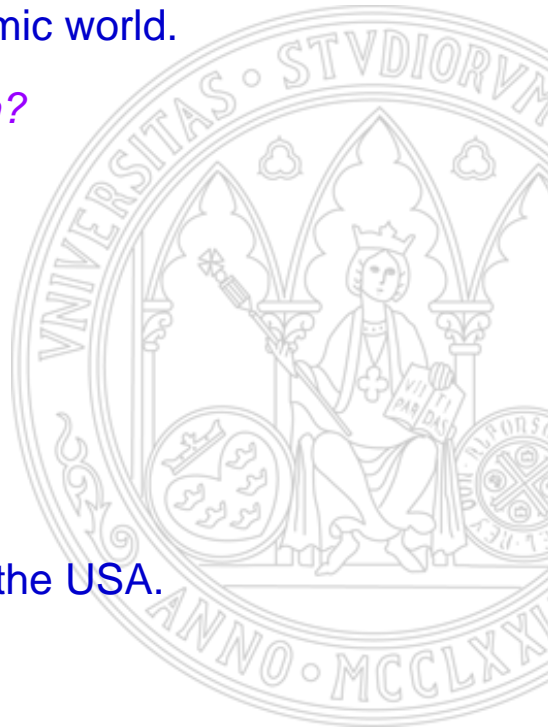
*Any reason you can think of behind this prestige aura?*

- Traditional names considered exponents of the G-T:
  - Franz Ahn
  - Johann Valentin Meidinger
  - H. G. Ollendorff
  - Karl Plötz
  - Johann Heinrich Seidenstücker
  - J. G. Tiarks

The G-T became to be known as the Prussian Method in the USA.



*Why?*





### 3. Historical background of the G-T

#### 3.2. From the Classical Method to the G-T (Traditional Method)

*Nineteenth-century textbooks compilers were mainly determined to codify the foreign language into frozen rules of morphology and syntax to be explained and eventually memorized. Oral work was reduced to an absolute minimum, while a handful of written exercises, constructed at random, came as a sort of appendix to the rules. Of the many books published during this period, those by Seidenstücker and Plötz were perhaps the most typical and, at least from our point of view, the most baneful, since such compilations became the model for innumerable language textbooks during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century.*

(Titone, 1968: 27)



# 3. Historical background of the G-T

## 3.2. From the Classical Method to the G-T (Traditional Method)

*Seidenstücker reduced the material to disconnected sentences to illustrate specific rules. He divided his text carefully into two parts, one giving the rules and necessary paradigms, the other giving French sentences for translation into German and German sentences for translation into French.*

(Titone, 1968: 27)

# 3. Historical background

## 3.2. From the Classical Method to the G-T (Traditional Method)

*In [Plötz's] textbooks, divided into the two parts described above, the sole form of instruction was mechanical translation. Typical sentences were: 'Thou hast a book. The house is beautiful. He has a book and a dog. We have a bread [sic]. The door is black. He has a book and a dog. The horse of the father was kind' ”.*

(Titone, 1968: 27)

# 3. Historical background

## 3.2. From the Classical Method to the G-T (Traditional Method)

Other examples of sentences to be translated (from Titone, 1968: 28)

- *My sons have bought the mirrors of the Duke.*
- *The cat of my aunt is more treacherous than the dog of your uncle.*
- *The philosopher pulled the lower jaw of the hen.*

Examples of Sweet's "arithmetical fallacy" (1899/1964) (in Howatt, 2004: 164)

