

Measuring Students' Attitudes Towards Grammar Translation Method in Chinese Colleges: a Case Study of Wuhan University of Technology

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Abstract: Grammar Translation Method has always been a popular second-language teaching method. This research aimed at measuring students' attitudes towards Grammar Translation Method in Chinese college English study. It was carried out through quantitative research among English-major students in Wuhan University of Technology. The result of the research showed that Grammar Translation Method is still practicable and effective and most of students hold a positive attitude towards its role in English-major classrooms.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Current Situation of English-Majored Classrooms in Chinese College

Grammar has always occupied a vital position in college English-major curriculum, no matter whether these students are normally intermediate-level learners or high-level English ones. It is stated by Hedge that "teaching English grammar provides explicit framework to guarantee producing correct structures and expedite the learning process" [1]. Therefore, a good mastery of grammar is requisite to the acquisition of any language, for it can help students to lay a solid foundation. Besides, it can help learners to write or speak sentences accurately and to better understand the sentences while reading. The importance of grammar can also be shown in Test for English Majors-Band 4, a Chinese test exclusively designed for testing the English skills of English-major students, in which grammar knowledge makes up a very high proportion. Therefore, Chinese college English teachers attach great importance to the teaching of grammar and regard it as the core of the curriculum [2].

Nowadays, various teaching methods for second language acquisition have been used by teachers for different learners, among which the Communicative Language Teaching is praised as describing a set of core principles about language learning and teaching [3]. Despite all this, Grammar Teaching Method (GTM) still is the dominant way in English-major classrooms in Chinese college, even if it has been regarded as out of date. This is decided by:

- the grammar-centered curriculum.
- teachers and students all share the same mother language, and teachers normally have an excellent understanding and mastery of their mother language, so teachers are able to impart second language knowledge accurately and efficiently through the native language [4].
- students don't have foreign language context, which means that they don't need to use this language in their daily life, so their foreign language communicative competence isn't given much attention.
- affected by the Chinese examination syllabus and graded exams, most of second language learners are exam-oriented, so they will attach great importance to their reading, writing and translating abilities, which can be easily tested through paper exam, and GTM can greatly improve these abilities in the shortest time to better prepare students for the exam [5].

In the English-major classrooms guided by the GTM, teachers are in control of the class and their elaborate explanation of English knowledge will take up most of the class time, while students spend most of their time listening and taking notes. When it comes to teaching some excerpts from

novels or articles presented in student's text book, teachers will firstly introduce the author and some background information, and then they will interpret the new words or phrases and give some examples of using them to create sentences. Later, teachers will explain the text sentence by sentence through translation, elaborate the sentence structure, and point out the important grammatical rules and the figures of speech. At the end of the class, teachers will normally assign some reading, translating, listening, writing or grammatical practice and students will finish them in a less-controlled situation. The whole process is shown in Figure 1.

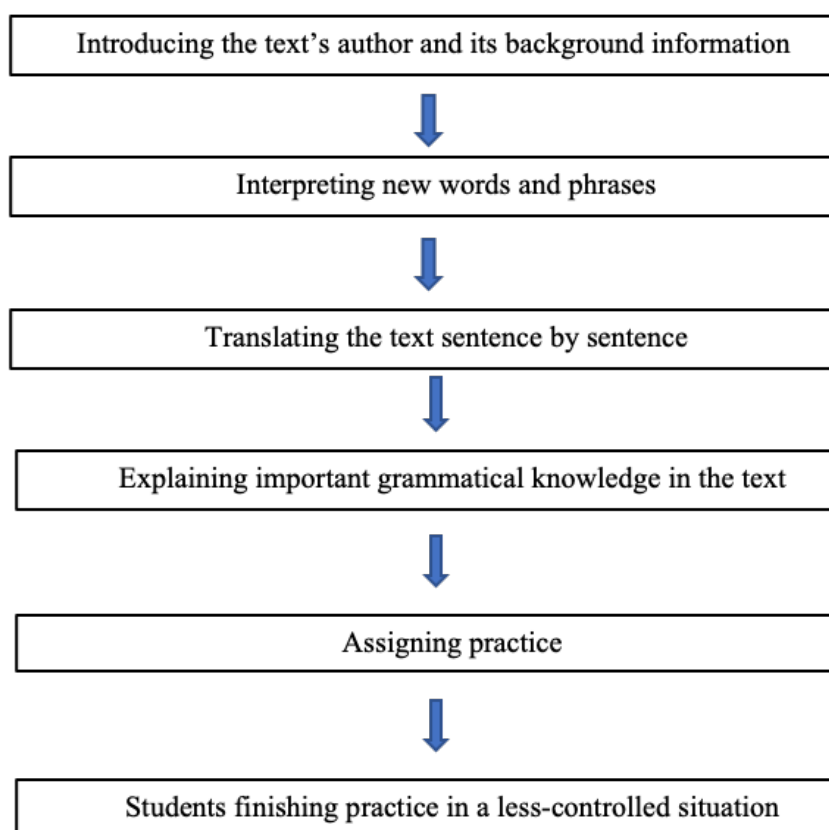


Fig.1 The Common Teaching Process in Chinese English-Majored Classrooms.

In this way, students can not only master the knowledge point of the text, but also understand its connotation. However, it is inevitable that not all the learners enjoy this kind of teaching mode, because students' interest can hardly be aroused. Firstly, for most of the time, students are passive knowledge-receivers and may feel not fully involved in class. Secondly, the memorization of words and phrases, which is required by GTM, may be regarded tedious by some. Thirdly, this kind of teaching method pay little attention to the development of students' communicative competence, which can make students who want to improve their speaking skills lose interest.

