



METHODS AND APPROACHES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The history of Language teaching in India, as we know, has a long tradition. Memorization of vocabulary and translation of sentences often formed the major part of such learning process in the past. Ancient languages such as Sanskrit and Pali were mastered in India through the process of memorization of texts and vocabulary lists. "Learning vocabulary lists indeed formed the core of language learning."

Keywords— *ELT-English Language Teaching, EFL-English as a Foreign Language, L1-First Language, GT-Grammar Translation Method, TL-Target Language, LSRW-Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing and CLT-Communicative Language Teaching.*

I. ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS

The grammar -translation method, the Direct method, Audio-lingual method, Bilingual method, Dr. Michael West's the new method, and Suggestopedia etc., are among the methods used commonly by the teachers of English in India. An attempt, therefore, has been made to review these methods as below:

II. THE GRAMMAR - TRANSLATION METHOD

This method ruled the world for more than a century. The main concentration of this method was to help learners to acquire the knowledge of the target language. This method did not focus on spoken form of language. O'Grady et al. (1993) suggest This method emphasizes reading, writing, translation, and the conscious learning of grammatical rules. Its primary goal is to develop literary mastery of the second language. Memorization is the main learning strategy and students spend their class time talking about the language instead of talking in the language. The curriculum requires the memorization of paradigms, patterns and vocabulary, with translation being used to test the acquired knowledge. Consequently, the role of L1 is quite prominent. 1 (O'Grady et al., 1993)

The G.T. Method dominated in Europe for foreign language teaching/learning for almost a century ranging from 1840 to 1940. But the earliest course for language learning teaching based on G.T. method was published by J.C. Fick in South Germany in 1779. The German Scholars like John Seidenstucker, Karl Plotz, H.S. Ollendorf, and John Meidinger were the main force behind the exploration and implementation of the G.T. Method moreover, an American teacher B.Sears too used this method as Prussian Method from 1845 onwards. Grammar learning/teaching was totally based on the goal of helping students to read and appreciate foreign language and literature. Interacting grammar learning/teaching second language was used as it was believed, to translate in and out of the target language. The grammar learning/teaching was consisted of the memorization of the rules of



the various sentence patterns, various grammar was taught prescriptively guided by the rules of the target language as well as greater emphasis was paid on accuracy.

III. DIRECT METHOD

This method was based on the assumption that a second language can be learnt in the same manner as a child learns the first language. The direct method facilitated a learning classroom which seems natural and contextual. There was no emphasis on the explicit instruction of grammatical aspect but one-to-one communication got motivated. The Direct Method emerged as a reaction against the G.T. Method. It was developed in the later nineteenth century when entire world need a language for the communication in different fields like business, traveling, International exchanges, political and economic reasons. There were many languages spoken in various countries but this was the main hurdle for the people to increase opportunities in different fields. Hence they were looking for a language used in Europe for communication. Hence nineteenth century Direct Method was innovated. The main objective of the Direct Method is the ability to communicate in the (T.L.) target language. The main focus of this method is to develop their (students) thinking (LSRW) but emphasizes for the correct pronunciation vocabulary also has a great importance than the grammar.

“The Direct Method has one very basic rule: No translation is allowed”² (Diller 1978: 23). It emphasized learning of language in a contextual manner and the avoidance of mother tongue was preferred while the meanings were taught through action and demonstration. More emphatically, it was a monolingual approach. The major contributor for this method was Prendergast and Sanver (1826-1907). They devised a Natural Method which was advice from the G.T. Method. The same method later came to be known as Direct Method. German Scholar I. Frank too deals with the psychological aspect of language learning where they discussed the principle of direct association before you the form and meanings in target language learning. The role of grammar in the Direct Method was quite in contrast with that of G.T. Method.

