Approaches and Methods of Teaching English as a Second Language: A Historical Perspective

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ABSTRACT: *The present paper attempts to review various approaches and methods of teaching English as a second language. Various linguists and scholars, all over the world, have adopted different approaches and have proposed different methods to teach English effectively. As English evolved into a truly global language, especially during the previous century, it becomes important to map out the diverse approaches and methods used in different parts of the world for the purpose of its teaching. In the present scenario, when an eclectic approach to teaching of English as a second language is strongly recommended, it is mandatory to review the various approaches and methods from a historical perspective in order to ascertain their usefulness in development of any particular skill/sub-skill. The paper undertakes a comprehensive review of approaches such as the structural and the communicative approach; and methods such as the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method, the Audio-lingual Method, Total Physical Response Method etc.*

Key Words: *The Eclectic Approach, Structural Approach, Communicative Approach, Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method, the Audio-lingual Method, Total Physical Response Method*

Introduction

An approach, in the context of ELT, refers to the way which a teacher considers appropriate for adoption in a second language classroom. It involves specific decisions about the teaching material to be used and instructions to be given so that wider goals of curriculum can be achieved. An approach is wider in comparison to a method in implication which includes "the notion of a systematic set of teaching practices based on a particular theory of language or language learning..." (Rodgers 3). As language is adaptable and fluid in nature, numerous innovations can be made in methods for its teaching/learning. The same can be observed in the case of a second language also. As reasons for learning a second language have been changing from academic to business as a result of globalisation, methods for its teaching have also been undergoing experimentations. After English gained international prominence worldwide and the need of communicative competence in it increased. Over the years, linguists and scholars have adopted various approaches and devised several methods (based upon the prominent theories of language acquisition) to facilitate learning of English as a second language. As the influence of English as a global language has grown exponentially, the methodology used for its teaching has also evolved. Pica states in this regard: "In the past fifty years alone, English language teaching has gone through a whirlwind of transitions in its methodology, from grammar translation to direct method, to audio-lingualism, to cognitive code, and a host of variations in each. Other methods, whose range of implementation has been much smaller in scope, have also been introduced. Among the most popular of these are Silent Way (Gattegno 1972), Total Physical Response (Asher 1969), Suggestopedia (Lazanov 1978), and Counseling Learning (Curran 1972)." (3) Some of the prominent methods which have been used for the purpose of teaching English as a second language are reviewed in the present paper from a historical perspective.

The Grammar Translation Method

This method remained dominant in Europe for the purpose of teaching second languages like Latin and Greek between the 17th and 19th centuries. In this method, learners were made to undergo rigorous practice in translation from and into the target language. It recommended gradual movement from translating and retranslating simple sentences (in the beginning) to complex sentences and longer texts so that the learners became proficient. Rules of grammar were taught explicitly and the learners were made to cram vocabulary items of the target language translated in native language. The medium of instruction in educational institutions was also the first language of the learners. Stern in *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching* clarifies that in this method, "the first language is maintained as the reference system in the acquisition of the second language" (455). Discussing the premises of this method, Tickoo brings out two major points of emphasis: "... (a) classical languages with their intricate systems of grammar were capable of training

human faculties including memory, and (b) that learning these languages was part of a truly liberal education. Teaching and learning primarily aimed at the ability to read full texts rather than to communicate orally in everyday situations" ("Towards an alternative curriculum in Acquisition poor Environments" 349). This method laid more emphasis on practicing reading and writing, and completely ignored listening and speaking. It remained very popular for teaching second languages all over the world.

