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Department of English Language and Literature

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Second-Language Teaching Methods: Contemporary Methods

1. Total Physical Response

Total Physical Response, frequently referred to as TPR, is very much a ‘natural’-type method: speech understanding precedes speech production, which, in turn, precedes reading and writing. Only the target language is used in the classroom and meaning is derived from actual objects and situations. Students are encouraged to induce rules on their own and speak when they are ready. Again, as with other natural-type methods, things go best with a small number of students.

James Asher, the founder of TPR in the 1970s, considers its unique characteristic to be the learners’ performance of physical actions in response to the teacher’s commands in the target language. His idea is that memory will be enhanced by motor activity with the result that language will be more easily remembered and accessed. Interestingly, this idea and the other major ideas comprising TPR are to be found in the Direct Method, although Asher has emphasized physical activity much more. In any case, there is no doubt that TPR is a very useful method and one that deserves attention.

A. Classroom Materials and Activities

Initially, in a classroom of beginners in English for example, commands are given such as ‘Stand up’, ‘Sit down’, ‘Open the door’, ‘Walk to the table’, ‘Point to the table’, ‘Point to the door’, ‘Where is the table?’, ‘Where is the book?’, etc. Soon after, sometimes even within the same class hour, statements or questions are paired with commands: ‘This is a book. Give the book to Susie’, ‘The book is on the table. Put the book on the chair’, ‘Who has the book? You? All right. Give the book to Anne’, ‘Where is the ball? On the table? All right. Tony, bring me the ball.’ After the proper groundwork has been laid, students are presented with more complex sentences, like ‘Give the book to Bob and give the pen to Jean’, ‘Walk to the table and then turn around’, ‘Take the yellow card and place it under the book’, ‘If you have a blue card then raise your hand’, ‘If you have the big card then place it under the small card’.

From the beginning the student is introduced to whole sentences in context. The teacher demonstrates the meaning of the words and sentences by pointing to the objects and by acting on the commands for all to see. It is claimed that with this method a student can easily learn around 25 new lexical items in an hour, along with a variety of structures.

TPR would predict that doing the action would solidify memory. Advancing with TPR After the teacher has determined that the students are firm in understanding what they have learned, they are then encouraged to speak. They are asked to give commands to their classmates with their classmates performing the actions. Games can be devised to encourage speaking. TPR has essentially the same advantages and limitations as the Direct Method. Students do learn to communicate in speech in a natural way and also relatively quickly. In order for this to happen, however, they must have fluent and creative teachers. Nowadays, though, perhaps the teacher need not be especially creative since a great deal of curriculum material has been developed and published for TPR instruction.

TPR is best used for the early phases of second-language learning. With more advanced language knowledge, actions become less useful and relevant to communication. Then, too, there is the problem of homework. Once out of the classroom, there is little a student can do to review or gain knowledge unless recordings are made. In this regard, adopting the Grammar– Translation method along with TPR might be one good solution.

B. Children vs. Adults

One problem with adults with TPR relates to its special reliance on action (‘Physical Response’). For social reasons, many adults, more so than children, may feel embarrassed marching around a room doing things. While the required action could be modified to lessen this problem, there is not much else a teacher can do to remedy this situation. Adults may become more accepting in time, though, especially after they see their teacher doing the same things that they are obliged to do. TPR works especially well with children, but with adults it may be best utilized in combination with other methods. Thus, TPR should not be viewed as a self-contained method that is applicable to all language-teaching contexts. Nevertheless, with such flexibility, it may well be considered the best of the speech-based teaching methods.

2.Communicative Language Teaching

In the early 1970s, Wilkins (1972) proposed a system of dividing communicative speech into two aspects: *functions* and *notions*. *Functions* (called Speech Acts in linguistics) involve requests, denials, complaints, excuses, etc. and are expressed through whole sentences. Essentially the learner is provided

with a means for performing a given function. For example, learners may be told that there are various ways to make a request: they may be told ‘Shut the window’, ‘Please shut the window’, ‘Would you shut the window?’, ‘Would you mind shutting the window?’, ‘Will you be so kind as to shut the window?’, etc.

Notions are expressions of frequency, quantity, location, etc. These are typically words or phrases within a sentence. For example, students may learn ‘I often go to the movies’, ‘I have a lot of friends’, and ‘He’s standing by the window’. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) presumes that students want to communicate, and it helps them to do just that. Lessons often start with the GT-like exercise. This may be the simultaneous reading and listening to a dialogue based on a real-life everyday situation, such as greeting a friend or buying something in a shop. Initially, there is no translation and no explanation of the structures involved, although the method does not exclude native language aids if that is what the students feel they need for a particular point. There is total reliance on situations and the students’ desire to communicate within those situations.