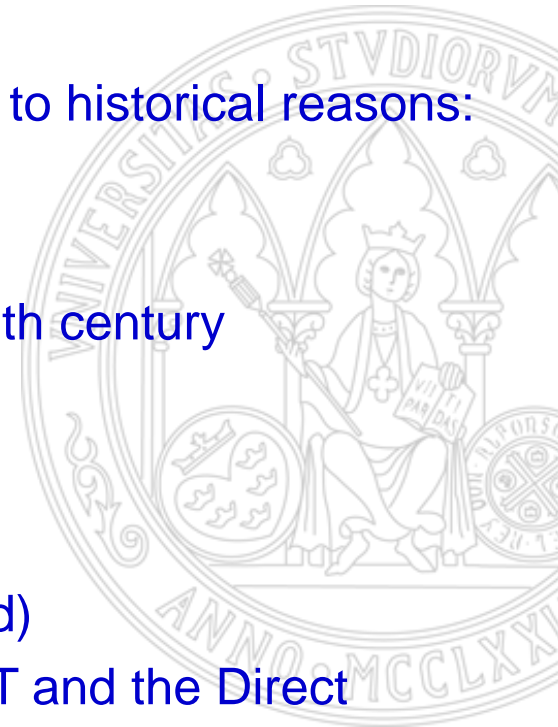


*What do you think the "arithmetical fallacy" is about?*

# 3. Historical background

## 3.3. Ahn's and Ollendorff's "practical method"

- In the school system, languages were not being taught primarily to learn oral/aural communication, but to learn for the sake of being "scholarly".
- Not all learners could be expected to learn a foreign language through the academic "grammar school" education or traditional education or even to pay for such education.
- A new class of learner emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century due to historical reasons:
  - changes in patterns of transport
  - emigration to the USA
  - industrialization of the second half of the nineteenth century
- need to be orally proficient in foreign languages →
- Natural methodology. Direct Method (Berlitz Method)
- Ahn and Ollendorff: halfway house between the G-T and the Direct Method (Howatt, 2004)



# 3. Historical background of the G-T

## 3.3. Ahn's and Ollendorff's "practical method"

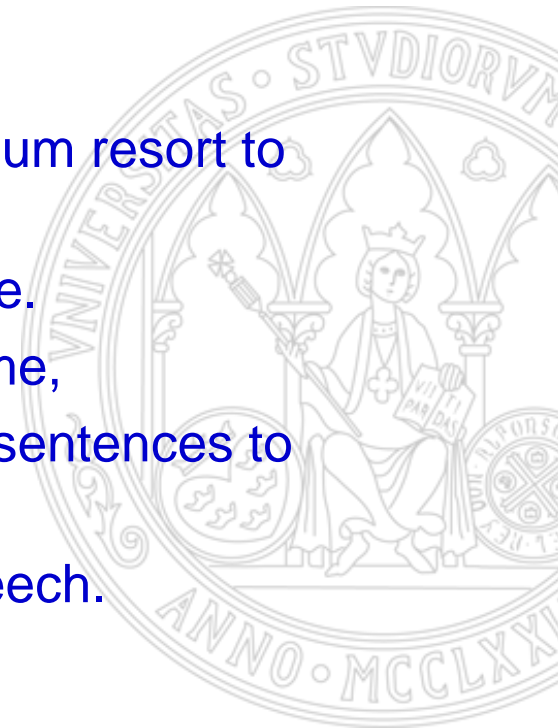
### Franz Ahn (1796-1865)

*A New Practical and Easy Method of Learning the French Language* (1834).

Spanish version: 1864

### LESSON STRUCTURE

- Brief grammar summary with short phrases. Minimum resort to grammar points: essential points only.
- Sentences to translate: usual and familiar language.
- Short lessons → a single linguistic problem at a time, around which the vocabulary turned together with sentences to translate.
- No distribution of lessons according to parts of speech.
- Link between sentences: grammatical



# 3. Historical background of the G-T

## 3.3. Ahn's and Ollendorff's “practical method”

Ahn's method: not exactly within the “pure” grammar tradition. He complements strict grammar:

- Criteria of simplicity (result of his own intuition)
- Vocabulary grouping
- Familiar sentences
- Application of grammar to everyday language
- Removal of all explicit reference to grammar



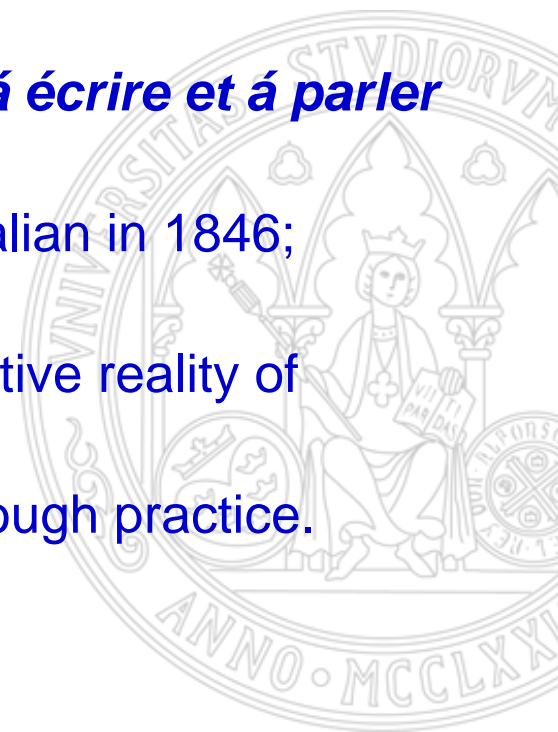


# 3. Historical background of the G-T

## 3.3. Ahn's and Ollendorff's "practical method"

### H. G. Ollendorff (1803-1865)

- **1835: *Nouvelle Méthode pour apprendre á lire, á écrire et á parler une langue en six mois, appliquée á l'allemand***
- Adaptations to other languages (French in 1843; Italian in 1846; English and Spanish in 1848).
- Grammatical points connected with the communicative reality of language.
- Ollendorff favours the learning of oral language through practice.