Despite its popularity, the method, however, is criticised by many scholars for dissecting of language in parts, and over emphasis on translation and explicit teaching of rules of grammar. Qing-xue and Jin-fang in the paper titled "An Analysis of Language Teaching Approaches and Methods Effectiveness and Weakness" state:"this method often creates frustration for students by a tedious experience of memorizing endless list of unusable grammar rules and vocabulary, and the limitations of practice techniques never emancipate the learner from the dominance of the first language..." (69-70). This method also faced criticism for its failure to develop communication skills of learners as Qing-xue and Jin-fang again corroborate: "... this method pay little attention to the student's communicative competence" (ibid. 70). However, despite criticism, this method is still one of the most popular and widely used methods for teaching English as a second language (TESL). Its supporters contend that without formal knowledge of rules of grammar and adequate semantic resources, it is impossible to build communicative competence in environments where the target language is not used for day-to-day communication.

The Reformative Method

The traditional Grammar Translation Method for teaching a second language was considered a repetitive activity by critics who opined that it paid no attention at all to developing communicative skills in the target language. To bring about a change in the focus of the teaching methods, several linguists and scholars proposed alternative methods as Padmaja recounts: "from the 1880's the linguists like Henry Sweet in England, Wilhelm Victor in Germany and Paul Passy in France contributed a great intellectual leadership necessary for reformative ideas in order to gain credibility and acceptance. The discipline of linguistics was evolved with vitality and strength. A new branch of knowledge in the name of phonetics was established...International Phonetic Association was founded in 1886" ("The Historical Perspective of Language Teaching – A Brief Study" 111). In 1899, Henry Sweet postulated that methodological principles must have a support of scientific analysis as well as psychology. He suggested that teaching material should be carefully selected and arranged in terms of four skills. Besides this, he also suggested that the material should be "graded from simple to complex" (*Practical Study of Languages*110-114). In order to change the focus of the language teaching methods, he proposed the Reformative Method which recommended laying more stress on the study of the sound system of a language. This method was based on the premise that speech is the primary form of a language; and writing is secondary to speech. It recommended use of conversional phrases, idioms, an inductive approach to grammar, and linking meaning of something to target language rather than native language. Use of isolated or disconnected sentences, and the explanatory approach to grammar was discarded; and application of phonetics was recommended. Most importantly, practice of translation was shunned, but use of mother tongue was accepted to boost the comprehension abilities of the learners.

Though this method was guided by a reformed approach towards second language teaching, yet it remained limited in appeal because of its over emphasis on development of oral skills and phonetics, and its relegation of reading and writing skills to secondary positions. A balanced approach must aim at simultaneous development of all four skills. This method helped learners only in improving their listening and speaking skills, but was not much useful in improving writing.

The Direct Method

Francois Gouin in his book *The Art of Teaching and Studying Languages* recollects his personal experience when he failed to use German effectively despite learning it through memorising thousands of words from a dictionary and reading translation of Goethe and Schiller. His failure led him to devise a method (based on the behaviourist theory) in which, instead of a heavy text-laden approach, series of simple sentences were used to teach the use of a second language in real life. This method aimed to build communicative competence among learners, but proved to be unsustainable due to its recommendation of rote learning of short sentences of everyday use. They could neither construct longer and complex sentences nor could they engage in two way conversations.

To make learners more efficient in using a variety of sentences in L_2, Soauveur opened a language school in Boston in the late 1880s. The method he used in his school to develop speaking skill was termed as the Direct Method which was based on conveying the meaning directly through demonstration and other such activities, without using the native language. Carl Rogers talks about a German Scholar, F. Franke who provided theoretical justification for a monolingual approach to teach a second language (1). Gatenby

explained that the main principles of this method included teaching grammar inductively in small sized classrooms where teachers and students could converse exclusively in the target language. The focus was on teaching vocabulary and sentences which could be used in everyday life through modelling, demonstration of objects and pictures etc. This method, unlike the Grammar-Translation Method, emphasised on building speaking and listening skills with a lot of focus on improving pronunciation through mimicry (*A direct method English course* 34-42).This method was officially approved for teaching a second language in France and Germany. Maxmillian Berlitz introduced the method in commercial language schools in America.