This kind of teaching stresses communication and allows anything into the classroom so long as it will further the communicative ability of the student. This can include GT-type translations and grammatical explanations in the native language. Or, if a teacher feels that an Audiolingual technique such as drilling a phrase a number of times might help a student, then the teacher does it, so long as the practiced phrase or sentence is later used in a meaningful situation.

Often, there are phrases or sentences which a student starts to create but has trouble with. For example, if a student would like to say in English something like ‘I wish I could have gone’ but can get out only ‘I wish . . .’, the teacher might model the whole sentence a few times, let the student repeat it a few times, and then return to the situation in which the student was trying to use it and let him or her use it. Later, there might even be an explanation of the grammar involved, or even a structure drill, such as letting the student substitute other past participles in a sentence: ‘I wish I could have eaten it’, ‘I wish I could have done it’, ‘I wish I could have seen it’. However, such techniques are only employed in the interest of assisting the students to communicate their ideas. In comparing Communicative Language Teaching with strictly speech-oriented methods such as the Direct Method, Total Physical Response, and the Natural Approach (to follow), we can see that there are marked differences.

CLT permits reading and writing almost immediately, as long as it serves the cause of communication. It also permits grammatical explanations, not relying totally on the student learning by induction. Furthermore, it permits translation. Given the above, it would appear that CLT is not so much

a particular method as an eclectic method that borrows, as it does, aspects of other methods, such as Grammar–Translation, Audiolingual, Community Language Learning, and TPR. The concern of CLT’s advocates is to get people to communicate by any means possible. It is probably because of its eclecticism that CLT has become one of the most widespread of teaching methods in use today. This is especially so in the United Kingdom where so many of its originators and developers have been active.

3.The Natural Approach

The Natural Approach (NA) is the name given by Terrell and Krashen to their ‘new philosophy of language teaching’ developed in the early 1980s. Although NA has a number of similarities with that and with other natural speech-based methods such as the Direct Method and TPR, perhaps the Natural Approach is more of an attempt to provide a theoretical description of the processes involved in second-language acquisition than it is a body of innovative techniques for teaching. In accord with the Natural Method, Direct Method, and TPR, the importance of listening comprehension and delayed speech production is stressed in the Natural Approach. Production is delayed until the student is believed to be ready. The idea that you can only effectively produce speech that you already understand is in keeping with the understanding-precedes production aspect of native-language acquisition.

Graded materials and syntax by induction as for grammatical structures and rules, these are seldom explained and are expected to be acquired by receiving appropriate language input. In this respect, sentences are presented in a simple-to-complex grading and at a level that may be slightly higher than students can understand. This is very similar to the Direct Method and TPR. NA defines itself as a method for developing basic personal communicative skills, oral and written. Goals of the method would include the ability to engage in simple conversational exchanges, to understand announcements in public places, to read newspapers, write personal letters, etc. Like most other speech-based methods, teachers of the Natural Approach make ample use of pictures, objects, charts, and situations in the classroom as the source of language input.

A. The Affective Filter

Such personal learning factors as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety are given special consideration in NA. These constitute what Krashen calls the learner’s ‘Affective Filter’ and play a significant role in gaining a language. A ‘low’ condition of the Affective Filter is said to be most desirable, for in such a case student would be highly motivated, very confident, and under little stress. Such desirable conditions can be fostered if, for example, students are allowed to communicate in situations without having to worry about any grammatical mistakes they may make. On the other hand, a ‘high’ condition of

the Affective Filter would have the opposite effect, blocking any learning through too much anxiety and low motivation.

However, there are other views that hold that Affective Filter factors such as anxiety can actually be useful for language learning. Scovel (1978) contends that a student may have ‘facilitating’ anxiety, which pushes them to greater efforts, rather than ‘debilitating’ anxiety which is the type of anxiety that the ‘Affective Filter’ is most concerned with. Then, too, according to Skehan (1989), high motivation may be a result of language learning under conditions of little stress as well as a cause of that learning as in the premise of the Affective Filter. For example, a learner with high motivation who succeeds in learning would, as a result, probably have their motivation increase even more. The opposite would be true for a learner with initial low motivation: the low motivation would lead to failure in learning, decreasing motivation for further learning. It is thus not clear to what extent motivation is a cause or an effect of language learning success. While it is probably the case that students learn better when they are motivated, not over-anxious, and when they feel relaxed and receive encouragement for their efforts.

B. The Monitor Hypothesis and the Acquisition-Learning Distinction

The Natural Approach differentiates between acquiring and learning a second language. Acquisition is said to involve a kind of inductive process similar to that which occurs in the acquisition of the native language. Such a process is claimed to be automatic and unconscious.

