

PRAGMATIC APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE TEACHING: ECLECTIC STYLE AS A VIABLE METHOD

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Abstract

Language teaching approaches and methods have cast light on the language teaching theory and practice. There are still many controversies about their usefulness and appropriateness. This paper tries to analyze their effectiveness and weakness of several most influential teaching approaches and methods: Grammar-translation Method, Direct Method, Audio-lingual Method, Communicative Teaching Method, Natural Approach in order to have a better understanding and application in the future teaching practice. Based on the analyses, this study therefore adopts the eclectic approach as the most viable technique for teaching English since it serves the learning purpose and encourages the students to learn the language systematically. The paper therefore recommends that since the above review is on the teaching of the English language in general, it is imperative to investigate the best application in the teaching of specific language components, such as grammar, reading, writing, listening or speaking.

Keywords: teaching approaches and methods; issues and challenges

Introduction

Language teaching has a long, fascinating but rather tortuous history, in which a debate on teaching methods has evolved particularly over the last hundred years. Out of practical experience in the teaching of language and the pitfalls associated with such experience, several methods of teaching have emerged. These include Grammar-translation method, direct method, audio-lingual method, communicative teaching method, natural approach etc. These methods are familiar enough yet they are not easy to grasp in practice because a method, however illdefined it may be, is more than a single strategy or a particular technique. As a part of language teaching theories, these methods derived partly from social, economic, political or educational circumstances, partly from theoretical, consideration (new changes in language theories and in new psychological perspective on language learning, and finally partly from practical experience, intuition and inventiveness. Therefore, to some degree, they represent a combination of language teaching beliefs, but it is evident that they are characterized by the over-emphasis on single aspects as the central issue of language teaching and learning.

Language scholars such as Asher (1977) Krashen (1982) Olaoye (1998), Anozie (2007) etc have somehow discussed some of these methods, which we feel that a conceptual approach to this subject matter will not be out of place. While Olaoye (1989) considered only five methods, Anozie (2007) included what he calls the newer methods, and all are highlighted in the works of Krashen (1982).

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 sixteenth century however, French, Italian and English gained in importance as a result of political changes in Europe, and Latin gradually became 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 took on a different function, it became the model for foreign language study from the seventeenth to the nineteenth 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 nineteenth 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-nineteenth 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

This method was the offspring of German scholarship, the object of which according to some of the less charitable critics was to know everything about something rather than the thing itself. (W.H.D Rouse, quoted in Kelly 1969) the principal characteristics of this method according to Kelly (1969) were thus;

1. The goal is to learn a language in order to read the literature or in order to benefit from the mental discipline and intellectual development that result from foreign language study.

2. Reading and writing are the major focus; little or no systematic attention paid to speaking or listening.
3. Vocabulary is based solely on the reading texts used and words are taught through bilingual word list, dictionary study and memorization
4. The sentence is the basic unit of teaching and language practice.
5. Accuracy is emphasized.
6. Grammar is taught deductively – that is, by presentation and study of grammar rules, which are then practiced through translation exercise.
7. The student's native language is the medium of instruction

The Grammar – Translation method has been facing various attacks from reformers. Some critics believe that this method often created frustration for students by a tedious experience of memorizing endless list of unusable grammar rules and vocabulary and the limitations of practice techniques of the first language, others say that this method pay little attention to the student's communicative competence.

In spite of the severe attacks, GTM as widely known dominated European and foreign language teaching from the 1840s to the 1940s and in modified form, it continues to be widely used in some part of the world today. Why? Because there is no inherent contradiction between grammar instruction and communicative approach, and a sort of explicit grammar instruction can complement communicative language teaching to raise learners' conscious awareness of the form and structure of the target language. Moreover, the first language as a reference system can dismiss the misunderstanding in the process of the second language learning. Then, thinking about formal features of the second language and translation as a practice technique put the learner into an active problem-solving situation.

Finally, the method appears relatively easy to apply and it makes few demands on teachers which is perhaps the exact decision of the popularity. This reform movement and their ideas laid the foundation for the development of new ways of teaching language, hence the direct method.

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. Sauveteur and others (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 drawbacks. 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. Audio-lingualism 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, audiolingualism 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 Hymes, and W.Labov) and some philosophy work (J. Austin and J. Searle) cited in Liu Qing, Shi Jin 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 Ugwu et al, 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. preproduction - 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 criticism 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 college and university foreign language programmes are designed to help students achieve certain goals". These goals according to him are:

- Listening 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.

The Eclectic Approach

Eclectic method of teaching a foreign language is a teaching technique that combines the principles and practices of teaching a language depending on the lesson objectives and individual differences in students.

This language teaching method appeared in 1990's and becomes popular because it contributes to achieving the lesson objectives without much task on the teachers and learners, instead, it provides a clearer vision for learners of the learning task before them.

Freeman (2000) views this approach as pluralistic, consistent and entails diverse learning activities that are in tandem with the learners needs.

Gao (2011) on his own opines that the style would challenge teachers to ensure that decisions about classrooms instructions and activities are based on a holistic and comprehensive understanding of all teaching theories and pedagogies in terms of the goal and situation of language teaching and learning, learners needs, the available materials and how language is learned. He viewed the approach as a method that combines all language skills (speaking, writing, listening and reading) and encompasses some practice in the classroom.

Wali (2009) supports the idea that eclectic style of teaching is the most ideal approach since teachers can choose whatever procedure and techniques inside the classroom to achieve learning objectives.

Supporting the above assertion, Duncum (2004) stated that teaching can be meaningful in the classroom through the interaction of speaking voice, sound effect, music and pictures. This implies using a variety of instructional materials approved to the learning objectives, and not to be limited to speech. He concluded that in eclectic style, teachers can use pictures and movements to teach English Lessons, like verb tenses.

Parupalli (2018) listed prominent features of eclecticism as:

- i. It makes teaching more interesting and innovative.
- ii. It enhances the active interaction between teachers and students
- iii. It caters for the individual needs for the learners
- iv. It enhances practical teaching as it facilitates retention and builds self confidence
- v. It is a problem based approach to teaching languages that solves the difficulties encountered by the students in class.

- vi. It creates a clearer vision of what the learners are learning.
- vii. Eclecticism connects life experience of learners to the ideas presented in language learning.

Just like any other teaching method, the eclectic teaching approach has advantages and disadvantages. In the sense that kumar (2013) opines that its approach is live, motivating, participatory, context-driven and sensitive, learner centered and includes using a variety of classroom task and activities. In addition, it is flexible to the needs of the classroom during the lesson. It is equally correlative and objective since it addresses the learners need of diverse underground.

The only major disadvantage as examined by the researcher is that it discourages teachers from reflecting upon their teaching. Other limitations of this approach are justifiable when teachers are poorly prepared for the classroom lessons.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the researcher lends his support to the adoption of the eclectic approach due to its importance to avoid boredom in the class and accurately address the learning objectives. He recommends further studies to explain in detail, the impact of applying any of the theories on teaching language component, since the above is in teaching English in general.

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