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## APPROACHES AND METHODS TO LANGUAGE TEACHING: A REVIEW

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Although what we say below applies to all languages, we are essentially dealing with the teaching of English as a second language is the focal point of the review paper. What we present below is a brief review of the major approaches and methods to (English) language teaching and how these have a role to play in the overall communicative abilities of learners. The approaches and methods stem out of the thinking dominant in a particular time period. Which is why, it is easy to see a direct correlation between the major philosophical schools and approaches to language teaching.

There have been numerous methods to teaching language and the moment we talk of teaching a language, we know that we are talking about second or third language and not the first language. The following have been different methods used to teach second/third language:

### **Grammar teaching method:**

If one goes back in time, history tells us that people have captured other people and so have languages captured populations. It can be said of Sanskrit, Persian and Latin for sure. Robins (1993) gives us a vivid account of how the teaching of Greek and Latin made an important part of the agenda of the rulers who wanted to ensure that the new and the old subjects lived in peace with each-other so that they could focus on the projects of the expansion. It is surprising that today Latin has been reduced to the status of "an "occasional" subject in school curriculum" (Richards & Rodgers 2001:3). There was a time when Latin served as the role-model for all grammar writings in the West. Richards & Rodgers (2001: 3) tell us that the "study of the classical Latin and analysis of its grammar and rhetoric became the model for foreign language study from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries." We are further told that "this approach based on the study of Latin had become the standard way of studying foreign language in schools, a typical text-book in the mid-nineteenth century thus consisted of chapters or lessons organised around grammar points." (Richards & Rodgers, 2001:4)

Grammar Translation method is said to be the result of German scholarship and was “known in the United States as the Prussian method” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 5). Grammar Translation Method (GT method, henceforth), according to Sinha (2016: 150), has also been the prominent “method to teach Sanskrit to students in India.”

Among its goals are:

- Reading the literature of the target language (i.e. 2<sup>nd</sup> language)
- “Translating sentences and texts into and out of the target language” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 5)
- GTMethod looks at language learning only as an exercise in learning the forms of the target language and learning how to translate texts.
- In the GTMethod focus is on reading and writing.
- “The sentence is the basic unit of teaching and language practice.” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 6)
- This Method pays a lot of attention to accuracy and grammaticality. Grammar remains the focal point behind all teaching and all teaching takes place in the learner’s mother-tongue.

Although Richards & Rodgers (2001: 6) claim that GT method was the dominant method of language teaching “from the 1840s to the 1940s and in the modified form it continues to be widely used in some parts of the world today.” It may be safe to say that given the written records, it had been a popular method much before the 1840s.(see Robins 1993, 1967; Itkonen, 1993).

There were attempts to find alternatives to GT method in the 19<sup>th</sup> century itself and some of the names that come to the fore were that of Henry Sweet, T. Prendergrast, F. Gouin, C. Marcel among others. Their collaborated efforts and observations set the tone for changes in language teaching attitudes and this phase came to be called the Reforms Movement in language teaching. (see Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Sinha, 2016).

### **Direct method:**

This method owes much to F. Gouin’s keen observation around “child language learning” and that of others who “turned their attention to naturalistic principles of language learning.” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 11) Another name that stands out is that of L. Sauveur (1926-1907) who opened a language school in Aston in the late 1860s and stressed on “intensive oral interaction in the target language” for which reason this method gained the name Natural method(Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 11). These thinkers believed that foreign language could be taught without translation and all that was needed was proper exposure to the target language.

This served as the foundation stone to the direct method or the oral method. One of the proponents who never used the term Direct method was Maximilian Berlitz. Nonetheless, he followed the same principles which are assumed in the direct method, some of which are given below:

- use of the target language directly and no use of the other tongue,
- “only everyday vocabulary and sentences were taught”,
- “grammar was taught inductively”,
- “concrete vocabulary was taught through demonstration, objects and pictures”,
- “both speech and listening comprehension were taught”,
- “correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasised”.

(Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 12)

The drawback of this method was that it required a lot of effort on the part of the teachers and it required that teachers be either native speakers of the target language or have native-like command over the target language. Its insistence on the use of target language made it a very difficult approach because it was observed that sometimes a brief explanation in the mother-tongue of the learner was a more effective way to teach the new word or concept than using the target language invariably (Brown, 1973). Another linguist Henry Sweet, too identified the severe limitations of the direct method (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 13). One of the important consequences of direct method in language teaching was the attempt by A. S. Hornby who wrote “An Outline Guide for the Practical Study of Foreign Language” in the year 1942. The book focuses on exposing the learners to certain patterns of sentence structure and getting them to practice these patterns until they become proficient in them.

The spoken aspect of language, especially that of English got a serious boost by the publication of Daniel Jones’ “The pronunciation of English” (1909) and “English Pronouncing Dictionary” (1917).

### **Audio-Lingual method:**

From the limitations of the direct method came the need for something better and it was found that audio-taped target language was a better way to give students the exposure to native pronunciation and native structures of sentences in the target language. This led to the emergence of the Audio-lingual Method of language teaching in English. The method became popular also with the Army, especially during the world war-II. The audio-lingual method was an outgrowth of recommendations made in Coleman report 1929 which emphasised for “reading-based approach to language teaching [in] American schools and colleges.” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 50)

World War- II made it mandatory for the army to look for people well-versed in foreign languages such as German, Japanese, Chinese, Malay, etc. and this was the reason that the “Government commissioned American universities and colleges developed foreign language programs for military personnel.” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 50)

The taped language would be repeated several times over a period of time and the expectation was that such repeated exposures would instil the whole of language in the learners. The learners would learn language by imitating the sounds and sentence structures and it was thought that sufficient exposure should be enough. Availability of tapes and other recording devices made it possible to think along these lines.

Audio-lingual method was much like the direct method in that the use of target language was emphasised upon. It was based on the behaviourist assumption that repeated exposure and further reinforcement would lead to improved command of language. The focus was on oral communication and a certain “habit formation among students” (Sinha 2016: 156). Much like the direct method, the audio-lingual method suffered because of the lack of trained teachers with native (-like) command in the target language and also because of the impracticality of the time and space and the logistics required for such method.

One of the approaches that is “Audio-lingual in its orientation” is the CALL (computer Assisted Language Learning) program for it too lays emphasis on “drills and pattern practice” and it too is “preoccupied with isolated sound patterns and sentence structures” (Sinha 2016: 157).

### **Situational Language Teaching Method (SLT)**

While the earlier method focused on the target language and the use of everyday vocabulary and sentences, it still did very little to embed the conversation in any context. Similar flaws were found in audio-lingual method.

The SLT method was developed by the British applied linguists as early as 1930s. There were attempts to control the vocabulary and the grammar and other input to the learners. What was felt important was that the “students capture the linguistic features of the language in use” and draw from the situations they were made to experience (Sinha, 2016: 157). Language was considered an intrinsic part of the whole situation and it was not possible to analyse the linguistic form without the context in which it was being used. The only thing was that the method to teach was inductive, wherein the learners drew from the exposure to inputs.

The method was so popular that much into the 1980s, the teachers taking a “certificate in TEFL was required to master” the P-P-P lesson model of the SLT (Richards& Rodgers, 2001: 47). The three Ps are the three phases, namely-

- “Presentation (introduction of new teaching items in context)
- Practice (controlled practice of the items) and

- Production (a peer-practice phase)” (from Willis and Willis, 1996 as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 47)

### **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**

The CLT came as a response to the shortcomings observed in previous methods of language teaching. What we must take note of is that by the early 1960s, there had already been a marked shift in the approach towards language learning in particular because of the claims made by Chomsky in his review of Skinner’s “The Verbal Behaviour”.

