

THE LINGUISTIC DILEMMA FOR AN EFFECTIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS

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Abstract

There is no single most excellent way of teaching English as second language. Any successful language teacher will not confine himself to only a single method. A method which is appropriate with one class on one occasion will not necessarily suit to the same class at another time. Likewise, a method which is suitable for one language teacher while teaching a particular language item may not be applicable for other teacher in the same or similar context. Language learning is such a complex process that it is impossible to offer a single solution to all our language problems. Perhaps, the best method is the one which works, and this varies from context to context. It is against this backdrop, that this paper x-rays the tenets and strengths of the different English language teaching methods and finally, recommendations were given.

Key Words: Language, Teaching Methods.

Introduction

In the long history of language teaching didactics, there have been numerous taxonomies regarding trends in language teaching along with different attempts to organize different methods into different categories. For instance, Kumaravadivelu (1994) talks about language-centred methods (Audio-lingualism), learner-centred methods (Communicative methods), and learning-centred methods (Natural approach). Vizental (2008) operates with the following division- the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), the Audio-Lingual Approaches (ALA), the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and the Post-Communicative Turn (PCT). It is then truism to assert that the history of the development of language teaching didactics and methodology is a well-documented field of research. Teaching methods therefore, are “a body of methods, procedures, working concepts, rules and postulates employed in the solution of a problem or in doing something. Effective Teaching in English provokes excellence of learners with listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. However, English language teaching and learning have a far older history, reaching the ancient world. It is shown in many websites that approximately a thousand million of

people speak and write English, both in their daily lives and in their professional fields. Today, the language is the most widely learned second language in the world.

Rogers (2000) affirms that the language teaching pendulum has swung away from grammar translation to the direct method, and then to alternative methods (Richards and Rogers, 2003). Such shifts from one method to another only provided ample inferential evidence of lack of success. This frustration led to the shift from teacher to learner from outside feeding theories to inside ones, from method-based top-down to teacher-based bottom-up approaches (Richards and Rodgers, 1987; Freeman and Richards, 1993). This paper in view of the above problems which lies in the inadequacy and contentment of a single English language teaching method to sufficiently cover all aspects of English language pedagogy attempts to define language and teaching methods and further review some of the renowned English language teaching methods with the aim of bringing out their efficiency as well as inefficiency towards English language teaching and learning.

Concepts Defined

Language

Language is a vital instrument of communication

and an invaluable medium through which people and nations of the world interact. Language is so complex that its definition cannot be fully accounted for by any one wholly consistent and comprehensive theory. To Sapir (1921) cited in Jindal (2015) “ language is a purely human and non-instinctive methods of communicating ideas, emotions, desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols’. Language as Sapir rightly point out is human. Similarly, Brumfit (1985) definition cited in Adeniyi (2011) is in line with Sapir’s, view on language, and according to him, language could be said to mean the relationship between words and experience and it could be produced and received in form of the verbalization of experiences or experiences of verbalization. Verbalization of experiences occurs when we produce language by talking and writing, that is putting our reaction to experience within and around us into words. On the other hand, experiences of verbalization occurs when we receive language by listening and reading, making sense out of the words of others and understanding them in their context of use.

Teaching Methods

A teaching method is a plan for presenting language materials to be learnt based on a selected approach. Ndukwe (2018) maintain that it is translating an approach into an instructional system based on the objective of language learning, content to be learnt, types of tasks, etc.

The Grammar Translation Method

This method was perhaps best codified in the work of Karl Ploetz (1819–1881), a German scholar who had a tremendous influence on the language teaching profession during his lifetime and afterwards (Celce-Murcia 2014). Grammar Translation Method was also called the classical method because it first and foremost focused on the teaching of classical languages. It also focuses on developing students’ appreciation of the target language’s literature and teaching the language. Students are presented with target-language reading passages and answer questions that follow. Some of the main principles of the Grammar Translation Method include the following:

- i. The main focus is on morphology and syntax (the forms and inflections of

words are learned thoroughly, together with rules and exceptions).

- ii. Focus on written language and sentences rather than texts.
- iii. There is little use of the target language for communication.
- iv. The role of conversation is underestimated.
- v. The main objective is the study of literary works.

Larsen Freeman (2000) states that the most important types of exercises within GMT are: translation of literary texts, reading comprehension questions, synonyms and antonyms, deduction of grammar rules, memorization, composition, and building up sentences using certain words. Thus, the above statement makes it clear that this method makes no provision for training in speech but lays stress on reading.

