ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACHES AND METHODS: EFFECTIVENESS AND WEAKNESS

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to undertake a comprehensive review of some approaches and methods of teaching English as a second language. It tries to analyze the effectiveness and weakness of several most influential methods. Grammar – Translation Method, Direct Method, Audio-Lingual Method, Communicative Teaching Method, Natural Approach etc. in order to have a better understanding and application in the future teaching practice. Based on the analyses, it is actually difficult to say which method is most effective unless used in a classroom of students with different needs, learning experience, intellectual levels, cultural background and attitude towards learning English as a second language. The paper suggests that a teacher should combine methods based on the classroom situation of the learners. It concludes that the learning cannot be successful no matter whatever method is applied unless students learn to utilize the classroom method to express thought and feelings outside into the real world situation.

Keywords: teaching approaches and methods; issues and challenges.

Introduction

In an ELT situation, an approach refers to the way a teacher considers appropriate and fit for adoption in teaching a second language. It entails specific decisions on materials to be used and instructions to be given in order to achieve the specific objectives. An approach is deemed wider in scope in comparison to a method in implication which could be seen as a systematic set of teaching practices based on a particular theory of language or language learning (Rogers 2001).

The language teaching methods and approaches is one of the key issues of educational research in the 21st century. This is due to today's globalization. Now learning English language has become a key to success in all spheres of human endeavour and a must to achieve professional development, technological advancement and gain advanced skills which fit the requirements of the 21st century challenges. Since language teaching and learning is a two way process in which both teachers and learners seek the best ways to achieve the expected objectives, the history of the language teaching field has been replete and characterized by a huge number of theories, approaches, methods and studies that search for the best teaching techniques which fit language learners needs and which help them to achieve the desired objectives.

This study is a descriptive paper designed to analyze some of the most used approaches thus pointing out the principles, merits and demerits. There is no doubt that in the past fifty years alone, the English language teaching has gone though a whirlwind of transition in methodology, from grammar translation to direct method, to audio-lingualism and a host of variations in each.

A Brief History of Language Teaching

It has been estimated that some 60 percent of today's world population is multilingual. From both a contemporary and historical perspective, bilingualism or multilingualism is the norm rather than the exception. It is fair, then to say that throughout history, foreign language learning has always been an important practical language concern. Whereas today, English is the world's most widely studied foreign language, 500 years ago, it was Latin, for it was the dominant language of education, commerce, religion and government in the western world. In the sixtieth century however, French, Italian and English gained in importance as a result of political changes in Europe, and Latin gradually because displaced as a language of spoken and written communication.

As the status of Latin diminished from that of a living language to that of an occasional subject in the school curriculum, the study of Latin look on a different function, it became the model for foreign language study from the seventeenth to the ninetieth centuries. (V. Mallison, cited in Titone 1968) opined that when once the Latin tongue had ceased to be a normal vehicle for communication, and was replaced as such by the vernacular languages, then it most speedily became a "mental gymnastic" the supremely 'dead' language, a disciplined and systematic study of which was held to be indispensable as a basis for all forms of high education.

As 'modern' languages began to enter the curriculum of European schools in the eighteenth century, they were used for teaching Latin. By the ninetieth century, this procedure based on the study of Latin had become the standard way of studying foreign languages in school. A typical textbook in the mid-ninetieth century thus consisted of chapters organized around grammar point by nineteenth-century. Textbooks were mainly determined to codify the foreign language into frozen rules of morphology and syntax to be explained and eventually memorized. This approach to foreign language teaching became known as the Grammar- Translation method.

The Grammar Translation Method

The method was in practice between the 17th and 19th centuries in Europe for the purpose of teaching second languages like Latin and Greek, here learners were made to rigorously undergo practices in translation from and into the target language. It recommends gradual movement from translating and retranslating simple sentences to complex sentences and larger texts so that the learners become proficient. Rules of grammar were taught explicitly and the learners were made to cram vocabulary items of the target language translated in native language. It was so tedious that the medium of instruction in educational institutions was in the first language of the learners. Stern, (1983) clarifies that in this method, the first language is maintained as the reference system in the acquisition of the second language.