Richard and Rodgers (1968, quoted in GeetaNagraj, p. 78) State that: Grammar was not taught explicitly and deductively as in the G.T. class but was learned largely through practice. Students were encouraged to draw their own structural generalization from what they had been learning by and inductive process. In this way, the study of grammar was kept at a functional level, being confirmed to those areas which were continually being used in speech, when grammar was taught more systematically, at a later stage, it was taught in the foreign language with the use of foreign languages terminology. ³ Richard and Rodgers (1968, quoted in GeetaNagraj, p. 78) The presentation of categorized sentence in form of short discourses were meant to improve only communicative ability with greater emphasis on clarity, stress, and pronunciation. Students were encouraged to deduce grammatical rules through the structure presented in the classroom on their own.

IV. THE AUDIO-LINGUAL METHOD

This is an extension and modification of the Direct Method. The main goal lies in the development of oral fluency as translation and use of native language who not permitted in language classroom. It worked on the notion of the mechanistic process of habit formation comprising dialogue memorization and pattern drills. It deals with the vocabulary acquisition as well as the drills of grammatical sentence patterns. This method was focused (Nagraj, Geeta, 1996: 79) refers to demonstrate the fact that a language teaching method can be based



on rigorous scientific disciplines like linguistics and psychology. The Audio-lingual Method treated all the form skills separately. The main tool to learn language through this method was dialogue – presentation in language laboratory.

The emergence of Audio-Lingual Method can be traced back to language teaching programme devised in America during the 2nd world war. The involvement in the Second World War of America needed a great supply of war personnel fluent in languages like German, Italian, Chinese, French, and Japanese etc. who can various actions of language. Charles Fries (1945) of the University of Michigan developed this method using structuralist theory which was later added by the behavioral psychological theories of conditioning by Skinner (1957). The learning of grammar was not emphasized directly but was learned through the acquisition of various grammatical sentence patterns. All the grammatical points like Direct Method were deduced after the presentation of sentences pattern in the contextualized discourse.

V. THE BILINGUAL METHOD

This method was developed by Dr. C.J. Dodson. As the name suggests, the method makes use of two languages- the mother tongue and the target language. Hence, this can be considered as a combination of the direct method and the grammar-translation method. ‘Selection’, ‘Gradation’, ‘Presentation’, and ‘Repetition’ are the four cardinal principles of all language teaching methodology. This method has all the four principles in it. In the opinion of Dodson a good method should promote thinking in the language. According to him a new method should have the following features as: “i) It must be simple. ii) It must strike a balance between the spoken and the written word, accuracy and fluency. iii) Constant revision of what is taught and learnt. iv) A new method must offer a new approach to the application of translation work. v) The method must give the teacher an opportunity to promote intercommunication between himself and the individual pupil. vi) The method must be sufficiently flexible to cope with various classroom conditions and the pupils’ specific and general abilities.”⁵⁵ The aims of this method as stated by Yardi are- to make the pupil fluent and accurate in the spoken and written words and to prepare the pupil in such a manner that he can achieve true bilingualism.⁵⁶ The main principles of the bilingual method as stated by Dr. SharadaBhat are: Controlled use of the students’ mother-tongue, the introduction of reading and writing early in the course of language learning and integration of writing and reading skills.⁵⁷ The advocates of this method believe that it is the wastage of time for recreating a situation while teaching a foreign language. They think that teaching-learning method is useful when mother-tongue equivalents are given to the pupil without duplicating the situation. It differs from translation method in two respects. In the first case it is the teacher only who uses the mother-tongue to explain meaning. Furthermore, pupils are given a lot of practice in the drill of sentence patterns. Such practice is not provided in the translation method. The Bilingual method was the reaction against the direct method. Dodson vehemently attacks the direct method in the following words: “It is one of the tragedies at present being enacted in some emergent countries, where a major world language is being taught as a second language to young children by the direct method, that if this type of teaching were successful, which by all account it is not, the vernacular would disappear within a few generations. It is only possible to teach a second language by direct method techniques at the expense of the first language, and it is sheer hypocrisy to claim that the final aim of such teaching philosophies is bilingualism. Every aspect of the direct method teaching is directed towards keeping the two languages as far apart as



possible, thus destroying the bridge which the learner must continuously cross to and fro if he wishes to be truly bilingual.