After remaining popular till the beginning of the 20th century, this method declined due to certain limitations. The biggest of its limitations was that over emphasising speaking and listening completely side-lined the development of writing and reading skills. Another concern of linguists regarding this method was that the teachers who were themselves second language learners of English had limited competence to use this method. Qing-xue and Jin-fang also point out: "... this method requires teachers who are native speakers or have native-like fluency in the foreign language they teach, but in practice, it is difficult to meet these requirements" ("An Analysis of Language Teaching Approaches and Methods Effectiveness and Weakness" 70). Not only was this method devoid of theoretical support, it also failed to effectively deal with class-room difficulties. After its decline, it was revived in the form of Audio lingual Method after a few years.

The Audio-lingual Method

Audio lingual Method, also known as 'the Army Method', became popular around World War-II when armies considered it vital to understand and converse in the language of their ally countries and their enemies. Based on the theory of behaviourism, this method, like the Direct Method, recommended teaching a second language directly "to attain conversational proficiency in variety of foreign languages" (Richards and Rogers 50). Thirumalai explains that this method "represents a return to the Direct Method as its main goal is to develop native-like speaking ability in its learners. It is an extension as well as refinement of the direct method. Translation and reference to 'L$_1$' are not permitted" ("Chapter One" 14). This method recommended teaching a second language without explaining the rules of grammar. It also recommended extensive use of habit formation drills and practice exercises to gain proficiency in second language. It focused on mimicry, memorisation of vocabulary, word phrases, repetitive drills, pronunciation, and reinforcement of responses by using audio-visual aids. It emphasised that vocabulary should be built in the light of the cultural contexts of learners as Jespersen (qtd. in Yi Qu) corroborates: "the highest purpose in the teaching of languages may perhaps be said to be the access to the best thoughts and institutions of a foreign nation, its literature, culture—in short, the spirit of the nation in the widest sense of the word" (58). After remaining popular during 1950's and 60's, this method started losing popularity due to its exclusive emphasis on memorisation and intense oral drills. In his analysis of the method, Dacanay in *Techniques and Procedures in Second Language Teaching* points out: "drills are inherently unnatural, contrived examples of the use of language. Humanising these devices is left to the teacher. Unless the students are stimulated by variety, novelty, and a quick change of cues, they may be mouthing meaningless sentences and in this unwilling frame of mind no learning takes place" (192-93). However, this method is still valued for training the second language learners through drills. Chastain clarifies:"…The methods of drill and pattern have proved pedagogically very sound. Therefore, the language teacher should devise methods to make the drills more meaningful and interesting bringing in real communicative situations outside the classroom" ("The Development of Modern Language Skills: Theory to Practice" 35).This method has evolved over the years and is still present in the form of modified use of audio visual aids for teaching a second language.

The Aural-oral Method

This method, based upon the structural approach to second language teaching, emerged out of experiments in the US army camps during World War II. According to this method, words can be arranged in various patterns called structures to convey a meaning. This approach "is a scientific study of the fundamental structures of the English language" (Bachelor of Special Education: 2017). These structures can be complete in themselves or may constitute a part of a larger pattern. This is a student-centred method which lays focus on development of spoken language by inculcating habits regarding arrangement of words in the target language. In the process, learners keep building vocabulary. Second language teachers are entrusted with the responsibility of correcting speech habits of students. The atmosphere of the classroom is like a workshop where students learn to use language in meaningful situations. The approach, however, also has its limitations. It is only suitable for students of primary grades in classrooms which are not overcrowded.

The Reading Method

This method, also known as the New Method, was devised by Dr. Michael West, a scholar and teacher of English in India. On the basis of his experience, Dr. West stated that it is easier for second language learners to read in the target language than to speak it as Stern also, in *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching,* states*:* "it was the easiest skill with the greatest surrender value for the student in the early stages of language learning" (460). This method emphasised on extensive reading to build overall second language skills. Highlighting the importance of reading, Gautam also states: "plenty of exercises in reading comprehension would make for later progress in speech and writing" (*English Language Teaching: A Critical Study of Methods and Approaches* 39). This method, however, has been criticised for promoting passive reading instead of active participation by second language learners, and for completely ignoring the other three skills.