This method had more emphasis on practicing reading and writing, and completely ignored listening and speaking. It remained very popular for teaching second languages all over the world. Despite its popularity, the method, however is criticized by many scholars for dissecting of language in parts, and over emphasis on translation and explicit teaching of rules of grammar. Qing-Xue and Jui-Fang (2007) state that this tedious experience of memorizing endless list of unusable grammar rules and vocabulary, emancipate the learner from the dominance of the fist

language. This method also faced criticism for its failure to develop communication skills of learners.

However, despite its criticisms, this method is still one of the most popular and widely used methods for teaching English as a second language. Its supporters contend that without formal knowledge of rules of grammar and adequate semantic resources, it is impossible to build communicative competence in environment where the target language is not used for day-to- day communication.

The Direct Method

Towards the mid-nineteenth century, several factors contributed to a questioning and rejection of the GTM. These include: opportunities for communication among European created a demand for oral proficiency in foreign languages, secondly was the way modern languages were taught in secondary schools. Language teaching specialists such as Marcel, Prendergast and Gouin have done much to promote alternative approaches but their ideas failed to receive widespread support. Other reformers toward the end of the century likewise turned their attention to naturalistic principles of language learning, and for this reason they are referred to as advocates of a natural method Sauveur and other (cited by Jack Richard and co 2001) believers in the Natural method argued that a foreign language could be taught without translation or the use of the learner's native language if meaning was conveyed directly through demonstration and action. This principle provided the foundation for what came to be known as the direct method. This method stood for the following principles and procedures. (Krashen, 1982).

1. Classroom instruction was conducted exclusively in the target language.
2. Only everyday vocabularies and sentences were taught
3. Grammar was taught inductively
4. New teaching points were introduced orally.
5. Concrete vocabulary was taught through demonstrations, objects, and pictures; abstract vocabulary was taught by association of ideas.
6. Correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasized.

These principles are seen in the following guideline for teaching oral language which are still followed in contemporary Berlitz schools cited in Ugwu I, and Ugwu I.

Never translate: demonstrate Never explain: act

Never make a speech: ask questions

Never speak with single words: use sentence

This method however functions well in private schools but it was difficult to implement in public schools. It was perceived to have several draw backs. One of the problems according to Brown (1994) is that it is met with constraints of budget, classroom size, time and teacher background in public education. It required teachers who were native speakers or who had native like fluency in

the foreign language. It was largely dependent on the teacher's skill, rather than on a textbook, and not all teachers were proficient enough in the foreign language to adhere to DM principles. As a result of all these, its practice began to decline. However, it later got revived and metamorphosed into what we have as Audio-Lingual method.

The Audio-Lingual Method

The audio-lingual method was the first to claim openly to be derived from linguistics and psychology. Audiolingualism reflects the descriptive, structural, and contrastive linguistics of the fifties and sixties. Its psychological basis is behaviorism which interprets language learning in terms of stimulus and response, operant conditioning, and reinforcement with an emphasis on successful error-free learning. It assumes that learning a language entails mastering the elements or building blocks of the language and learning the rules by which these elements are combined, from phoneme to morpheme to word to phrase to sentence. Therefore, it was characterized by the separation of the skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing— and the primacy of the audio-lingual over the graphic skills. This method uses dialogues as the chief means of presenting the language and stresses certain practice techniques, such as pattern drills, mimicry and so on. Listening and speaking were now brought right into the centre of the stage in this method, tape recordings, and language laboratory drills were offered in practice.

As one of the most popular methods in the history of foreign language teaching, the audio-lingual method is of some great contributions to language teaching, for example, it attempted to make language learning accessible to large groups of ordinary learners because it proposed that language teaching should be organized in such a way as not to demand great intellectual feats of abstract reasoning to learn a language. In addition, it stressed syntactical progression, while previously methods had tended to be preoccupied with vocabulary and morphology.

In spite of these contributions, audionlingualism was also criticized in many ways. First, its theoretic foundation was attacked as being unsound both in terms of language theory and learning theory by Chomsky's theory of TG grammar; secondly, the practical results fell short of expectations and students were often found to be unable to transfer skills acquired through Audiolingualism to real communication outside the classroom. Therefore, it ignores the communicative competence in teaching practice.