This method has no psychological basis but has two suppositions: that a foreign language can easily be learnt through translation and that grammar is the soul of language. While criticizing this method, Rouse (1925) remarks that the aim of this method was to know everything about something, rather than the thing itself. Students found the method frustrating as they had to memorise words and rules. The use of ‘L1’ in the classroom prevented the learner from developing confidence to communicate in English. The learners found it very difficult to emancipate themselves from the clutches of their mother-tongue. They were unable to use English in their day-to-day communication. The excessive obsession with accuracy and competence in written rather than oral language inhibited learners who often preferred to remain silent rather than expose their ignorance.

The Direct Method

The Direct Method (DM) appeared as an alternative to grammar translation, and it was described in the works of the French teacher of Latin, François Gouin in 1880. As the Grammar Translation Method focused too much on the written forms of language, the direct method was created as a counterbalance, focusing on oral

performance and communication. The direct method received its name from the fact that meaning was conveyed directly in the target language with the help of demonstration and visual aids (Larsen Freeman, 2000). The Direct Method (DM) allows students to perceive meaning directly through the target language taught from the beginning because no translation is allowed. Visual aids and learning materials are used to clarify the meaning of vocabulary items and concepts in real life language. Some of the main principles of the direct method (Celce-Murcia 2014, Boyadzhieva 2014, Molina et al. 2006) are the following:

- i. Oral interaction is primary.
- ii. Knowledge of a language is the ability to produce everyday spontaneous speech, which is the first goal of the lessons.
- iii. The most important techniques and procedures are repetitions and drills: questions and answers are the main pathways to reach a gradual oral progression.
- iv. Translation and use of mother tongue are prohibited.
- v. Lessons begin with dialogues and anecdotes in modern conversational style.
- vi. Correction is not neglected, putting emphasis on correct pronunciation and grammar.

In addition to the above, the most important techniques in using the Direct Method are: reading aloud, questions and answers, self-correction, conversation practice, fill-in-the-blanks, dictation, map drawing, and paragraph writing (Larsen Freeman 2000).

Therefore, the direct method being considered better than the grammar-translation method was not completely free from certain weaknesses either. For one thing the method is not all that direct, for only a limited number of words can be directly associated with their meanings or the objects they represent.

The Reform Movement

The reform movement was another important reaction to GTM and DM, which

focused on the teaching of oral language. Although, Celce-Murcia (2014) demonstrates that the reform movement was not considered a full-blown pedagogical approach to language teaching, she also highlights that its adherents had a significant influence on certain subsequent approaches. This movement was initiated by the founders of the International Phonetic Association established in 1886 (Molina et al. 2006, Celce-Murcia 2014). The principles of the International Phonetic Association can be summarized as follows:

- i. Foreign language study should begin with the spoken language of everyday life as the spoken form of a language is primary.
- ii. Pupils must be familiarized with the sounds of the Foreign Language.
- iii. Among the most important procedures, the direct techniques are presented with no use of L1: immersion, questions and answers, small groups, and native speakers.
- iv. Examinations take the form of conversations and interviews.
- v. The findings of phonetics should be applied to language teaching.
- vi. Learners should be given basic phonetic training to establish good speech habits.

The Reading Approach

In the first decades of the twentieth century, the reading approach was devised for English learners in India and German or French learners in the USA. Michael West, who was a teacher of English in India, endorsed the reading approach, in which he recommended graded reading for its practical utility, without neglecting the skill of speaking (Celce-Murcia 2014, Molina et al. 2006). Some principles of the reading approach or reading method are:

- i. Only the grammar useful for reading comprehension is taught.
- ii. The learner does not have to master the grammar, but merely recognize it.

- iii. Vocabulary is controlled at first (based on frequency and usefulness) and then expanded (the most basic level was made up of just 300–500 vocabulary items, which led to the introduction of the concept of Basic English, as stated in Ogden (1930).
- iv. Translation is a widely used classroom procedure.
- v. The first language is used to present reading material, discuss it, and check understanding.
- v. Grammar is generally viewed as difficult and boring; therefore, theoretical presentations should be avoided (grammatical structures are sequenced and rules are taught inductively).
- vi. Skills are sequenced: listening and speaking are taught first; reading and writing are postponed.
- vii. The usage of technology in language teaching: language laboratories and recordings are widely used.