The Silent Way

Noam Chomsky, in early 1960's, proposed the theory of Universal Grammar in reaction to the methods of teaching English as a second language which were based on the theory of behaviourism. According to Chomsky, language acquisition is the result of a learner's thinking process or cognition. This cognitive approach propagated that learners themselves were responsible for learning and hypothesising the rules of language which they were attempting to learn. The Silent Way, devised by Caleb Gattengo in 1976, is close to this approach. It is based on the belief that learning a second language is a process which is similar to the process of unconscious acquisition of their native language by very young learners. According to this method, learners have to utilise their own perception, awareness, cognition, and intuition for learning a language. This method, like the Direct Method and the Audio-lingual Method, recommended avoiding the vernacular and suggested creating simple situations in which learners attempted to describe certain objects or actions without direct interference on part of the instructor. Gattengo aimed to wean the learners from their dependence on teacher towards autonomy and a sense of co-operation with each other in solving language related problems. The teacher was expected to remain silent and keep himself away from any direct explanatory interactions with learners. He was only expected to concentrate on the content and manner of the learners' speech and observe their pronunciation. Remaining silent, he could use sound, colour coded charts depicting sounds, and words of the target language to initiate learning. However, this method was vehemently criticised by language teachers who considered it harsh, indifferent, and non-conducive to learning as well as teaching.

Communicative Language Teaching Method

Communicative Language Teaching came into prominence in the late 1960s after widespread dissatisfaction with Chomskian theory of Universal Grammar and other structural approaches of language learning. There was a growing realisation that communicative proficiency was the need of the times. Prominent linguists all over the world such as John Firth, MAK Haliday, Dell Hymes, David Wilkins, John Gumprez and William Labov emphasised that objective of a language teaching programme should be to develop communicative competence instead of establishing mastery over structures. Communicative competence, as a concept, was defined and redefined by scholars, resulting in exploration of a variety of functions performed through language and exhibited in learners' accomplishments. William Littlewood in "Communicative Language Teaching: An Expanding Concept for a Changing World" explains the concept of communication as viewed in this approach and states that it is:

… an interactive process in which meanings are developed and negotiated over longer stretches of discourse. This involves developing effective ways of structuring information, creating cohesive links over longer stretches of discourse, opening and closing conversations appropriately, initiating as well as responding, expressing disagreement without producing confrontation and so on. (546)

Instead of theorising about communication, this approach lays stress on actual communication as undertaken in contextually useful situations. It also lays emphasis on developing fluency before accuracy. It may also be called an approach which employs flexible techniques as per the demand of the situation. Keith Johnson explains activities undertaken by several researchers as following:

These attempts may take many forms. Wright (1976) achieves it by showing out-of-focus slides which the students attempt to identify. Byrne (1978) provides incomplete plans and diagrams which students have to complete by asking for information. Allwright (1977) places a screen between students and gets one to place objects in a certain pattern; this pattern is then communicated to students behind the screen. Geddes and Sturtridge (1979) develop' 'jig-saw' listening in which students listen to different taped materials and then communicate their content to others in the class. Most of these techniques operate by providing information to some and withholding it from others.

(*Communicative Syllabus
Design and Methodology* 151)

Fazili also explains the variety of communicative activities and summarises as she states: "the range of exercise types and activities compatible with a communicative approach are unlimited, however, the element of doubt and lack of information or information gap characterizes them all. For communication to take place, some gaps must be provided so that a need is felt to bridge those information gaps" (*Communicative Methods In ELT* 21).These activities which focus on strengthening one particular aspect of language or the other are compared by Dubin and Olshtain to "workouts" (*Course Design* 95).This approach still remains extremely popular for teaching English as a second language all over the world. However, it is also not without limitations. Its focus on fluency at the cost of accuracy leads to a false notion that communicative competence can be achieved even if grammar and structures are ignored. Moreover, in class room situations, there is limited time available for practicing and teachers (especially in second language classrooms) also need to be trained according to the recommendation of this approach.

