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APPROACHES AND METHODS OF FOREIGN LANGAUGE TEACHING

Annotation: this article is about approaches and methods of foreign language teaching. Approach refers to theories about the nature of language and language learning that serves as the source of practices and principles in language teaching.

Key words: approach, method, technique, Grammar translation method, Direct method, Oral approach, Audio-lingual method, The Natural approach, Total Physical Response, The Silent Way.

A method is the practical realization of an approach. Method may be defined as a way of governing or guiding the learning. In a teaching – learning process method may be considered as a structural – functional component of Teacher – Learner activity. Teacher and learner are interrelated. This interrelation is carried out through methods.

The methods of teaching – learning process include:

1. The acquisition of new info about a new linguistic or language phenomenon (the pupil gets knowledge of what he is to learn).
2. The drill and exercises (the pupil performs exercises to form habits on the material he learns).
3. Making use of the acquired habits in the act of common, i.e. in listening, speaking, reading, writing, in other words, in language skills.

Each method is realized in techniques. A technique is a way to organize a learning procedure. By a technique we mean an individual way in doing something, in gaining a certain goal in teaching – learning process. For example, while organizing pupils' acquisition of a new sound the teacher can use either demonstration of the pronunciation of the sound or an explanation of how the sound should be pronounced in the target language or he uses both demonstration and explanation. To help pupils to grasp this sound and produce it correctly as an isolated element, then in a word in which it occurs and in various sentences with the word. An activity is a procedure of getting involved in learning. An exercise is a skill-developing procedure.

The choice of techniques is of great importance for effective teaching. When organizing pupils' acquisition of a new material the teacher thinks of the techniques which are more suitable for his pupils: he takes into consideration pupils' age, the progress in language learning (the stage of learning), their intellectual development, the conditions under which pupils learn.

Pre-communication methods.

The way towards communicative teaching has been a long and controversial one with advances and setbacks. The focus of attention has gradually shifted from the language as a systematic code to the language as a means of communication with the search for an effective method of instruction and consideration of the learner's personality.

Grammar translation method included detailed analysis of grammar rules, translating sentences and texts into and out of the target language, memorizing rules and manipulating morphology and syntax, reading and writing.

Direct method encouraged the use of foreign language in the classroom. Classroom teaching was conducted in the target language only. The learning process was mostly based on imitation and memorization.

Oral approach or situational language teaching was based on selection and organization of the "situations". "Situations" were organized with the use of concrete things and pictures. They were used to introduce the new grammar structures.

Audio-lingual method applied the principles of structural linguistics to language teaching. Pattern practice became a basic classroom technique. Audio-lingual method was the combination of structural linguistic theory and fundamentals of behaviorism (stimulus, response, reinforcement).

The Natural approach put emphasis on the exposure to language (comprehensible input) rather than formal exercises. The following hypotheses were at the foundation of the Natural approach: the acquisition/ learning hypothesis (only natural-like acquisition can result in mastering the language while "learning" helps getting knowledge about the language), the monitor hypothesis (explicit knowledge has only one function, that of monitoring correctness of the utterance), the natural order hypothesis (the acquisition of grammar structures proceeds in a predictable order), the input hypothesis (the relationship between the input and language acquisition shows that learners need comprehensible input), the affective filter hypothesis (learners with high motivation, self-confidence, low anxiety generally do better in language acquisition).

Humanistic approach

Humanistic approach emerged as a reaction to the behaviorist approach to teaching with the rigid teacher's control over the learners' behavior. The concern of humanistic tendencies was to enhance people's self-fulfillment and their role in directing their own lives.

Humanistic approach to language teaching emphasized the value of developing the learner's whole personality, the socialization of an individual in a group, creative activities with music, arts, etc. It was further developed in community language teaching. The method was based on counseling techniques. In lay terms, counseling is giving support to another person. This method was described as humanistic with self-fulfillment and secured self-esteem of the learners.

The priorities of the method were to develop learners' relationships in the group, to encourage the learners' feeling of security and belonging to a group as well as asserting their personal identity. "Learner autonomy" became a new and much discussed concept. Affective learning and learner anxiety were taken seriously as an important factor of effectiveness. Instead of the formulaic knowledge (the product of behaviorism) teachers tried to develop in learner's heuristic knowledge.

Special attention was given to the issue of "debilitating anxiety", which unlike "facilitating anxiety" could hinder and even block the process of language acquisition. As a result of debilitating anxiety during the lesson, learners usually develop a "defense mechanism". Some of them withdraw from the work of the class, make a game of a task, fidget and let their attention wander or plunge into the world of fantasy. They can challenge the teacher with unacceptable behavior or passive aggression in the form of "silent protest". Some learners accuse others of their own learning problems. As expression of protest the learners join subgroups of other failure learners.

An important issue which is tackled by the humanistic approach to teaching is the rejection of the learners by their teachers. The rejection of this type can be hidden and show itself indirectly. These teachers prefer not to look at the learners, which they dislike (gaze of avoidance). The whole teacher's body movement is in the direction opposite to the learners they dislike. The teachers keep these learners at a greater distance and give them less verbal contact and addresses. These learners are denied teacher's supportive intervention and detailed feed-back that other learners formally enjoy. They are given a reduced teacher's waiting time.