# 3. Historical background of the G-T

## 3.3. Ahn's and Ollendorff's "practical method"

### Ollendorff

*My system of acquiring a living language is founded on the principle, that each question contains nearly the answer which one ought or which one wishes to make to it. The slight difference between the question and the answer is always explained before the question: so that the learner does not find it in the least difficult, either to answer it, or to make similar questions for himself. Again, the question being the same as the answer, as soon as the master pronounces it, it strikes the pupil's ear, and is therefore easily reproduced by his speaking organs.*

(In Howatt, 2004: 162)

# 3. Historical background of the G-T

## 3.3. Ahn's and Ollendorff's "practical method"

### Ollendorff's principles:

1. Each question or point contains the answer to be supplied by the Ss in an almost **self-contained way**. The lesson starts with the answer to the questions proposed later.

The *question* is posed so that the student him/herself gets used to the new phonetic system as well. E.g.:

*Le, la            Le, la (para personas)*

*Lo, la*

*Avez-vous mon chapeau?*

*Tiene V. mi sombrero?*

*Oui, Monsieur, je l'ai .*

*Sí, señor, lo tengo.*

(From Ollendorff, H. G. (1871). *Nouvelle Méthode pour apprendre à lire, à écrire et parler une langue en six mois, appliquée a L'ESPAGNOL. Ouvrage entièrement neuf à l'usage de tous les établissements d'instruction, publics et particuliers, de l'un et de l'autre sexe, par Le Dr. H.G. Ollendorff, auteur de la Nouvelle méthode d'Allemand adoptée par l'Université de France, etc.* (5ème ed.). Paris: l'Auteur).

# 3. Historical background of the G-T

## 3.3. Ahn's and Ollendorff's "practical method"

### Ollendorff's principles:

1. Each question or point contains the answer to be supplied by the Ss in an almost **self-contained way**. The lesson starts with the answer to the questions proposed later.

The question is posed so that the student him/herself gets used to the new phonetic system as well.

2. Questions and points are introduced in accordance with the **principle of progression, from simple to complex**.

Each lesson is referred to the previous one through the employment of an already used word or grammatical point.

Eg. Communicative objective: expression of possession

*Lesson 1: possessive determiners.*

*Lesson 2: have (which have you got? Mine).*

3. Presentation through Q-A → interaction principle.

# 3. Historical background of the G-T

## 3.3. Ahn's and Ollendorff's "practical method"

*Ahn's textbooks follow a method that is largely the result of his intuitive feeling for simplicity; they proceed one step at a time, with not too many words in each lesson, plenty of practice, and so on. With Ollendorff, however, there is a much more deliberate approach to textbook planning and the organization of materials and practice activities. There are even the glimmerings of a theory.*

(Howatt, 2004: 160)

# 3. Historical background of the G-T

## 3.3. Ahn's and Ollendorff's "practical method"

Ahn and Ollendorff represent an important reaction against the traditional grammatical method:

1. Progression from simple to complex grammar points since the essential thing was to illustrate the grammar point in question well.
2. Examples or illustrative phrases extracted from "real" / "daily-life" use (if possible). Not taken from classical authors but from teacher's/textbook author's intuition.



*Why were the examples taken from the authors' / teachers' intuition?*

3. Q-A between T-S in the L2:
  - emphasis on oral practice (not only translation as such).



*What type of translation would Ollendorff use?*

- interactive process → *adopted by the ALM.*



*Do you remember the forerunners of Q-A in FLT?*



# 3. Historical background of the G-T

## 3.3. Ahn's and Ollendorff's "practical method"

- *Both Ahn and Ollendorff intended their books for use in schools, but their reputation as 'lightweight' courses [...] suggest[s] that the private adult learner (with or without a tutor) was their principal market.*

(Howatt, 2004: 165)

Ollendorff's "practical method" was very much favoured by supporters of the Natural Method or Natural way of learning languages (which went through a revival in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). In fact, Ollendorff's books were a huge success in the USA and Europe, dominating the market in the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the appearance of the Direct Method at the end of that century.