The Audio-lingual Method

The audio-lingual approach or audio-lingual method (ALM) became dominant in the United States during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. This technique of teaching was initially called the ‘Army Method’ and was the first to be based on linguistic theory and behavioural psychology. The objective of this programme, as stated by Richards Jack, C. and T.S. Rodgers (1987) was for students “to attain conversational proficiency in variety of foreign languages”.

Based on the Army Specialized Training Program and emerging from the direct method, the audio-lingual method shifted the emphasis from written language to spoken language by developing first and foremost oral skills. No explanation in or translation into the students’ native tongue was allowed in their classes; all instructions had to be given in the target language, and meanings were explained with the help of visuals, realia (real objects), paralinguage and demonstration (Vizental, 2008). Some of the most important principles of the audio-lingual method include:

- i. The learner’s mother tongue is banned, and target language is used exclusively.
- ii. Vocabulary is severely controlled and limited in the initial stages.
- iii. Full priority of oral skills: vocabulary and grammar are taught in context.
- iv. The importance given to habit formation by using commands to direct behaviour, i.e. students

The most popular audio-lingual techniques are: dialogue memorization, backward build-up (expansion) drills, repetition drills, chain drills, single and multiple substitution slot drills, transformation drills, question and answer drills, dialogue completion, and grammar games (Larsen Freeman, 2000).

The Audio-lingual method was not completely free from its weaknesses and flaws. Behaviourist assumptions underlying this method have come under severe criticism. The importance given to achieve ‘oral accuracy’ only has prompted many linguists to question the very necessity of a teacher.

The Audiovisual Method

The audiovisual method appeared in the early sixties in France. The most important principles of the audiovisual method are:

- i. Introducing and promoting basic linguistic varieties (Français fundamental, Basic English).
- ii. Introducing specialized discourses (E.S.P).
- iii. The steps of the lesson are: Presentation: visual scenarios for meaningful utterances and context (using filmstrips and tapes); Explanation: through pointing, demonstrating, selective listening, questions/answers; Repetitions and memorization; Exploitation (development or transposition), visual emancipation, role-play, and new

questions and answers; and lastly Grammar (Molina et al. 2006).

The Oral-situational Approach

In Britain, the same historical pressures that fostered the development of the audio-lingual approach gave rise to the oral, or situational approach promoted by Eckersley around 1955 (Celce-Murcia 2014). Some of the most important principles of the oral-situational approach include:

- i. Organizing structures around situations (e.g. at the pharmacy, at the post office, at the bank, at the restaurant, etc.).
- ii. New words and new grammar items are introduced and practised embedded in situations.
- iii. All language material is practised orally before being presented in written form.
- iv. Only the target language is used in the classroom, and there is little (or no) use of the mother tongue.
- v. Mainly the most general and useful lexical items are presented.
- vi. Among the most important techniques, drills and repetitions should be highlighted.

The Bilingual Method

This method was developed by 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 (1998) a good method should promote thinking in the language which according to him must be simple; the method must strike a balance between the spoken and the written word, accuracy and fluency; constant revision of what is taught and learnt; a new method must offer a new approach to the application of translation work; the method must give the teacher an opportunity to promote inter-communication between himself and the individual pupil; the method must be sufficiently flexible to cope with various classroom conditions

and the pupils' specific and general abilities.

The aim of this method is to make the pupils fluent and accurate in the spoken and written words and to prepare the pupils in such a manner that they can achieve true bilingualism. Some of the principles of the bilingual method 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. 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."

Total Physical Response

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a method labelled sometimes a humanistic approach and some other times a designer method. It was introduced by James Asher in the late 1970s. The main features and principles of TPR include – Only the target language is used, and no mother tongue is allowed. Understanding precedes speaking and active use of language: learners learn from responding to verbal stimulus; they understand the foreign language and respond kinaesthetically before starting to speak. Language learning should activate the right hemisphere, where the motor centre is located. The teacher

gives commands and shows learners the meaning by doing the appropriate physical action as a response. When learners are ready to speak, they begin to give each other commands. Structural language is taught by listening and responding with actions, while grammar is taught implicitly. Learners will learn better if stress to produce language is reduced: activities must be designed to reduce the affective filter (Molina et al. 2006, Celce-Murcia 2014, Boyadzhieva 2014).