The humanistic approach advocated "non-conflict", "non-judgement" and "empathy" in the relations of the teacher and learners. The importance of the humanistic approach lies not just in the effectiveness of language learning but also in the development of the personality.

The humanistic approach facilitates the self-fulfilment of learners. Self-fulfilled people have a healthier psyche and are more capable of a creative non-stereotyped behavior. This helps them to identify easily with the group. They demonstrate a more accurate perception of reality and accept it without unnecessary conflicts. They focus more on cognitive problems and less on themselves. These learners possess the capacity for peak experiences (through love, music, art, nature, etc.) and a greater aptitude for empathy with other people. They are able to see things other than in black and white. Self-fulfilment of learners is achieved through learner-centered teaching by using interactive tasks in pairs and small groups, creating a supportive environment and building confidence in learners.

Intensification tendency

Total Physical Response (TPR) is the combination in the teaching method of speech and action. The method combined verbal rehearsal with motor activities.

The Silent Way was based on the premise that the teacher should be silent as much as possible in the classroom, while the learners will produce more language. A typical feature of the Silent Way is the use of color charts and rods as memorable images and signals to help in verbal responses. The proposition underlying this method of instruction was that learning is facilitated if the learners discover or create even with minimal language skills rather than rehearse and remember.

Suggestopedia aimed at optimising learning by music and rhythm, authoritative teacher's behavior and 'infantilisation' of learners, physical and psychological relaxation. The focus was on the memorization processes, which according to the authors, was 25 times faster than in conventional learning.

Another example of exploiting resources of the human psyche in teaching languages is neurolinguistic programming (NLP), NLP is shaping one's inner world through reevaluating one's experience and using the power of the word. It aims at opening up one's inner resources as a way towards accelerated learning.

Communicative approach

Communicative language teaching is based on a number of typical features of the communication process. Language teaching is understood as learning to communicate through communication. The emphasis is put on the meaningful and motivated use of language by the people who communicate in order to achieve a certain goal.

Language for learning is derived from communicative experience in a variety of real world situations. Fluency is put over accuracy. Interactive learning is encouraged as the way towards acquiring communication skills.

The learners are taught "negotiating" the meaning (working towards better understanding each other), and using "communication strategies".

Communicative competence

The idea of communicative competence started to develop with the construct of "linguistic competence". Linguistic competence is understood as innate knowledge of language. Linguistic competence is only part of what is needed for communication.

Communicative competence encompasses the knowledge of how to use language in the real world, without which the rules of grammar would be useless.

Communicative competence can be described as including grammar competence (knowledge of grammar rules, lexis and phonetics), pragmatic competence (knowledge of how to express a message), strategic competence (knowledge of how to express a message in a variety of circumstances), socio-cultural competence (knowledge of social etiquette, national mindset and values, etc.) Communicative competence breaks down into the two major components of knowledge: knowledge of language and knowledge of how to achieve the goal of communication.

Competence is not the same as ability. In order to be able to communicate, people need psycho-physiological mechanisms, i. e. communicative skills.

Communication is the process of interpersonal interaction and requires the knowledge of social conventions, i. e. the knowledge of rules about proper ways to communicate with people. In accordance with the social conventions, participants in communication perform communicative functions (to socialize, to inform, to persuade, to elicit information, to manipulate behavior and opinions, to perform rituals, etc) and communicate roles (leader, informer, witness, participant, catalyst, entertainer, etc). In order to perform these functions a speaker needs more than just the knowledge of the language.

The process of communication is characterized by communicative strategies of achieving a goal through communication.

Success of communication depends very much on the knowledge of successful strategies chosen by the speakers. E.g. the Prince (in "The Prince and the Pauper" by M. Twain) was unable "to ask" because he was only competent in how to "give orders".

Successful strategies are known as the "four maxims" of good communication. These maxims include quality (say only what is supported by evidence), quantity (say no more and no less than you think is needed), relevance (say what is relevant to the point of communication) and manner (present your ideas clearly and unambiguously). The four maxims of successful communication can be used in teaching how to communicate effectively.

In choosing a strategy the participants in communication can prefer either an achievement strategy (guessing, paraphrasing yet achieving the goal) or a reduction strategy (co-operation, avoidance and sometimes giving up one's goal partially or completely).

For successful communication learners need to know non-verbal means. They include proxemics (physical distance and life space in the process of communication), kinetics (body language, gestures and postures), facial expression (smiles, eye contact), haptics (the use of touch in communication), clothing and physical appearance in the process of communication (the concept of decency in clothing and physical appearance), paralanguage ("um-m", "uh-huh", etc). Many non-verbal expressions vary from culture to culture, and it is often the cause of cultural misinterpretation. E. g. a physical distance can be too close or somebody's private space can be trespassed. Gestures and postures can be inappropriate; there can be a lack of smile and eye contact. Touching somebody's body during conversation can be taken as offensive. The dressing habit can be alien. Vocal confirmation following the conversation (Aha! Etc.) can be inappropriate.

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