1.2 Significance of the Research

What comes with the worldwide globalization is that the more and more vital role that English plays as a universal language. Since nowadays China is an extremely important and indispensable member in the global community, English serves as a requisite bridge for China to connect the world. Hence, the acquisition of English language and the selection of effective teaching method become extremely necessary in Chinese education. Thanks to the current information era, more and more pedagogical methods for second language acquisition have been familiar to Chinese teachers, such as Audiolingual Method, Direct Method, and Total Physical Response and the Natural Approach. However, GTM continue to be widely applied in English teaching class, even though a huge number of educators who are using it and students who are benefiting from it oppose strongly against this method. It is this contradiction that required the examination of current application of GTM in Chinese colleges. This research will aim at measuring students' attitudes towards GTM in

college English study. It will help to find out the effectiveness of this teaching method. It will help both teachers and students to have a clear understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of this method and thus make it possible for teachers to improve their way of teaching and curriculum accordingly.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Objectives

This research will achieve the following objectives:

- To reveal the attitudes of English-majored students towards GTM and find out whether this method is suitable in second language acquisition in college.
- To suggest some practicable improvement to GTM to better meet the new need.

2.2 Research Questions

- What are the attitudes of English-majored students in Wuhan University of Technology towards GTM?
- What improvement can be apply to GTM?

2.3 Research Targets

In this research, targets were from English-majored students in the fourth and third grade of Wuhan University of Technology.

2.4 Research Design

As cited above, the objectives of this research are quantitative in nature. And it is also known that quantitative method paves a way for researchers to collect enriched data and its findings can also be generalized extensively [6]. Therefore, this research employed quantitative research method to fulfill the objectives and the data is collected through a questionnaire.

In the questionnaire, there were 16 statements all together and participants should select their different level of attitudes (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree) towards each statement. All these statements relate to the main characteristics of GTM-focus on grammar; a lot of translation and grammatical practice; a lot of memorization; teacher-centered class; teachers' use of native language to teach second language knowledge; little attention on the cultivation of students' communicative competence. To be specific, statement No.1, 4, 5 and 9 are designed to find out students' opinion about the role grammar play in English studying. Statement No.7, 12 and 15 aim to reveal how learners view the translation and grammatical exercise, while statement No.3 and 13 focus on memorization. And the purpose of statement No.2, 10 and 14 is showing students' attitude towards teachers' use of mother language, while statement No.8 is towards teacher-centered class. In addition, statement No.6, 11 and 16 put forward some possible improvement to GTM and discover students' acceptance of them.

2.5 Data Collection

After handing out the designed questionnaire, 102 questionnaires were received, among which 4 questionnaires were considered invalid.

The answers of 98 valid questionnaires is represented in the following Table 1.

Table 1 the Answers Of 98 Valid Questionnaires

No.	Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Not sure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	Grammatical knowledge is important to English study.	52	39	4	2	1
2	Teachers' use of translation on text or literature can help students understand.	37	54	3	4	0
3	A lot of memorization of words can help to improve English skills.	61	32	5	0	0
4	Grammatical knowledge can greatly help improve English writing.	62	31	2	2	1
5	Grammatical knowledge can improve English speaking skills.	16	42	23	14	3
6	Teachers should teach through English during the entire class.	30	44	10	13	1
7	Grammatical practice can help students get good grades in exams.	57	36	4	0	1
8	Teacher-centered classes are not conducive to stimulating students' learning interest.	10	29	41	15	3
9	Grammatical knowledge can help students better understand listening text.	22	43	15	17	1
10	Students' interest can be aroused by interpreting English literature through translation.	18	44	16	16	4
11	During the class, teachers should focus on improving students' English speaking ability.	40	46	11	0	1
12	Translation exercise can help students better understand the cultural difference between China and the west.	43	43	8	2	2
13	A lot of memorization deter stimulating students' learning interest.	17	42	24	14	1
14	During the class, teachers' use of Chinese can help students better understand teaching content and thus improve their learning efficiency.	14	42	22	16	4
15	Translation practice help to improve students' English skills.	42	48	6	1	1
16	During the class, playing videos related to teaching content can motivate students' learning interest and increase their attention.	56	32	6	3	1

2.6 Data Analysis

2.6.1 Data Analysis of Statement 1

For the statement “Grammatical knowledge is important to English study.”, as is shown in Figure 2, 53.06% of students who were the majority strongly agreed and 39.8% agreed with it, with only a few opposed. It means that students have a positive attitude towards the influence grammar impose on English learning.

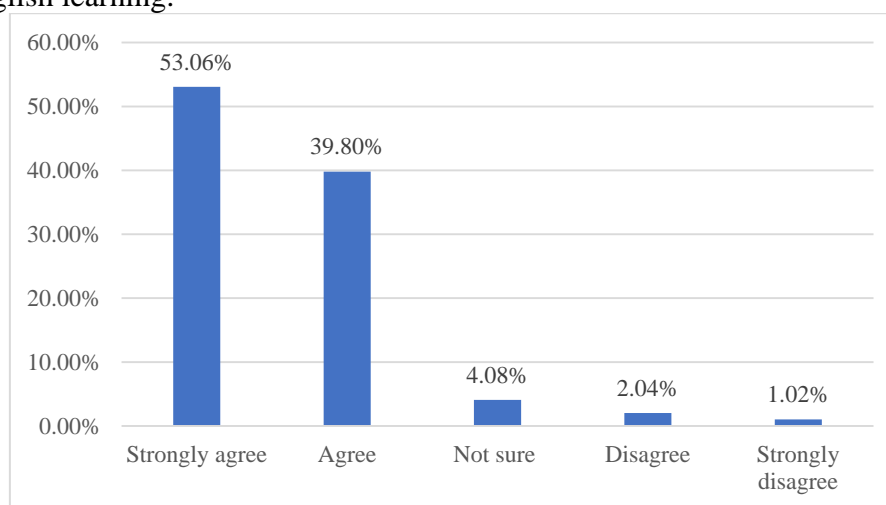


Fig.2 The Percentages of Each Answer to Statement 1.