Textual-translation Method

At the end of the 18th century there appeared a variety of the grammar-translation method called textual-translation method. The training goal was the students' overall development in reading classical literature. The content and stylistic features of the text became more important. In some textbooks, there was the line arrangement of the texts: in the first line there was a text in a foreign language, in the second line there was its transcription and the third line contained its literal translation, with the grammar structure being the same as in the foreign language. Having repeated the text after the teacher many times and having read the transcription, the students were to analyze the translation and propose the appropriate literature translation.

The representatives of this method, however, made a great contribution in the language teaching methods having used for the first time the translation from the native language into the foreign one. We quite agree with the conclusions of the authors of the book "Foreign Language Teaching Methods at the Secondary School" (Gez et al, 1982) that for the first time in the history of teaching methods the translation methods of the foreign language teaching had serious drawbacks. First, they were badly directed towards the language acquisition as communication means even for reading training. The main task was only general education, its being understood as the development of logical thinking as a result of grammar learning. Secondly, the characteristic feature of these methods was form and content separation. In the grammar-translation method all attention was focused on the form, with the content being disregarded. In the textual-translation method the texts were not always available since the grammar was studied

unsystematically and the students were badly prepared to its perception. Thirdly, the language learning was based on grammar and logic identification,

Community Language Learning

Community Language Learning (CLL) arises from Rogers's notions of learners in the role of clients and teachers as non-directive counsellors (Molina et al. 2006). The main features and principles of the CLL method include the introduction of group work; the classroom is organized following a circle or a u-shape (also called horseshoe shape) so that participants can really communicate among themselves. Students sit in a circle or in a u-shape, and they decide what they want to say; the teacher translates and gets learners to practice in the target language the material that was elicited. Later, the teacher goes over the words and structures on the blackboard. These interactions are recorded and transcribed by the teacher. There is no pre-defined a priori syllabus: students decide what and when to learn according to their needs. The most important procedures are: translation, recording, and analysis techniques.

Suggestology, Suggestopedia, or Accelerated Learning

Based on the observation that the ability of acquiring a foreign language is blocked mainly by fear of failure, in the 1970s, Georgi Lozanov came up with a method meant to ensure a relaxing atmosphere in a colourful and decorated classroom with comfortable chairs and accompanied by relaxation music. The main features and principles of the Suggestopedia method are:

- i. The class starts with the relaxation of the students through the appropriate background music, breathing techniques, and voice of the teacher: in a classroom resembling a living room, learners sit in easy chairs and assume a new identity.
- ii. After relaxation, the teacher starts by introducing a script accompanied by music. This way, the teacher introduces the grammar and lexis in a playful manner, using only the target language. During this phase, the students just relax and listen. Students

then use the language in a fun and/or undirected way as this is followed by group or choral reading of the script on the first day, along with songs and games.

- iii. Translation is also used to foster comprehension.
- iv. Interactive activities are employed so that learners are able to use what they have unconsciously acquired.
- v. No correction is performed.
- vi. Dialogues, dramatized texts, songs, and games are widely used.
- vii. No use of the mother tongue is allowed.

The Communicative Method or Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

The 1970s witnessed the emergence of the communicative approach to language teaching (CLT). The success of CLT is due not only to the changes it involved, as far as methods are concerned, but also to the fact that textbook writers applied its principles quite rapidly. The movement was quickly accepted by language teaching specialists, curriculum developers, and even governments.

Communicative Approach is an umbrella term that encompasses a range of closely related methods such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). However, some other researchers, such as Rama-Agullo (2012), states that TBLT and CLIL are post-communicative trends, whereas Dagkiran (2015) states that after the introduction of CLT Content- Based Instruction (CBI) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emerged as CLT's successors within the scope of Communicative Approaches (CA). There are several very recent language teaching models which belong to Content-Based Instruction such as: theme-based language instruction (the language curriculum is built around selected topics or themes), sheltered subject matter teaching (carried out in the target language by a content area specialist for a separated class of target language learners), adjunct language instruction (students are enrolled in two courses – a content and a language one –

which are mutually coordinated), skills- based approach (Molina et al. 2006) . Widdowson (1990), one of the mentors and promoters of CLT, describes it as follows:

“It concentrates on getting learners to do things with language, to express concepts and to carry out communicative acts of various kinds. The content of a language course is now defined not in terms of forms, words and sentence patterns, but in terms of concepts, or notions, which such forms are used to express, and the communicative functions which they are used to perform.”