VI. THE ORAL – SITUATIONAL LANGUAGE TEACHING

In 1920s an approach for language teaching in a systematic way was evolved. This included the mechanized steps of selection, gradation and presentation of language items and context to be practiced in language learning classroom. This approach came to be known as oral approach to language teaching. In oral approach the spoken language item was followed by written forms as these language items were practiced situationally after a brief introduction. Later this principle of situationality became the key feature of oral approach and got a new name as Oral – Situational Approach. The linguist like Hornby, Palmer was behind the exploration of this method. The linguist like Gurrey, Frisby, Billows and Fittman too contributed emphatically for the development of this method. Especially, Fittman and his colleagues developed a tremendous set of practice material. The approach got its existence in 1920s and 1930s as linguists like Hornby and Palmer worked a lot to set a launch pad of this approach. The teaching/learning of grammar followed as systematic rule of shifting learning from simple to complex items. The grammar contents were learnt through an oral approach. Grammar was received as the “underlying sentence pattern of spoken language”.

VII. DR. MICHAEL WEST’S THE NEW METHOD:

This method was evolved by Dr. Michael West, who taught English in India for a number of years and was well-aware of the English language teaching situation in India. He found that for Indian learners of English, learning to read English was easier than speaking it. He recommended an emphasis on reading not only because he regarded it as the most useful skill to acquire in a foreign language but also because, as Stern points out: “it was the easiest skill with the greatest surrender value for the student in the early stages of language learning.”⁶² West viewed language teaching programme as a whole and gave each skill its legitimate place. He believed that: “The initial stage of learning a foreign language should, we believe, be to learn to read it-even in the case of the student who aims at complete mastery (of reading, writing and speech)”.⁶³ His compilation of the ‘New Method Readers’ paved the way towards the method based primarily on reading and it came to be known as ‘The Reading Method.’

According to Yardi, this method was of ‘particular relevance’ to India. West realized that, by and large, most Indians required only the receptive skills of English. Besides, learning and teaching how to read and comprehend written English is easy and not affected by the size of the class. Stern says: “The reading method was a theory of language teaching which deliberately restricted the goal of language instruction to one of practical attainable utility.”⁶⁴ Thus, the statement cited above makes it clear that this method was well supported by the psychological principle that listening and understanding precede speaking and writing. Hence, this method had a strongly pragmatic basis.

Dr. West’s book ‘Bilingualism’ contains several observations. The following one cited by Yardi makes clear the utility of the first, second, and third language. West observes: “In the typical case the first language is the vehicle of thoughts about the home life and perhaps of the literature expressive of emotions and ideas connected with the home; while the second language is a vehicle of communication for matters of government, commerce,



industry, scientific thought and higher culture generally. There may be a third language which is a medium of communication for international relations and higher education, and fourth necessary for the religion and ancient culture of the people.

VII. APPROACHES TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING:

The Structural Approach:

This approach as Kripa K. Gautam states “is based on the belief that language consists of ‘structures’ and that the mastery of these structures is more important than the acquisition of vocabulary. Since structure is what is important and unique about a language, early practice should focus on mastery of phonological and grammatical structures rather than on mastery of vocabulary”.

This approach, according to Kulkarni ‘emphasizes the teaching and learning of the basic items or materials that constitute the framework of a language’.

The cause of the emergence of this approach was the extensive research conducted on English language teaching as a foreign

language at the University of London institute of Education.

This approach as, Dr. Bhat asserts ‘is definitely an improvement upon the Direct Method, though the techniques and principles are not widely different’.⁸⁰ The exponents of this approach consider that language consists of ‘structures’ and structures are more important than the vocabulary. These structures are carefully graded in terms of both meaning and form.