Learning, on the other hand, is said to involve a formal process by which one consciously learns rules such as those taught by a teacher. According to Krashen, language knowledge that is ‘learned’ never becomes unconscious or automatic as does knowledge that is ‘acquired’. The distinction is based on Krashen’s so-called Monitor Hypothesis. According to the hypothesis, ‘learned’ rules are always monitored, i.e. consciously applied in the production of sentences. No such ‘monitoring’ of speech production, however, is said to occur with a grammar that has been ‘acquired’. It is because of the monitoring process that Krashen claims that once students ‘learn’ grammar (instead of ‘acquiring’ it) they will be unable to use it unconsciously, and thus effortlessly, in production.

The ‘learned’ system can only be applied under certain conditions adequate for ‘monitoring’. Only when learners have adequate time, are focused on grammatical form, and know the rule of the grammar can they produce speech using what they have ‘learned’. For example, the ‘learned’ system might be used during a language test or during writing. The consequence of the limited application of the ‘learned’ system is that the teaching of grammar rules by explication is frowned on by advocates of the Natural Approach.

C. Criticism of the Monitor Hypothesis

The Monitor Hypothesis has been subjected to severe criticism by many theorists. Krashen has not really answered his critics, nor has he provided convincing evidence in support of his claim that knowledge gained from the presentation of rules and their explanations cannot become unconscious and automatic. The validity of the Monitor Hypothesis, therefore, is very much in doubt.

An alternative to the Monitor Hypothesis is provided by a model of learning proposed by Bialystok in which consciously learned language can become automatic and unconscious through practice. Certainly, Krashen's claim is counterintuitive to what many people experience when they produce sentences in a second language. For example, according to Krashen, English speakers who are told in their first Japanese lesson that Japanese has a Subject + Object + Verb ordering would continue to consciously monitor this ordering even after six weeks or more. Initial awareness disappears rather quickly. Of course, there are times when second-language learners do become aware of applying certain grammatical rules in the construction of sentences. However, this typically occurs only in the early stages when the learner has not yet integrated that knowledge well enough.

4. Content-Based Instruction

Content in language teaching is most frequently defined as the substance or subject matter that we learn or communicate through language. Content-Based Instruction (CBI) is based on the same principles and on the same psychological and linguistic orientation as Communicative Language Teaching; therefore, it might be better to say that CBI is an approach to language instruction, rather than a separate method. CBI differs from CLT in its focus on instructional input: CBI organizes language teaching around the subject that students need to master, rather than around a linguistic syllabus, and uses the target language as a means to present the subject matter.

A. Language Features

CBI is built upon three main features. First, language is focused on as a means for getting information. Information is constructed and delivered in texts and discourse. Thus, *language instruction is based on texts and discourse*, and not only on sentences, clauses and phrases. Second, because real world language skills such as comprehension and production, and reading and writing, are intertwined, so too should language instruction involve mastering several skills together. Third, it is assumed that language is purposeful.

People learn a second language more successfully when they use this language to get information, which is interesting, useful, and leads to a desired goal. Thus, it becomes essential for the learners to

realize the purpose of the language samples they are studying and link it to their own goals. CBI understands speech communication on the one hand, and literacy on the other hand, as two aspects of the same goal to achieve. No separate grammatical instruction becomes necessary, because grammar is seen as a component in the operation of other skills. Then, too, grammar is more often explained than presented for learning by induction. The teacher is responsible for finding relevant grammatical material to fit into the topic or theme to be learned. Quite often this material needs to be modified by the teacher to be accessible for the students. This may involve simplification (e.g. use of shorter units and clauses), explicitness (e.g. speaking with non-reduced pronunciation), regularization (e.g. use of canonical word order), and redundancy (e.g. highlighting important material through simultaneous use of several linguistic mechanisms)

B. Teaching Procedures

In most CBI courses, the syllabus is organized around specific topics and subtopics, which are chosen in accordance with language learning goals. In a CBI class students might read a text, make notes, listen to a tape recording, and respond orally or in a written form; they might study letters, reports, book chapters, or they might be involved in meetings and discussions; every type of activity being included into a subject topic. Teaching materials and activities are selected according to the extent to which they match the type of program. The materials must be authentic, of the type that is typically used with the subject matter of the content course in native-language instruction.

C. Advantages and Disadvantages of CBI

The teacher is required to play a very active role in the process of learning: there must be a match between a student's specific interests with appropriate language material which might be needed to pursue academic goals. Students are supposed to 'understand their own learning process and . . . take charge of their own learning from the very start. Most CBI courses expect students to support each other, sometimes becoming sources of content themselves, sharing their experience of the subject.