Communicative language teaching relies on the following:

- i. The ultimate aim of foreign language teaching is to develop the learners' communicative competence.
- ii. Learners' own personal experiences must be enhanced as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
- iii. Learning begins with imitation, but the learner has to move on to the stage of free production; otherwise, the process does not turn into actual learning.
- iv. Developing language skills is more important than teaching content. In some cases, the content is academic or job-related material, replicating real-lifesituations (students should use the language functionally and strategically to achieve real-world objectives and goals, the way people do in real life).
- v. Skills are integrated from the beginning. Teaching aims at developing the four major (macro) skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening in content- and task-based activities.
- vi. The four skills are divided into two groups: productive (speaking

- and writing) and perceptive (listening and reading). Perceptive skills facilitate the language input, while the productive skills foster the output.
- vii. Meaning is more important than form or structure.
 - viii. Appropriateness of language is as important as linguistic accuracy (as communication takes place in a certain social and discursal context, and students must be taught to observe social conventions, adapt, and select their language according to the requirements of this social and discursal background).
 - ix. Active participation, personalization, and affective involvement enhance students' learning.
 - x. Spontaneous, improvised practice is more efficient than mechanical repetition. Students work in groups or pairs to transfer and negotiate meaning in real life-like situations.
 - xi. Communication is basically interactive, learners must be given a purpose for producing language (simulation, role-play, and debate are efficient classroom procedures for language learning).
 - xii. Language must be learned with the help of authentic material.
 - xiii. The teacher's role is to facilitate communication and only secondarily to correct errors. The use of mother tongue is not allowed in the classroom (Nunan 1991, Celce- Murcia 2014).

Nevertheless, the success of CLT is partly due to the rapid spread of textbooks. Every practitioner knows, however, that CLT textbooks have quite a lot of flaws as well; among these are: too many visual aids, which sometimes make pages rather chaotic and disorganized; little emphasis on

language accuracy and more on appropriateness.

The Eclectic Method

The term eclecticism comes to the fore in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Prabhu (1990) promotes the concept of eclecticism in an article (There Is No Best Method—Why?), the title of which suggests the basic concern of the author: the lack of a perfect method or a best method, universally applicable and equally efficient in all contexts. Principled eclecticism can be described as “a desirable, coherent, pluralistic approach to language teaching. Principled eclecticism entails using diverse language learning activities that have different characteristics in response to learner needs” (Larsen-Freeman 2000). As Liu (2004) puts it, the term eclectic method (EM) might not be the best descriptor or denominator as “eclecticism or even principled eclecticism could imply that teachers adopt a varied set of practices based on flexibility and variety of the content”.

Based on postmodern and postcolonial ideas, Kumaravadivelu (1994) suggests that deconstruction of the term method and coined the term post-method condition. Kumaravadivelu prefers the term post-method to eclectic method due to several reasons: “eclecticism at the classroom level invariably degenerates into an unsystematic, unprincipled, and uncritical pedagogy because teachers with very little professional preparation to be eclectic in a principled way have little option but to randomly put together a package of techniques from various methods and label it eclectic” (Kumaravadivelu 1994).

Conclusion

This paper has succeeded in reviewing some of the important English language teaching methods. In as much as these methods can be used in different aspects of language learning, the approaches fall short in the realisation of their purest form in the actual classroom. Thus, it could be concluded that it is impossible to arrive at the perfect approach or technique for English language teaching and learning. The truth is that no new method has ever completely discarded all previous ancient methods. Questioning the authority or efficacy of a method and challenging inquiries in predominant systems is one thing, but changing the paradigm is another, however radical

this change of paradigm might seem, there have always been overlaps between different methods. New methods usually try to correct the insufficiencies of previous methods, but they never efface them totally but rather overtake some of their techniques in slightly modified versions. Language learning is such a complex process that it is impossible to offer a single solution to all our language problems. Perhaps the best method is the one which works, and this varies from context to context.

Recommendations

The paper therefore, recommends that:

- i. Any method which creates conditions for learning to take place is good. As such, it should enable the learner to acquire the strategies of learning

- ii. rather than merely equipping him with knowledge;
What is important therefore, for the teacher is to find out what approach and what method will enable him to realize a particular objective under a set of particular circumstances;
- iii. Teachers of English as second language should be encouraged to attend seminars, workshops and conferences on language teaching and learning;
- iv. Teachers should not restrict themselves on the use of one method while teaching. They should be encouraged from time to time to switch from one method to another.

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