Suggestopedia

This method was proposed in 1963 by a Bulgarian psychotherapist Georgi Lozanov who believed that human beings possess a much greater capacity for learning than they actually utilise. According to him, we use less than one tenth of our mental capacity to learn while the rest remains unutilised because of various psychological barriers. Inspired by research in Yoga, he devised this method for learning by means of relaxation induced by classical music. In it, the learners were made to sit in comfortable seats while classical music was played in the background in dim light. In such an atmosphere, they were encouraged to concentrate on building vocabulary, reading, and writing; besides engaging in long conversations. Writings translated into their native language were provided to them, and emphasis was laid on content rather than form. Preaching tolerance for errors while learning, this method also encouraged role-playing. It was devised on the premise that a relaxed mind makes a learner more constructive and builds long term memory. Lozanov in *Outlines of Suggestology and Suggestopedy* also states that language learning is an outcome of "positive, comprehensive stimulation of personality" (253).

This method was also criticised for appearing mystical rather than scientific or linguistic. Moreover, it required expensive study rooms and language guides who were also adept yoga trainers, making it a method only for the rich who could afford the luxuries associated with the method. It was not considered practically useful for thousands of learners who study in packed classrooms without even basic amenities.

The Bilingual Method

C.J. Dodson, a British scholar propounded this method in 1967 to supplement the already prevalent Audio-lingual method. He conducted empirical studies in primary and secondary level schools and proved that use of mother tongue for teaching a second language is extremely beneficial. This method can also be called a combination of two leading methods of second language acquisition, i.e. Direct Method and Grammar-Translation Method. It recommended that mother tongue can be used to strengthen various aspects of second language learning by building vocabulary, explaining meanings of words, and rules of grammar. It makes the meaning of a sentence or a text clear by providing equivalents (the form of translation) in the first language. The similarities or dissimilarities between structures of the native and the target language can also be explained in the native language. This method not only encourages imitative responses by learners, but also encourages direct contact with the target language, allowing sufficient time for learning and practicing. H. N. L. Sastri points out the relevance of this method by stating that it can facilitate and expedite learning in the classroom situations. It also has a positive impact on approach of the learners towards learning English by establishing a healthy relationship between the teacher and the learner (24-28). The utility of this method, however, has been extensively debated by scholars. The critics of the method feel that it evaluates second language in terms of one's native language. According to them, such an approach develops limited vision and strengthens resistance among learners. They also argue that learners who use this method, are never able to use the target language as effectively as their first language. It is criticised for interfering in spontaneous oral expression, but the efficacy of this method in developing writing beyond question.

Community Language Learning Method

Developed by Charles A. Curran in 1977, this method is based on the principle that language learning is a result of social interactions. It only takes place successfully if the teacher and the taught share a good interpersonal relationship. They should act like a counsellor and a client respectively. The counsellor is supposed to deal warmly, supportively, and empathetically with his client's confusion and problems related to language learning. Based on the behavioural approach, this method recommended use of easy learning materials such as stories or audio-visual aids etc.

Total Physical Response Method

This method of language learning was developed in 1996 by James Asher, a professor of Psychology in America. Based on the comprehension approach to language teaching, this method recommends learning through co-ordination between speech and physical actions. According to this method, the teacher should deliver instruction in the target language, and then supplement it with movements of his body. Learners are also expected to respond to the teacher's actions with actions. This method emphasises on developing listening before speaking. It also recommends that the target language should be presented in larger chunks, rather in words or sentences; and grammar should be learnt passively from language input. This method is popularly used to teach very young children, but it is not found to be much useful for grown-up learners.