2.6.2 Data Analysis of Statement 2

For the statement “Teachers' use of translation on text or literature can help students understand.”, as is shown in Figure 3, students who strongly agreed and agreed with it were

respectively 37.76% and 55.1%. It shows that students can better understand the text and literary works when teachers use Chinese to interpret. And it can also imply that students feel there is no need for teachers to use English under this circumstance.

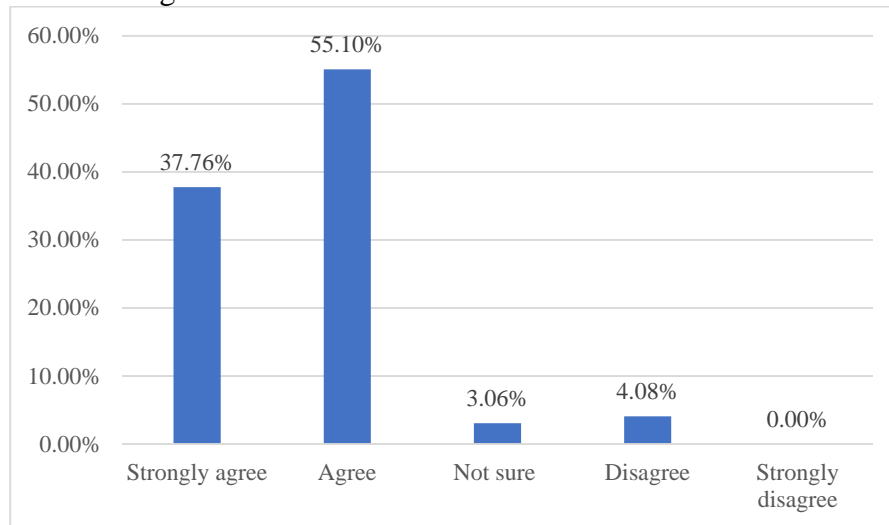


Fig.3 The Percentages of Each Answer to Statement 2.

2.6.3 Data Analysis of Statement 3

In the response for the statement “A lot of memorization of words can help to improve English skills.”, as is shown in Figure 4, the majority of participants approved of it, with 62.24%, 32.65% respectively for “strongly agree” and “agree”. It shows that most students think memorizing words can make great contribution to the improvement of their English ability.

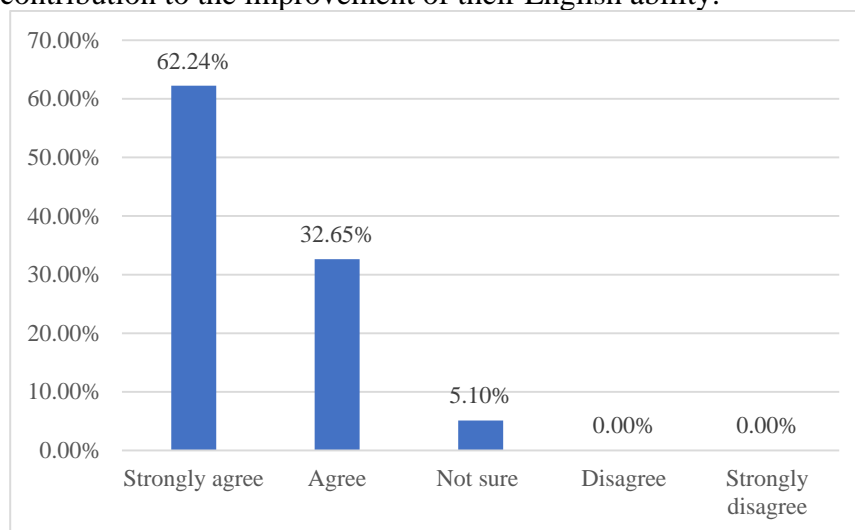


Fig.4 The Percentages of Each Answer to Statement 3.

2.6.4 Data Analysis of Statement 4

In the response of the statement “Grammatical knowledge can greatly help improve English writing.”, as is shown in Figure 5, 63.72% of the students chose “strongly agree” and 31.63% chose “agree”. It indicates that students believe a good mastery of grammatical knowledge can contribute a lot to their writing, for it can help them create accurate sentences with delicate structure.

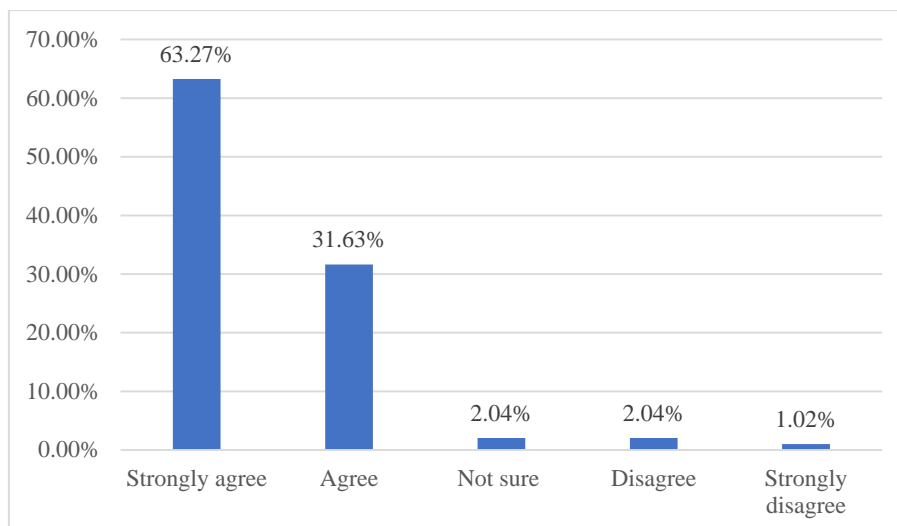


Fig.5 The Percentages of Each Answer to Statement 4.

2.6.5 Data Analysis of Statement 5

As for the statement “Grammatical knowledge can improve English speaking skills.”, as is shown in Figure 6, the answers varied a lot. 42.86% of learners chose “agree”, while 23.47% learners held a neutral attitude. And the proportion of students who chose “strongly agree” and “disagree” were almost the same, with 16.33% and 14.29% respectively. The statistic of this statement shows that although students hold quite different view about the role grammar plays in communicative competence, the majority of students think grammar can be helpful in improving their oral English.