However, the quantity of new material might be overwhelming for some students, who now have to master both a new subject matter and new language skills. Some students in CBI courses have been reported to prefer more structured, traditional classrooms. As for teachers, who mostly have been trained to teach language skills rather than a certain subject, they have to cope with a double workload, spending large amounts of time and energy to prepare for classes. Given such burdens for the students and teacher, the teacher might simply take the easy way out and run a Grammar–Translation class!

5.Task-Based Language Teaching

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is yet another offspring of Communicative Language Teaching. Unlike other approaches, TBLT focuses more directly on the instructional factor, stressing the importance of specially designed instructional tasks as the basis of learning. The main idea is that learners learn the target language by interacting communicatively and purposefully while engaged in the activities. Task definitions vary. Most often a task is defined as an activity or goal that is carried out using language, such as finding a solution to a puzzle, reading a map and giving directions, making a telephone call, writing a letter, or reading a set of instructions and assembling a toy. The task should also involve a communicative act on its own, that is, the task should provide a sense of completeness.

A. Theory of Language

TBLT relies upon a theory of learning rather than a theory of language. The core concepts are based on the following three assumptions. First, learners are considered to learn the target language better when they are engaged in a meaningful activity. Second, a task is exactly what stimulates communication and regulates information input and output. Third, tasks will serve to improve learner motivation and promote learning because they typically use authentic materials.

B. Advantages and Disadvantages of TBLT

The use of tasks and puzzles as a unit in curriculum has always been a good idea, and, in fact, such tasks are widely used in language instruction nowadays. However, TBLT's reliance on tasks as the main vehicle of instruction opens the approach for criticism. TBLT-based language teaching program did not enjoy much success. The basic claim of TBLT as a more effective basis for teaching than other language teaching approaches is still far from being a fact.

6.Computer-Assisted Language Learning

Work in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) began as early as the 1960s when the idea of using a computer for language instruction developed. With the introduction of microchip technology, and then the invention of the Internet, things have changed dramatically. Computers became cheaper, smaller, and more powerful, and as a result, their role in education has grown immensely. By the beginning of the 1990s, a survey conducted in elementary through university educational institutions in the United States indicated that almost every student had access to a computer.

Another study reported that a majority of colleges and universities across Canada were using CALL while in the USA, more than 40 states provide educators with some sort of Internet access, with at least 20 per cent of public school teachers reporting using computers for teaching or curriculum design.

A. Advantages and Disadvantages of CALL

The greatest benefit of CALL is the fact that it is largely oriented to the individual learner: a computer program delivers exactly the material a learner needs, and the process of learning can go at the learner's pace. If necessary, a computer program can be used for mere drilling to get language skills automated by providing a variety of structured exercises on any grammatical or lexical problem. A computer program can be used at home, and a student can spend as much time as he or she needs to master a language skill. In a classroom setting, CALL can significantly enlarge the class capacity without increasing teaching staff. CALL is still far from being used widely due to a number of problems, particularly with regard to different computer operational systems. At present, CALL is only a helpful auxiliary technique in learning the target language.

Conclusion

It is safe to say that students will learn something from any method. No method is a total failure because, in all methods, students are exposed to the data of a second language and are given the opportunity to learn. Thus, to the disappointment of all, there is no magic method. No method has yet been devised that will permit people over the age of 12 or so to learn a second language as effortlessly as they did their native language. Still, teachers can do much to make the experience for a learner rewarding and enjoyable, whatever method is employed.

In judging the relative merits of teaching methods, one must consider goals. Just what is the purpose of having people learn a second language? If the ability to speak and understand a second language is the primary goal, then a speech-based method would be best for them. If, on the other hand, the ability to read and write is the primary goal, then perhaps Grammar– Translation could be the method of choice.

The goals of a nation are important in determining second-language teaching program in the school system. One country may wish to promote the study of reading and translation of scientific material from a second language, and would, therefore, wish to stress the knowledge that is gained through reading. In such a case, the Grammar–Translation Method may well be appropriate. Other countries, however, may regard communication through speech as the highest priority. As such, speech-based methods may be preferred, providing, of course, that adequate finances are available for the specialized training of teachers in such methods and that the school system can afford teaching classes with small numbers of students. When large numbers of students are to be taught and few teachers are available, Grammar–Translation might well be chosen by default, since, practically speaking, no other choice is viable.

A teacher who can afford the luxury of selecting a method for the classroom might well consider putting together a personal method of second language teaching. For example, with both speech and literacy as objectives, one could use Communicative Language Teaching and then supplement it with physical activities (from Total Physical Response), pattern practice drills (from the Audiolingual Method), and explication and translation (from the Grammar–Translation method). Most methods will have some feature that can benefit the language learner.