The review brought about a revolution in the overall understanding and approach towards language learning and teaching. It turned the focus from the behaviouristic stand to a cognitive one and made people sit up and take note of the fact that no amount of repetition or exposure could make a child bypass the stages of sound production or sentence production. The fact that children, even of immigrant population, picked up language from the surrounding community with such ease that it was impossible to even speak of repeated exposure from the parents. Therefore, language learning, was nothing short of a miracle which could not be accounted for by mere habit formation.

In order to account for the relative ease in language learning by a child, Chomsky mentioned the possibility of an ‘innate’ capacity which allowed even a three year old child to master a language and he also differentiated between competence and performance.

Some thinkers found Chomsky’s insistence on ‘linguistic competence’ rather narrow and objected to it by suggesting that language was not just about the production of grammatical structures. One among them was Dell Hymes who called to attention the “communicative competence” of the speaker. He stressed that language rules were not just restricted to notions of ‘acceptability’ and ‘grammaticality’ on the linguistics judgements of the speakers; an utterance gets its acceptance from the other non-linguistic rules of social and contextual appropriateness.

There were other thinkers in the form of MAK Halliday who asked for the functional usage to be given importance and Widdowson (1974) who stressed the importance of “cohesion of text and coherence of text...” (Sinha 2016: 158).

Krashen (1977a & 1977b) and Dulay, et al. (1982) proposed further that perhaps there is a “filter and the organiser which work subconsciously and the monitor which works at the conscious level of L2 learners.” (Sinha, 2016: 159). They believe that a child goes through a silent phase in the beginning of language learning and with time acquires “the words and phrases of L2 that s/he learns and acquires in accordance with the principles of uniformity and predictability” (Sinha, 2016: 160).

This is an addition in the sense that Dulay et al. (1982) assign a cognitive schematic approach to language-learning. This was along the lines proposed by S. Pit Corder and Larry Selinker, who proposed Error-analysis and Inter-language approach to second language learning respectively.

Corder emphasised that “learner-errors offer a window into the process of creative construction of a language system” (Amritavalli, 2017: 59). Corder (1967: 165) stresses that “[n]o one expects a child, learning his mother-tongue, to produce from the earliest stages only forms which in adult terms are correct or non-deviant. We interpret his ‘incorrect’ utterances as being evidence that he is in the process of acquiring language... for those who attempt to describe his knowledge of the language at any point in its development, it’s the ‘errors’ which provide the important evidence.”

Selinker (1972) highlighted the fact that the grammar of the target language being learnt is just a phase and it keeps approximating until it reaches a point where it may ‘fossilise’. It is largely an idiolect that develops when a learner is trying to learn a second language but is influenced by the features of both his first language and those of L2 (i.e. the second or the target language). One may think of it as some stage in the acquisition of L2 where the learner is influenced by various factors such as the transfer from L1 (i.e. the first language or the mother tongue), “strategies of L2 acquisition” and “overgeneralisation of L2 Language patterns.”

Given that these major methods of language teaching have already been mentioned, it may not make sense to talk about the other approaches which did come into existence but didn’t last very long to have any major impact on language learning and language teaching scene. Some of these not so prominent methods were:

### **Total Physical Response (TPR)**

This method to language teaching was developed by an American professor James J. Asher who observed the way children learn their first language and found out that they learn it by immersing in the action (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). So the parents have some kind of “body language conversations” with their children and the children respond to it by involving themselves in the action. For instance the parent would say, “pass on the salt” and the child would comply by passing the salt to the parent. When similar instruction gets repeated, followed by repeated actions on the part of the child over a period of months, the child is busy soaking in all the language, its sounds, sentence structures and other aspects and the child eventually begins to speak, once the process of assimilation has taken place. TPR is about replicating this interaction in the classrooms and getting the learners to learn the target language by suggesting them the action (see Asher, 1969, 1996; Cook, 2008 for details).