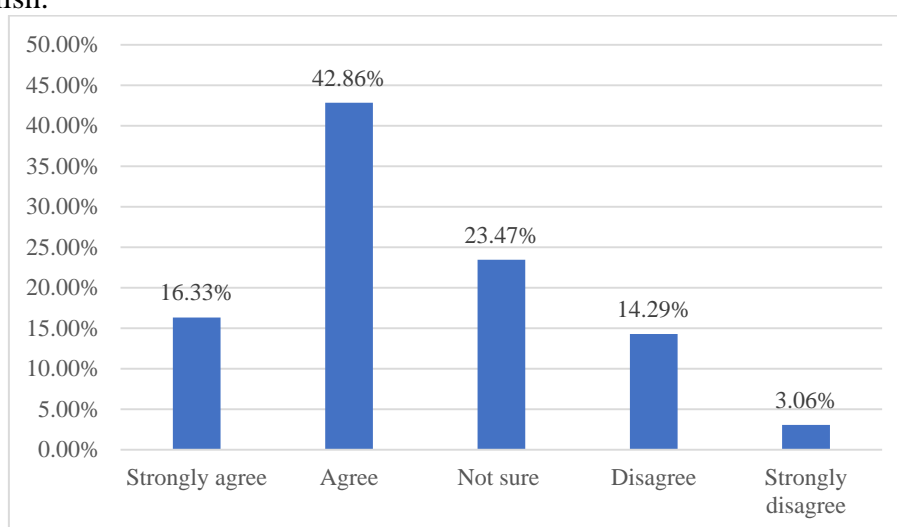


Fig.6 The Percentages of Each Answer to Statement 5.

2.6.6 Data Analysis of Statement 6

In the answer of the statement “Teachers should teach through English during the entire class.”, as is shown in Figure 7, the majority of participants approved of it (75.51%), while there were 13.27% of participants chose “disagree” and 10.2% chose “not sure”. It shows students’ hope for teachers to teach by English, not by Chinese.

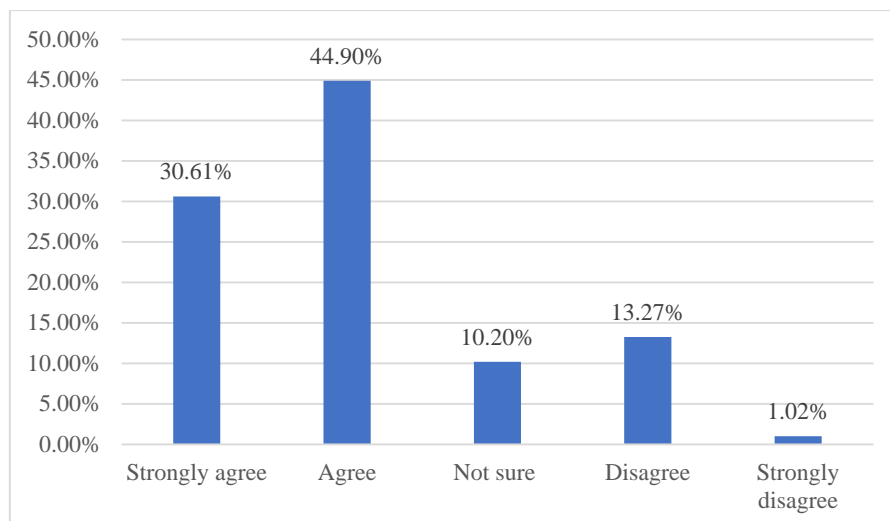


Fig.7 The Percentages of Each Answer to Statement 6.

2.6.7 Data Analysis of Statement 7

For the statement “Grammatical practice can help students get good grades in exams.”, as is shown in Figure 8, students who strongly agreed with it outnumbered those who chose the others, with the proportion of 58.16%. It means that students believe that doing a lot of grammatical practice can bring good grades. And it also implies students’ willingness to practice more for good marks and that the examination of grammatical knowledge may be included in the test.

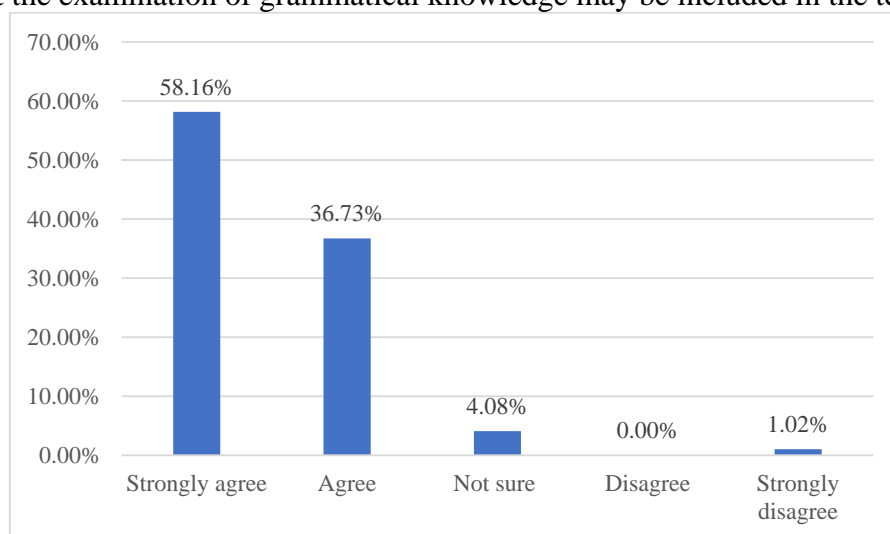


Fig.8 The Percentages of Each Answer to Statement 7.