**BUT:**

- Lesson content is still driven by grammar

# 3. Historical background of the G-T

## 3.4. Consolidation and prototypical features of the G-T

### TYPICAL OLLENDORFIAN MODEL AS SHAPED BY OLLENDORFF'S SUPPORTERS –ASSIMILATED IN THE FLT LITERATURE TO THE CURRENT “PURE” G-T OR THE “TRADITIONAL METHOD”:

- Grammar rules followed by illustrative examples.
- Bilingual vocabulary list, sometimes organised in thematic areas. Should facilitate sentence formation (sometimes sheer noun phrases) which amplified the illustration of grammar rules.
- Topics of direct and inverse translation in writing: the vocabulary was used again in an attempt to practise the initial grammar rules and consolidate the vocabulary.



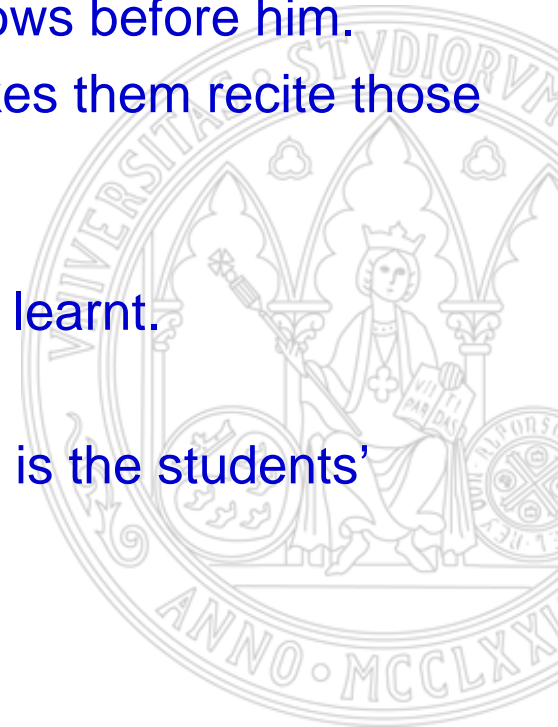
*Can you see the main differences with Ollendorff's genuine method?*

# 3. Historical background

## 3.4. Consolidation and prototypical features of the G-T

A typical G-T class runs as follows:

- The teacher sits on his/her chair. Students in rows before him.
- Students memorise the rules. The teacher makes them recite those rules.
- Students memorise lists of vocabulary.
- Exceptions to rules are carefully explained and learnt.
- Translation exercises follow, in both directions.
- Most often the language used in the classroom is the students' native language.

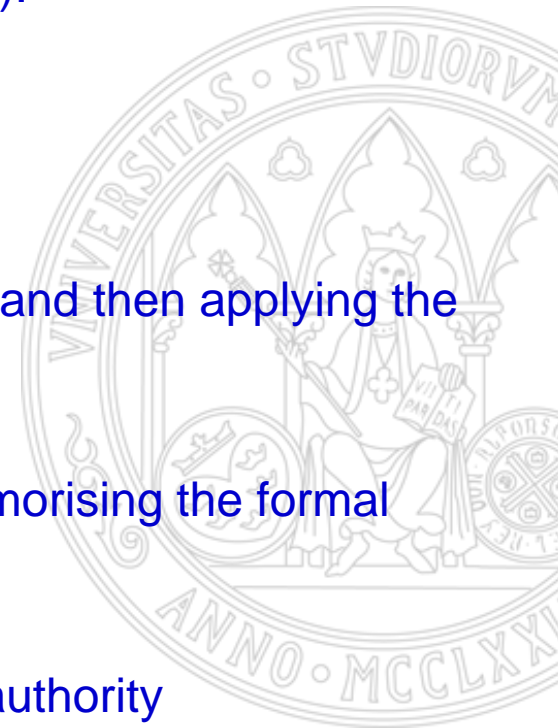


# 4. Analysis of the components of the G-T

## Axis 1. The Why. Underlying principles and beliefs (approach)

- ❑ Theory of language (nature of language, including approach to culture)
  - Language is a formal system with the grammatical rules at the base.
  - Language is a “set of norms” (prescriptive approach).
  - Literary language is superior to spoken language.
  - Correct use of language must follow rules.
  - Culture is regarded as literature and fine arts.
- ❑ Theory of learning (learning principles)

Deductive: You acquire language by learning the rules and then applying the rules to the vocabulary at your disposal.
- ❑ Theory of teaching (pedagogical principles)
  - Deductive learning is attained by analysing and memorising the formal contents.
  - Practice follows theory deductive explanation.
  - Teaching is directed by the teacher and the school authority
  - Formal accuracy is emphasised.