### **Silent way (SW):**

This method, like many others, appeared on the scene in 1970s and is due to Caleb Gattegno. The central idea behind this teaching method is that the teacher should remain as quiet as possible and should only serve as a silent facilitator whose job is to encourage the students to involve themselves in the act of language creation (Gattegno, 1972; Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The language is taught through highly organised and structured sentences that are presented in a certain order. The method follows the simple principle that says that children learn language by imitation. Learners are given more

autonomy and their abilities in language learning are trusted much more than is usually done in other approaches, so much so that “students concentrate on the task to be accomplished and potential means for its accomplishment” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 83).

According to Richards & Rodgers (2001) silent way is “related to a set of premises ... succinctly represented in the words of Benjamin Franklin:

Tell me & I forget,

Teach me and I remember,

Involve me and I learn.” (Richard & Rodgers, 2001: 81-82)

By staying silent, the teacher develops “the inner criteria” among the learners which “allows [them] to monitor and self-correct their own production” (Richard & Rodgers, 2001: 83). This way the teacher aims or should aim to build the language among the learners.

### **Community Language Learning (CLL)**

Community Language Learning was developed by a psychology professor Charles Arthur Curran at Loyola University, Chicago, who was also a counsellor. He developed this method on the insight from his experience as a counsellor and also from the “Rogerian counselling”, which suggested that “counselling is one person giving advice, assistance and support to another person who has a problem...” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 90). Curran took this “metaphor to redefine the roles of the teacher (the counsellor) and learners (the clients) in the language classroom” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 90). The language learner’s tasks, according to CLL, are “to apprehend the sound system, assign the fundamental meanings, and to construct a basic grammar of the foreign language.” (La Forge, 1983, as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 91)

Because the basic idea is that one party will serve as the counsellor and try to solve the problem of the learner/client, it is important that the teacher be familiar with the intricacies of counselling as a bad counsellor can threaten and spoil the learnings.

That it would be difficult for a counsellor/teacher to cater to the ‘needs’ of the learners in multilingual settings is obviously one of the biggest shortcomings of this approach. It has also been pointed out that since the success of this method depends largely on the active participation of all the parties and in the case of differences among the learners, such an active interaction may not be possible.

### **Suggestopedia**

This was a language teaching method developed in the 1970s by a Bulgarian named Georgi Lozanov, who was of the opinion that the insights from Suggestology, a “science concerned with the systematic study of the non-rational and/or non-conscious influences” which humans constantly keep responding to, can be of immense help in helping develop a method

which would not only ensure a better and faster language learning but also improve the memories of individuals by 25 times. (Stavick 1976: 42, as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 100).

So Suggestopedia depends largely not only on direct interaction “but [the environment] in which the interaction takes place. The bright decor of the classroom, the musical background, the shape of the chairs, and the personality of the teacher are considered as important as instruction...” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 102)

Its main focus is on a highly structured lesson-plans, which is augmented by the style of instruction on the part of the teacher and the creation of the environment in which the instruction takes place. The instruction may be for the facilitation by the change in the intonation or use of music (see Lozanov, 1978 for details). Suggestopedia was criticised for its focus on only the receptive skills of its listening and reading which were thought to give the students a degenerate exposure to language because other skills like speaking and listening seldom find place on the lesson plan.

These were some of the major and minor language teaching methods which were developed with the intention to teach second language and since all of these were developed keeping English, as the target language in mind that was needed to be taught. Whether we admit it or not, English language teaching approaches and methods have shaped all those societies that have witnessed the imperialistic onslaught of the speakers of English and English language itself. India has served its English masters for more than a couple of centuries and though there were things to learn from them, it was largely because of English language that the very intellectual setting of this country has undergone a tremendous change. Whether that has been a tragic change is for the future generations to decide.

### **Conclusion**

Both eastern and western world view language differently. Oriental (Indian to be precise) outlook towards the language has been that of spiritual one, which enables to protect the piousness of the accent and pronunciation of sacred texts, whereas in the western world it is largely viewed as a tool for communication. A few others also consider communication to be change-usage of the language. The paper also discussed about different approaches towards language learning which resultantly lead to conception of a new teaching method. The paper, in details, discusses the approaches and situations which led to the propagation of different language teaching methodologies.

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