2.6.8 Data Analysis of Statement 8

For the statement “Teacher-centered classes are not conducive to stimulating students’ learning interest.”, is shown in Figure 9, as most students were not sure about it, with the proportion of 41.84%. And 29.95% of students chose “agree”, whereas 15.31% of them chose “disagree”. It indicates that although some English-majored students regard lack of classroom initiative as a hinder to their English study, more of them will not view teacher-centered class as a negative factor.

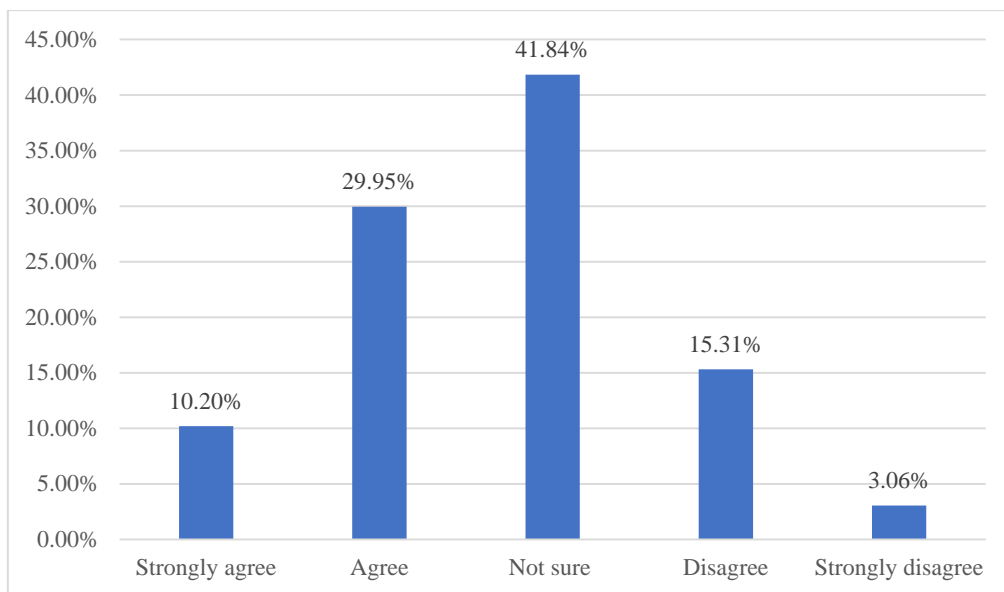


Fig.9 The Percentages of Each Answer to Statement 8.

2.6.9 Data Analysis of Statement 9

In the answer of “Grammatical knowledge can help students better understand listening text.”, as is shown in Figure 10, 43.88% of learners agreed with it, while there were 17.35% of them held an opposite view. It shows the common belief of English learners that grammar can facilitate in understanding listening tapes and help improve their listening ability.

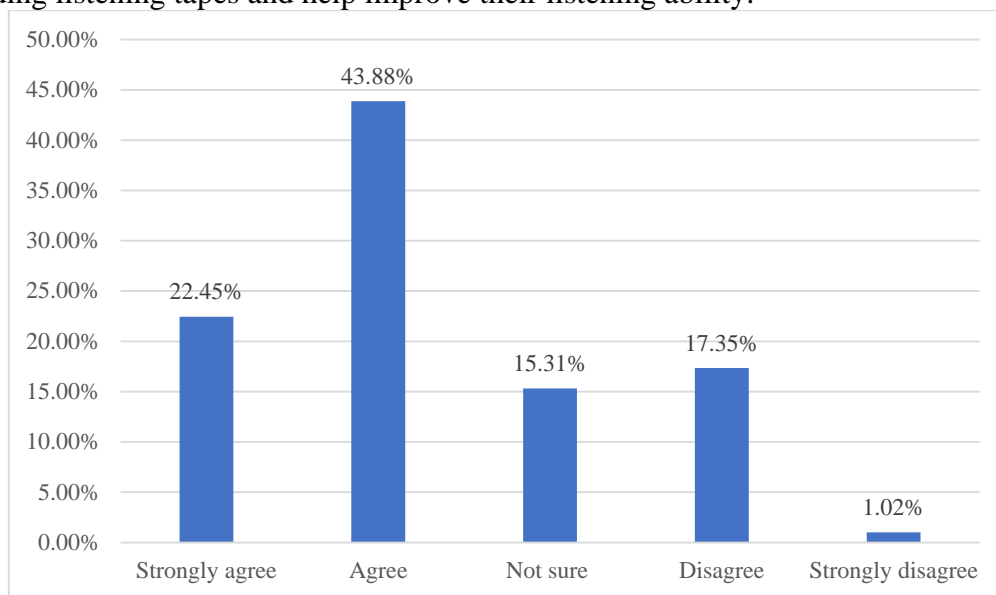


Fig.10 the Percentages of Each Answer to Statement 9.

2.6.10. Data Analysis of Statement 10

In the answer of statement “Students’ interest can be aroused by interpreting English literature through translation.”, as is shown in Figure 11, 44.9% of participants chose “agree” and the proportion of those chose “strongly agree” (18.34%) was almost equal to that of “not sure” and “disagree” (16.33%). It shows that, despite of the disapproving voices, the usage of Chinese to teach foreign literary works can help students better understand and thus their interest is more likely to be intrigue.