# 4. Analysis of the components of the G-T

## Axis 2. The What. Objectives of teaching. Syllabus specifications

- ❑ Model of language: cultivated (literature)
- ❑ Emphasised language areas:  
grammar (rules) and vocabulary (bilingual lists often related to situations and topics that can illustrate the grammar rules).
- ❑ Emphasised skills: reading and writing

## 4. Analysis of the components of the G-T

**Axis 3. The How.** Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

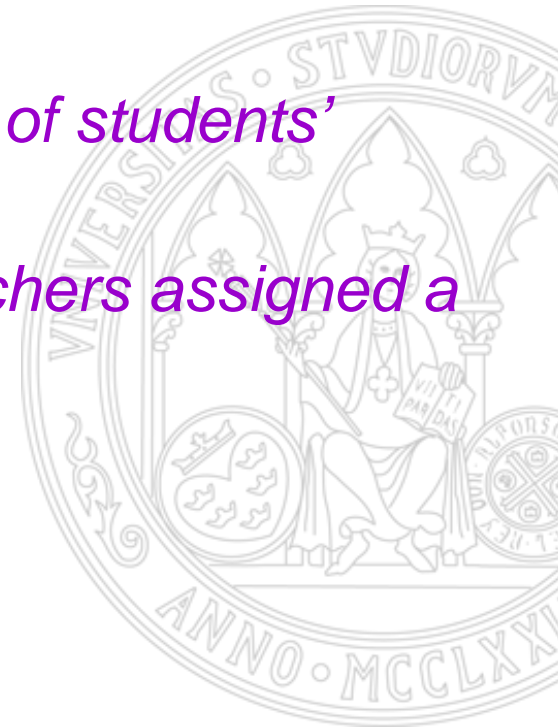
- ❑ Activities: learning rules and lists of vocabulary by heart, each student on his/her own; explanation of grammar rules; sentence formation exercises reflecting the previously acquired rules; direct and inverse translation exercises.
- ❑ Roles of teacher (including feedback issues). Very traditional. The teacher is the authority in the classroom. Error correction is compulsory and immediate.
- ❑ Roles of students: passive. They must learn what the teacher transmits to them, without questioning any aspect of his/her pedagogy.
- ❑ Roles of instructional materials: sacred character assigned to textbooks by teachers and students, as they contain all the syllabus material. The class cannot deviate from them.



# 4. Analysis of the components of the G-T



- a) *What do you think about the place of students' motivation in the G-T?*
- b) *Why do you think that the G-T teachers assigned a “sacred” role to textbooks?*



# 5. Critical assessment of the G-T



*Can you think of any advantages and disadvantages of the G-T?*



## 5. Critical assessment of the G-T

### □ Positive aspects:

- 1) The use of the students' L1, especially in monolingual classes.  
Several scholars (Cook, 2008; Macaro, 1997, 2003; Swain & Lapkin, 2000) highlight the benefits of using the students' L1 as an important cognitive strategy; for instance, teachers can use it to explain grammar, give instructions of tasks and exercises, check comprehension, give feedback; keep discipline; students can use it for exercises involving bilingual dictionaries and even for codeswitching when performing activities (which is a normal feature of bilingual speakers) (Cook, 2008; Macaro, 1997).
- 2) The fact that learners endeavour to understand the grammatical system of the L2, so that grammar teaching becomes important for them (Stern, 1983: 454).
- 3) It is a method considerably easy for teachers to apply, even for those who do not master the FL completely well or who are not proficient in the speaking skill. (Stern, 1983: 454).
- 4) It cannot be denied that the mental training and the intellectual growth derived from its application does have a value for academic learners.

## 5. Critical assessment of the G-T

### ❑ Negative aspects of the G-T

It is also true that the G-T does have shortcomings, especially from a CLT perspective. As Stern (1983: 455-456) states,

*The major defect of the grammar-translation lies in the overemphasis on the language as a mass of rules (and exceptions) and in the limitations of practice techniques which never emancipate the learner from the dominance of the first language. In addition, the sheer size of the task of memorization and the lack of coherence with which the language facts have been presented to the learner invalidate the claim, made in the nineteenth century, that this method provides a safe, easy, and practical entry into a second language.*

# 5. Critical assessment of the G-T

## □ Influence of the G-T on FLT:

In spite of all the previous criticisms, the G-T has stood the test of time...

*Why do you think so?*



1, 2, 3, 4