Communicative Teaching Method

Under the influence of British applied linguists (such as John Firth, M.A.K.Halliday, who stressed the functional and communicative potential of language), sociolinguistics works (Dell Hyms, and W.Labov) and some philosophy work (J. Austin and J. Searle) cited in Liu Qing,ShiJin Fang [2007], the communicative method was advocated in language teaching. It saw the need to focus on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastering of structures.

This communicative teaching method aims to make communicative competence the goal of language teaching, and develops procedures for teaching the four skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication. It encourages activities that involve real communication and carry out meaningful tasks. It believes that language is meaningful to the

learner supporting the learning process. Language learners are expected to be negotiators, teachers to be organizers, guides, analysts, counselors, or a group process managers.

It is no doubt that the communicative method developed quite fast, it dominates language teaching in many countries because it not only makes language learning more interesting, but helps learners develop linguistic competence as well as communicative competence. However, problems also arose in the initial wave enthusiasm about it. For example, Can this method be applied at all levels in teaching? How such an approach can be evaluated? How suitable it is for non-native teachers? How it can be adopted in situations where students must continue to take grammar-base tests? Of course, these issues will help us have a better application of the communicative method.

The Natural Approach

In the early eighties, Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrel cited in Ugwuetal, developed the Natural approach which is based on Krashen's theories about second language acquisitions. The Natural approach shares a lot in common with Asher's Total Physical Response method: the emphasis on silent phase, waiting for the student's use of the target language at will; the emphasis on learner's relaxation during learning process. Krashen (1982: 138) describes the natural method in the following principles:

i. Class time is devoted primarily to providing input for acquisition,

ii. The teacher speaks only the target language in the classroom. Students may use either the first or second language; their errors are not corrected unless communication is affected,

iii. Homework may include formal grammar work. Error correction is employed in correcting homework.

iv. The goals of the course are "semantic", activities may involve the use of a certain structure, but the goals are to enable students to talk about ideas perform tasks, and solve problems.

Other activities involved in Natural method include games, role plays, dialogues, group work and discussions. Three generic stages involved are:

i. preposition - developing listening skill

ii. Early production - students struggle with the language and make many errors which are corrected based on content and not structure

iii. Extending production - promoting fluency through a variety of more challenging activities.

Natural method faced criticisms on the matter of recommending a silent period which terminates when students feel ready to emerge into oral production and also the idea of comprehensible input. The argument of the critics is that students emerge at different times or perhaps, not at all, and to determine which forms of language input that will be comprehensible to students is a hard

task. However, the Natural Approach led generally to preferring a general accepted norm for effective language teaching known as Communicative Language Teaching.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

This is a broad approach that encompassed various methods, motivations for learning the target language, types of teachers and the needs of individual classrooms and students themselves. It is one 'umbrella' approach to language teaching approach that has become the accepted 'norm' in this field. The basic premises of this approach are:

- Focuses on all the components of communicative competence not only grammatical or linguistic competence.
- Engages learner in the pragmatic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes,
- Views fluency and accuracy as complementary principles underpinning communicative techniques.
- Uses the language in unrehearsed contexts.

The all-embracing nature of communicative language teaching (CLT) as a method has currently been of the pre-occupation of modern language researchers and has also been of great interest and pursuit of many colleges and university foreign language programmes. Rifkin (2003) notes that "many colleges and universities foreign language programmes are designed to help students achieve certain goals". These goals according to him are:

- Listing comprehension (and, in some cases, viewing comprehension).
- Reading comprehension.
- Speaking ability.
- Writing ability.
- Understanding the culture(s) in which the language is spoken.
- Understanding the perspectives of different culture.

Conclusion

Each of the different methods has contributed new elements and has attempted to deal with some issues of language learning. However, they derived in different historical context, stressed different social and educational, needs and have different theoretical consideration. Therefore, in teaching practice, in order to apply these methods effectively and efficiently, practitioners should take these questions in mind: who the learners are, what their current level of language proficiency is, what sort of communicative needs they have, and the circumstances in which they will be using English in the future, and so on. In a word, no single method could guarantee successful results.

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