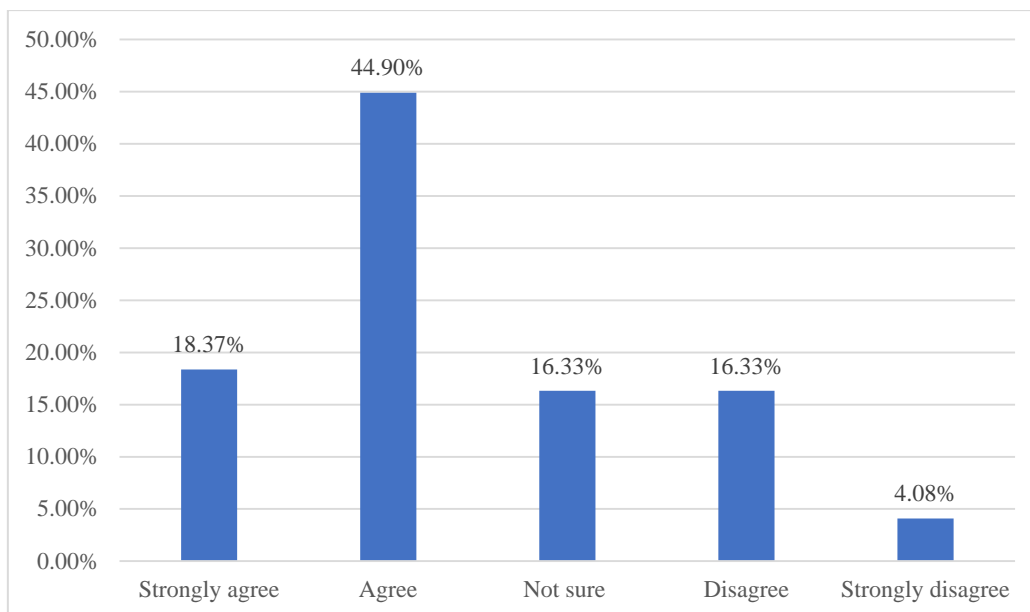


Fig.11 the Percentages of Each Answer to Statement 10.

2.6.11. Data Analysis of Statement 11

In the response of “During the class, teachers should focus on improving students’ English speaking ability.”, as is shown in Figure 12, the majority of learners approved of it, with 46.94% chose “agree” and 40.82% chose “strongly agree”. It reveals learners’ wish for teachers to give more attention on the development of their communicative competence.

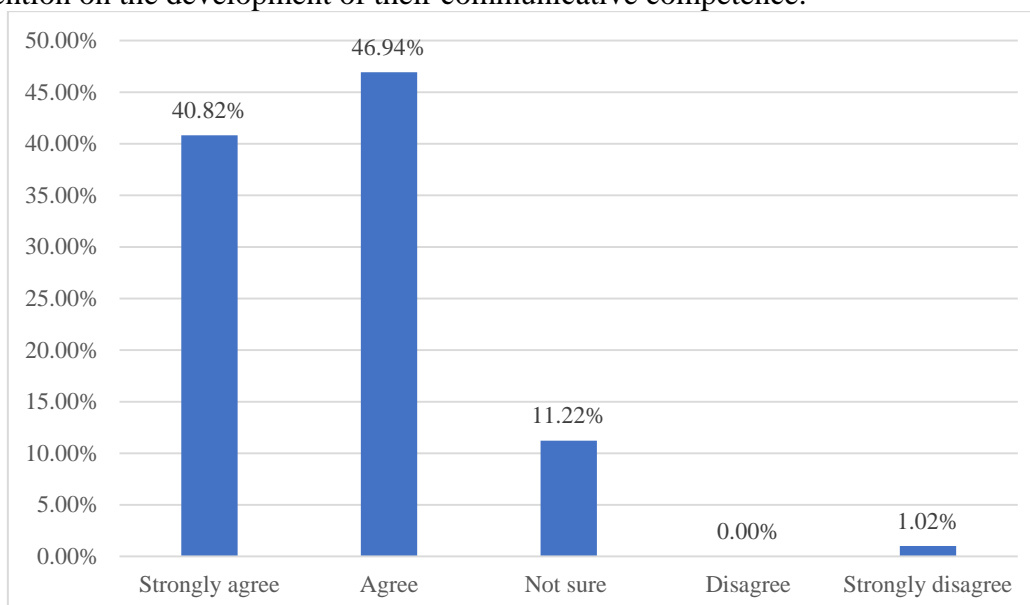


Fig.12 the Percentages of Each Answer to Statement 11.

2.6.12. Data Analysis of Statement 12

As for the statement “Translation exercise can help students better understand the cultural difference between China and the west.”, as is shown in Figure 13, students who held a positive view towards it shared the biggest proportion (87.76%). It shows that while translating, students can better acknowledge the cultural difference through the various usage of words in Chinese and English.

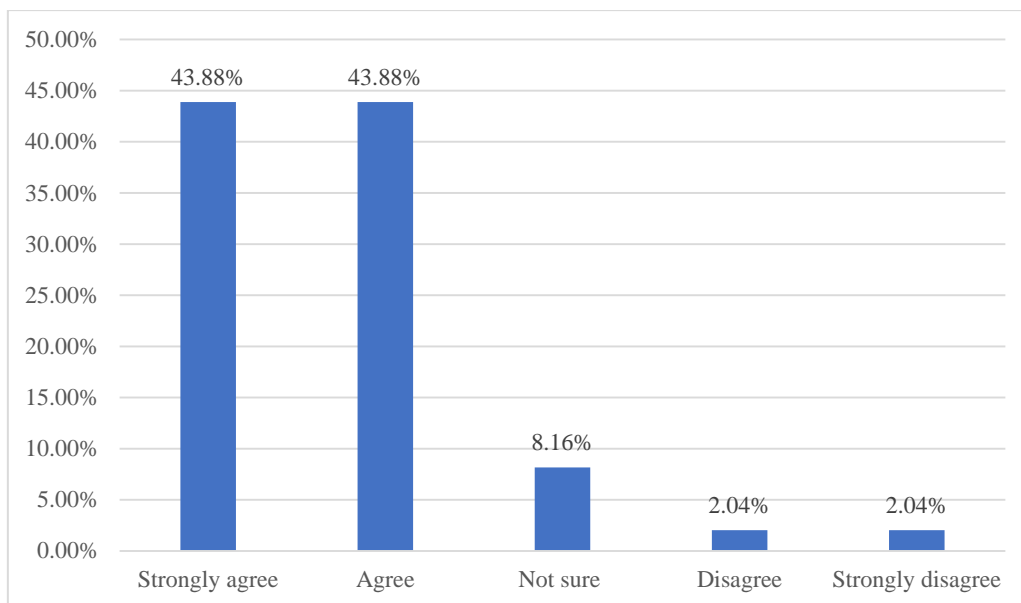


Fig.13 the Percentages of Each Answer to Statement 12.