Strategy Based Instruction

This method is based on the realisation of importance of strategies in language development. Scholars like Rubin, O' Malley, Chamot, and Oxford opined that the strategies which learners unconsciously employ while learning their native language can also be successfully used to learn a second language. This premise encouraged the use of meta-cognition to help the learners identify the strategies which they may use to enhance second language learning. This method recommends using text books to provide guidelines regarding use of strategy oriented activities.

The Situational Approach

This approach   is based on the premise that speech is the basis of language teaching. It recommends that language must be taught in a situational context in order to be useful. Use of mother tongue should be avoided and learners should be encouraged to infer meanings from words or structures. The teacher should create situations similar to real life in the classroom and let the students use hints in terms of maps, charts, pictures etc. to speak meaningfully. Use of this approach lays stress on correct use of vocabulary, rules of grammar, and pronunciation. However, it is limited in its inapplicability in higher grades where it is mandatory to teach text books.

Post-Method Era

The decade of 1990s heralded path breaking ideas in the field of second language teaching and learning. Scholars and language teachers started subscribing to an eclectic approach, recommending use of a variety of methods according to the specific function of language in the given context instead of using a single method. V. Saraswathi opines: "different methods may be appropriate to different contexts. If we start searching for the perfect method or the ideal single solution to the problem of language learning, we are bound to fail" (*English Language Teaching* 63). Diane Larsen-Freeman states that there can be "no single truth necessarily accounts for the whole of language acquisition" (*Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*183).Commenting on the inadequacy of a single method to address all problems related to teaching of a second language, Freeman and Freeman further state, "…it is clear that universal solutions transposed acritically, often accompanied by calls for increased standardisation, and that ignore indigenous conditions, the diversity of learners, and the agency of teachers, are immanent in a modernism that no longer applies, if it ever did" ("Language Moves: The Place of 'Foreign Languages in Classroom Teaching and Learning" 168). Modern linguists insist that we should use relevant elements of each method instead of getting obsessed with any single method. Kumaravadivelu corroborates as he states that "... empowered teachers can devise for themselves a systematic, coherent, and relevant alternative to method, one informed by principled pragmatism" ("The Postmethod Condition: (E)merging Strategies for Second/Foreign Language Teaching" 27).The statements quoted above make it amply clear that no single approach or method is appropriate for all learning styles and situations. To address diverse issues related to second language teaching, Kumaravadivelu considers multiple dimensions of the issue and recommends that "language pedagogy, to be relevant, must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular socio-cultural milieu" ("Towards a Post-Method Pedagogy" 538). He further warns that "as long as we are caught in the web of method, we will continue to get entangled in an unending search for an available solution" ("The Post method Condition: (E)merging Strategies for Second/Foreign Language Teaching" 28). He concludes by saying that we must find "an alternative to method, rather than an alternative method" ("The Post method Condition: (E)merging Strategies for Second/Foreign Language Teaching"29).

As a result of all these factors regarding the situation of second language teaching, the present times have come to be known as post-method era. The two most popular techniques used for second language teaching are Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Content Based Instructions (CBI). In TBLT, the aim is to teach language through tasks that urge learners to communicate in the target language, and in CBI, the main

goal is to teach in the target language rather than to teach the language itself. The utility of these techniques for beginner level second language learners has been debateable.

Conclusion

Teaching or learning a second language is a complex process, making it difficult to develop a single approach or devise a single method to facilitate the same. It can be observed that various linguists and scholars have recommended the use of different methodologies to impart effective teaching of English as a second language. Their recommendations have been guided by the specific educational, business, and communicative needs of different time periods. It can also be observed that no single method is so comprehensive as to cater to all the needs of a second language learner of English. Therefore, an eclectic approach can be adopted by the teachers and learners as per their peculiar needs and objectives.

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