

LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS – A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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МЕТОДЫ ОБУЧЕНИЯ ЯЗЫКУ - ИСТОРИЧЕСКАЯ ПЕРСПЕКТИВА

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Abstarct: In this article we will look at ten different methods, name and briefly describe ten different methods of teaching foreign languages, describe the major characteristics of the following methods: direct method, ALM, CLT, explain the theoretical basis of the ALM and the Silent Way, write your own brief definitions of the ten methods, explain why a successful teacher should not be biased in favor of one method or another and explain the concept of “an eclectic approach”.

Key phrases: Method; approach; target language; four skills; activities; competence; usage; use; characteristics; eclectic approach;

Many teachers of English as a foreign language now share the belief that a single right way does not exist. It is certainly true that no comparative study has consistently demonstrated the superiority of one method over another for all teachers, all students and all settings. Presented in this article is a description of language teaching methods in practice today: the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method, the Audio-Lingual Method, the Silent Way, Suggestopedia, Community Language Learning, the Total Physical Response Method, and the Communicative

Approach. Of course, what is described here is only an abstraction. How a method is manifest in the classroom will depend heavily on the individual teacher's interpretation of its principles.

Some teachers prefer to practice one of the methods to the exclusion of the others. Many teachers prefer to pick and choose in a principled way among the methodological options that exist, creating their own unique blend.

Grammar-Translation Method: In the 18th and 19th centuries Latin and Greek were taught by means of what has been called Classical Method. In the 19th century the Classical Method came to be known as the Grammar-Translation Method. The Grammar-Translation Method focuses on developing students' appreciation of the target language's literature as well as teaching the language. Students are presented with target-language reading passages and then they answer questions that follow. Other activities include translating literary passages from one language into the other, memorizing grammar rules, and memorizing native language equivalents of target language vocabulary. Class work is highly structured, with the teacher controlling all activities. Memorization is the main learning strategy and students spend their class time talking about the language instead of talking the language. Little thought was given at the time to teaching someone how to speak the language.

[1]

Guine and the Series Method: As we begin our insight into the history of "modern" foreign language teaching, let's look at the study of Francois, Guine, a French teacher of Latin whose insights and writings were truly remarkable. In his mid-life he decided to learn German and went to Hamburg for one year. Upon arrival in Hamburg he started learning German grammar book and a table of the 248 irregular verbs! He did this in a matter of only 10 days and hurried to the university to test his knowledge.

"But alas!" he wrote, "I could not understand a single word!" Guine was undaunted. He returned to the isolation of his room, to memorize the German roots and to re-memorize the grammar book and irregular verbs. "But alas!" The result was the same as before. In the course of the year in Germany, Guine memorized books,

translated Goethe and Shiller, and even memorized 30000 words from a German dictionary. At the end of the year Guine went home, a failure.

But there is a happy ending. Upon returning home Guine discovered that his 3-year-old nephew had, during that year, learned to speak. His nephew was a chatterbox of French! How was it that this little child succeeded so easily? The child must hold the secret to learning a language! Guine spent a great deal of time observing his nephew and other children. He came to the following conclusions: language is a means of thinking, and representing the world to oneself. Guine set about devising a teaching method. It was a method that taught learners directly (without translation) a series of connected sentences that are easy to perform. Guine was very successful with his method.[2]

Natural Method: Since children learn naturally to speak before they read, speaking precedes writing and receptive skills precede productive ones. Proponents of the method tended to avoid the use of books in class. Like a child at home, a student had to be immersed in language and allowed to formulate his own views. A great deal of pantomime accompanies the talk. With the aid of gesticulation, by attentive listening the beginner comes to associate certain acts and objects with certain combinations of sound, and finally reaches the point of reproducing the foreign words and phrases. The mother tongue is strictly banished.

Direct Method: The Direct Method allows students to perceive meaning directly through the target language because no translation is allowed. Visual aids and pantomime are used to clarify the meaning of vocabulary items and concepts. Students speak a great deal in the target language and communicate as if in real situations. Reading and writing are taught from the beginning, though speaking and listening skills are emphasized. Grammar is learned inductively. Problems have arisen with this approach because adults do not in fact learn exactly like children, and they express the need for explicit instruction in grammar and other aspects of the language. The major characteristics of the method are the following:

- ❖ Classroom instruction was conducted exclusively in the target language.
- ❖ Only everyday vocabulary and sentences were taught.

- ❖ Grammar was taught inductively.
- ❖ Vocabulary was taught through demonstration, objects and pictures.
- ❖ Both speaking and listening comprehension were taught.
- ❖ Correct pronunciation was emphasized.[3]

Audio-Lingual Method (ALM): The Audio-Lingual Method is based on the behaviorist belief that language learning is an acquisition of a set of correct language habits. A learner repeats language patterns until he is able to produce them spontaneously. Once a given sample – for example, subject-verb prepositional phrase – is learned, the speaker can substitute words to make his/her own sentences. The teacher directs and controls students' behavior, provides a model, and reinforces correct responses. The Audio-Lingual method in some way 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 a refinement of the Direct Method. Translation and reference to the mother tongue are not permitted. Just as the Direct Method was an extension of the Natural Method, so Audiolingualism had its theoretical roots in the Direct Method. Some of the things which led to the spread and success of this method include: greater amount of time, smaller classes, and greater emphasis on oral practice which led to automatic production of sentences. The major characteristics of the method:

- New material is presented in dialogues.
- Grammar is taught inductively.
- Little or no grammatical explanation.
- Vocabulary is very limited and learned in context.
- Much use of tapes, language labs, and visual aids.
- Great importance is attached to pronunciation.
- Very little use of the mother tongue.
- Errors are to be avoided at all costs.
- Memorization of set phrases is important. [4]

The Silent Way: The theoretical basis of the Silent Way is the idea that teaching must be subordinated to learning and thus, students must develop their own

inner criteria for correctness. All four skills – reading, writing, speaking, and listening – are taught from beginning. Students’ errors are expected as a normal part of learning; the teacher’s silence helps foster self-reliance and student initiative. The teacher is active in setting up situations, while students do most of the talking and interacting. The theory of learning behind the Silent Way can be summarized in the following:

- ✓ Learning is facilitated if the learner discovers or creates rather than remembers and repeats what is to be learned.
- ✓ Learning is facilitated by problem solving involving the material to be learned.

Suggestopedia: This method seeks to help learners eliminate mental barriers to learning. The learning environment is relaxed, with low lighting and soft music in the background. Students choose a name and character in the target language and culture, and imagine being that person. Students are encouraged to be as “childlike as possible”. Thus, they become “suggestible”. Dialogues are presented to the accompaniment of Baroque music. Students just relax and listen to them and later playfully practice the language during an “activation” phase.

Community Language Learning: In this method, teachers consider students as “whole persons”, with intellect, feelings, instincts, physical responses, and desire to learn. Teachers also recognize that learning can be threatening. By understanding and accepting students’ fears, teacher’s help students feel secure and overcome their fears, thus helping them harness positive energy for learning. The syllabus used is learner-generated: students choose what they want to learn to say in the target language. [5]

Total Physical Response Method (TPR): This approach begins by primary importance on listening comprehension emulating the early stages of mother tongue acquisition, and then moving to speaking, reading, and writing. Students demonstrate their comprehension by acting out commands issued by the teacher; teacher provides original and often funny variations of the commands. Activities are designed to be fun and to allow students to assume active learning roles. Activities eventually

include games and skits. The objective of this approach is to connect physical activity with meaningful language use.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): This approach argues that merely knowing how to produce a grammatically correct sentence is not enough. A communicatively competent person must also know how to produce an suitable, natural, and socially acceptable utterance in all contexts of communication. ‘Hey, buddy, you fix my car!’ is grammatically correct but not as effective in most social contexts as ‘Excuse me, sir could I have my car fixed today?’ Communicative competence includes having grammatical knowledge of the system, and knowledge of the suitability of language use, such as sociocultural knowledge, paralinguistic (facial and gestural). The Communicative Approach stresses the need to teach communicative competence as opposed to linguistic competence; thus, functions are emphasized over forms. Students usually work with authentic materials in small groups on communicative tasks, during which they receive practice in negotiating meaning. The major characteristics of this method are:

- Meaning is paramount.
- Dialogs, if used, center on communicative functions and are not normally memorized.
- Language learning is learning to communicate.
- Effective communication is sought.
- Attempts to communicate are encouraged from the very beginning.
- Translation may be used where students need or benefit from it.
- Communicative competence is the desired goal.
- Teachers help learners in any way that motivates them to work with the language.
- Language is created by the individual often through trial and error.
- Fluency and acceptable language is the primary goal.
- Students are expected to interact with other people, either having hands-on experience, through pair and group work, or in their writings.
- The teacher cannot know exactly what language the students will use. [6]

Immersion Programs: Students are instructed in most of their courses and school activities in foreign language. Instruction is usually begun in the foreign language and eventually incorporates the native language. The main objective of any immersion program is that all students acquire a high level of proficiency in oral, listening, and literacy skills. Fundamental to an immersion program is the belief that normal children have the inherent capacity to learn a foreign language without jeopardizing their native language expertise. Total immersion involves instruction of all subjects in the foreign language, including physical education and extracurricular activities. Partial immersion involves instruction in the foreign language for a half of the school day and in the native language for the other half.

The Need for an Eclectic Approach: At present, teachers of English around the world prefer some form of communicative teaching and learning, rather than audio-lingual method and its derivatives. However, we must remember that a successful teacher is not necessarily biased in favor of one method or another. A teacher should be first of all competent in and comfortable with the methods she wants to use. She tends to select different teaching strategies from different methods, and blends them to suit the needs of her materials and students. She thinks in terms of a number of possible methodological options at her disposal for tailoring classes to particular contexts. Her approach should include most if not all of the principles that will be elaborated on in the article.

A diligent teacher continually learns new techniques from colleagues and students, as she or he interacts with them. The teacher needs to know new directions in teaching of English which are debated in journals and demonstrated in new textbooks. His/her own English speech, pronunciation, and writing should be as close to the “standard” as possible, or native-like. His/her writing in English should be simple, straightforward and plain. He/she should have a good command and conscious knowledge of the grammatical structures of the language and should be at home with the grammatical terms used to describe the structures. He/she should be sensitive to the needs of his/her class. He/she should have a clear voice, and should be energetic and enthusiastic so that the class will come alive in her presence. It is

important for him/her to get all her students involved in the activities conducted in the class. A good actor she should be!

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