2.6.13. Data Analysis of Statement 13

In the response of “A lot of memorization deter stimulating students’ learning interest.”, as is shown in Figure 14, 60.21% of participants agreed with it (17.35% “strongly agree”, 42.86% “agree”), while 24.24% of them were not sure and 14.29% disagreed. These statistics indicate that most of students think too much memorizing work is terrifying.

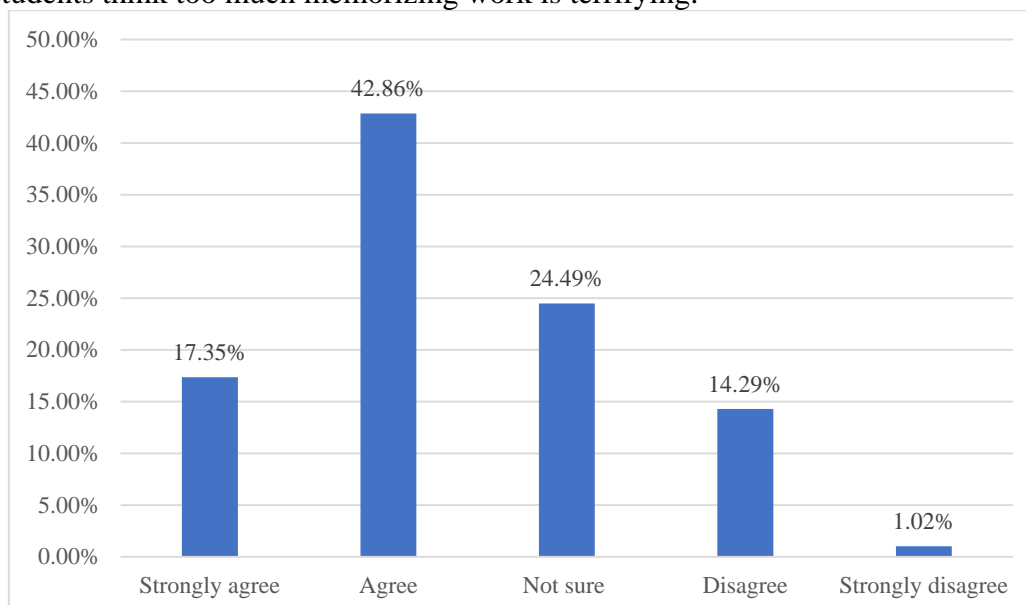


Fig.14 the Percentages of Each Answer to Statement 13.

2.6.14. Data Analysis of Statement 14

As for the statement “During the class, teachers’ use of Chinese can help students better understand teaching content and thus improve their learning efficiency.”, as is shown in Figure 15, most students chose “agree” with a proportion of 42.86%, while those chose “not sure” were 22.45%, followed by 20.41% of opponents. It shows that students hold quite different opinions about the use of Chinese, but most of them still see it positively.

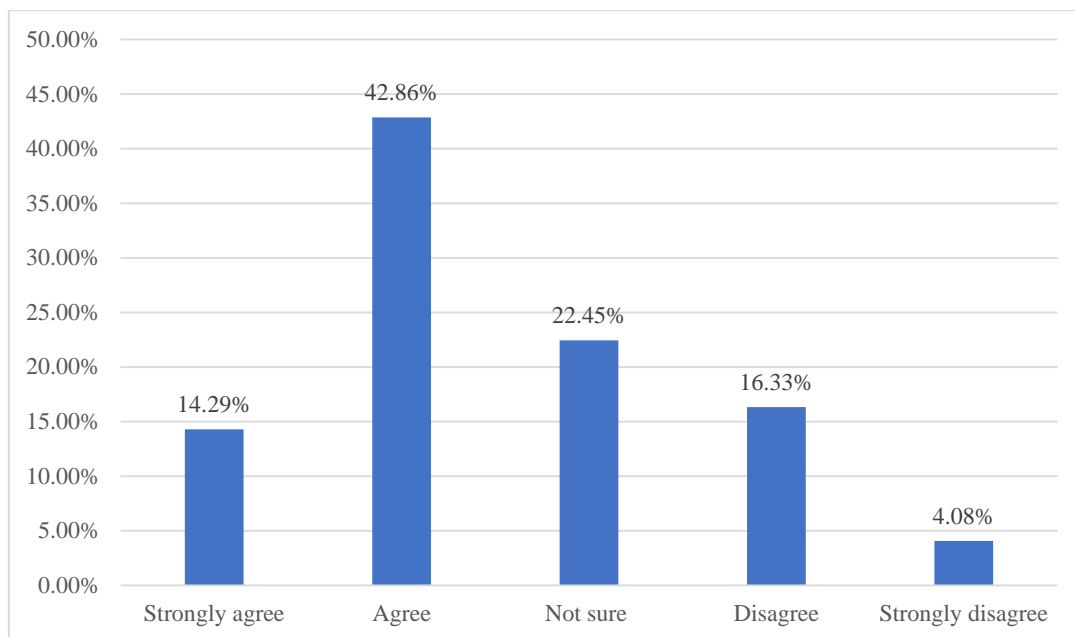


Fig.15 the Percentages of Each Answer to Statement 14.

2.6.15. Data Analysis of Statement 15

In the answer of “Translation practice help to improve students’ English skills.”, as is shown in Figure 16, 48.98% of learners chose “agree” and 42.86% of them chose “strongly agree”. It means that learners believe doing translating exercise can be helpful to their English study.