The term ‘structural’ according to Kripa K. Gautam “is referred to the following characteristics: “a) Elements in a language are linearly produced in a rule governed way. b) Language samples can be exhaustively described at any structural level of description (phonemic, morphological and syntactic). c) Linguistic levels are thought of as a system within systems. These sub-systems are pyramidally structured-phonemic systems leading to morphemic systems, and those in turn lead to be higher level systems of phrases, clauses and sentences”.⁸¹ The two essential features of this approach are careful grading of structures, and vocabulary control. J.B. Bruton in a working paper presented at the Nagpur Seminar in 1958 summarises the basic assumptions regarding the nature of language and the methods best suited for the presentation of linguistic items. He says:

“a) language is primarily a spoken thing and... therefore, our approach to a foreign language should in a first instance be through its spoken forms, b) ...mastery over the signalling system of a language is more important than detailed knowledge of the forms of the language; c) ...this mastery is best acquired by repetition of the various components of the system in varied forms; d) ... since language arises from situation, the teacher’s task is to create meaningful situations from which language will arise easily and naturally; e)... mastery over a given range of structures and confidence in their use are best imparted by concentrating on the teaching of one item at a time; f)...each item must be firmly established orally before pupils encounter it in their textbooks”.

XI. THE STRUCTURAL-ORAL-SITUATIONAL APPROACH:

This approach, popularly known as the S-O-S approach, came into being as an alternative to the direct method. It is an outcome of the experiments carried out in the army camps during world War II⁸⁷. It is the presentation



and practice of carefully selected and graded grammatical structures of English in effective, meaningful situations, initially through speech and later through reading and writing.

Language is viewed as structurally related elements for encoding of meaning, the elements being phonemes, morphemes, words, structures and sentence types. According to Rao the theory underlying this approach is that language exists in situations; it cannot be used in vacuum. Language is used according to the needs of the situation.⁸⁸ In view of this Rao suggests presenting a new language item in meaningful situations. It would make the input comprehensible for the learner. Situational use of English is aimed at in this approach. Prominent names associated with this approach are Charles Fries, Harold Palmer and A.S. Hornby. Harold Palmer points out that there are three processes in learning a language- receiving the knowledge or materials, fixing it in the memory by repetition, and using it in actual practice until it becomes a personal skill. By using meaningful situations, according to GeethaNagraj, the use of mother-tongue can be avoided. In view of this GeethaNagraj suggests that these language items should be given in meaningful situations, the learners can deduce the meaning and the context from the situation in which it is used.⁹⁰ Pitman suggests that the situations will be controlled carefully to teach the new language material...in such a way that there can be no doubt in the learners' mind regarding the meaning of what he hears.

XII. GRAMMAR BASED

The History of English Language Teaching has witnessed the maximum dominance of grammar-based. English Language courses. Under the aegis of the Traditional Approach – Grammar-Translation Method – the teaching of grammar was so crucial that it almost became synonymous to language teaching. This phase of dominance of grammar in language teaching was continued for centuries, until the emergence of modern linguistics. Modern linguistics look that language in a new perspective and hence a change was brought into the language teaching methodologies. Hence, the traditional Latin modalled Grammar-Translation Method was replaced by a Modern, Structuralism – based teaching methodologies. Such a replacement brought in obvious changes in the general outlook, approach and theorization of the methods. But so far a quantum of the amount of grammar items available in the above mentioned methods remained the same with a slight change in the handling of the grammar items in the shape of teaching techniques and strategies in the actual classroom situation; for instance prescriptivism was replaced by the descriptivism. Hence grammar continued to maintain its central position from the tradition. Grammar-Translation Method to the American Audiolingualism and the British Oral-Situational Method. These methods were based on the assumption that language is a set of rules/language is a system of systems. This type of dominance of grammar was reflected in the material's tool produced at those points of time.

XIII. CONCLUSION

Thus it could be concluded that it is impossible to arrive at the perfect approach or technique for language learning in Indian context. Language learning is such a complex process that it is impossible to offer a single solution to all our problems. Perhaps the best method is the one which works, and this varies from context to context. Any method which creates conditions for learning to take place is good. It should enable the learner to acquire the strategies of learning rather than merely equipping him with knowledge. What is important for the



teacher, therefore, is to find out what approach and what method will enable him to realize a particular objective under a set of particular circumstances.

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