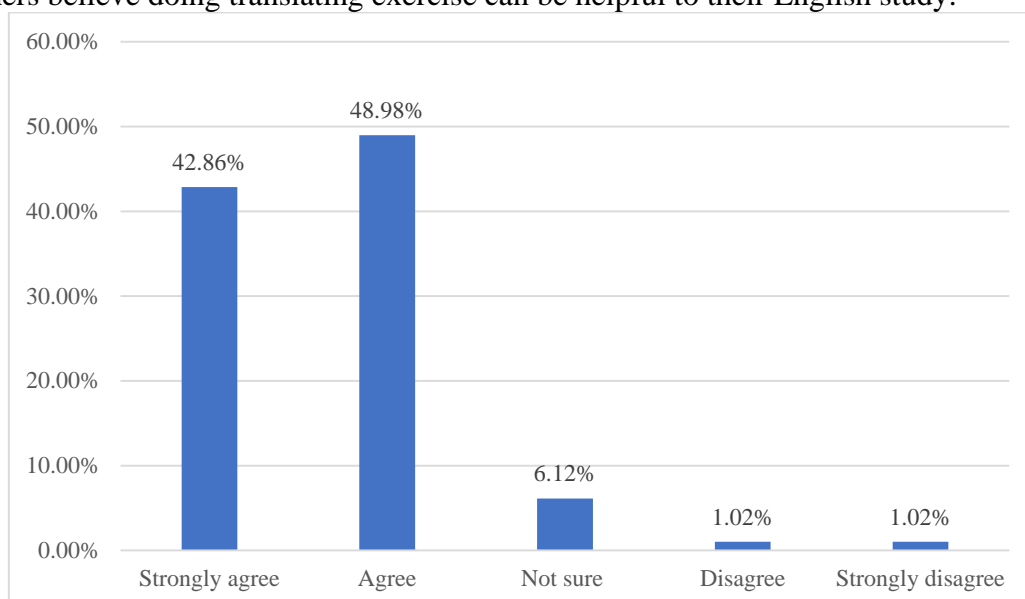


Fig.16 the Percentages of Each Answer to Statement 15.

2.6.16. Data Analysis of Statement 16

In the answer of “During the class, playing videos related to teaching content can motivate students’ learning interest and increase their attention.”, as is shown in Figure 17, participants who chose “strongly agree” were the majority with 57.17%, and the proportion of those who chose “agree” was 32.65%. It shows that the application of multimedia in English class is strongly welcomed by students.

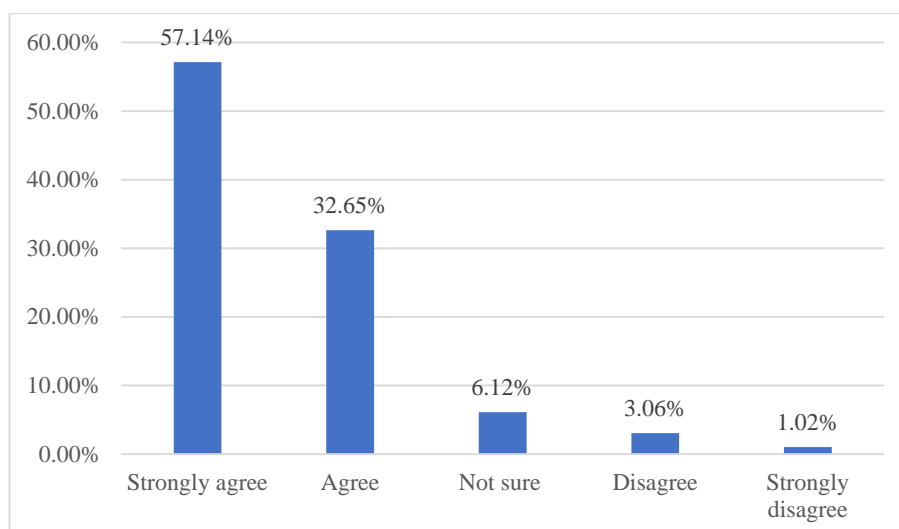


Fig.17 the Percentages of Each Answer to Statement 16.

3. Discussions and Conclusion

3.1 Findings

From the above data, the major findings of this research can be summarized as follow:

- In general, most English-majored students have a positive attitude towards GTM, and believe that this teaching method can be of great help to not only their development of English skills, but also their improvement in academic performance at school.

- It is also clear that English-majored students have a significant demand on the development of their English communicative competence.

3.2 Improvements

From the above data, some possible improvements can be suggested as follow:

- Teachers can use English to teach more often, for English-majored students are intermediate or high-level learners who will not find it difficult to understand teachers' English speaking.

- Teachers should pay more attention on the cultivation of students' English speaking skills.

- Teachers may apply the multimedia as a teaching supplement to English class, for it can add spice to GTM.

3.3 Limitations of the Research

Although the research has been designed under a careful consideration and has provided us with sufficient and various data, it is still inevitable that there are some limitations in this research:

- The research sample only contains the third and fourth year of English-majored students in Wuhan University of Technology, which is not large enough. Therefore, the presented result may not be applicable to all the English-majored students, not to mention the English learners of different levels.

- The duration of this research is not long enough, so we cannot be sure that the same result will be obtained from the same sample in a long-duration research.

- The research may not be objective enough, because all the statements and results in the questionnaire were designed and chosen by the author. Therefore, author's own opinion is inevitably involved and may influence the research's objectiveness.

3.4 Conclusion

Grammar is an important element in the learning process of almost all the languages. Without certain grammatical knowledge, learners can hardly use language correctly or freely. That is one of the main reasons that GTM is still widely used in English-majored classes. And this paper was designed to determine whether the application of GTM is proper in college English study.

In order to measure learners' attitudes towards GTM, the author assigned a quantitative research to a certain amount of English-majored students in Wuhan University of Technology. The most obvious finding emerging from the result was that GTM is still proved to be an effective and proper way for the development of English-majored students' English ability.

The result of this study might be helpful for teachers to grasp a better comprehension of the GTM and learners' attitudes towards it, and, therefore, to improve the method to better meet students' need.

Moreover, since this study has some limitations, it would be beneficial to replicate it on larger and different samples.

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