Methods of English Language Teaching in India:
From Primary to Higher Level

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to describe the methods of teaching English in India as a second language, which have been propounded till date for providing classroom instruction to enhance the second language skills of Indian learners at all levels (adults as well as children). It describes how different methods can be put to best use at different levels of learners, i.e. different 'learning stages'. It is based on teaching CBSE students of all classes as well as adult learners of English. It shows how all the methods hold their own unique place in second language teaching. It also shows how all these methods are closely interwoven and are being followed (to some extent) in our school curriculum.

Keywords: Second language teaching methods; Methods of teaching English in India.

Introduction

Since the post-method period, there has been a steady resistance to the use of any one method in second language teaching. A combination of methods is encouraged. This article aims at presenting a combination of methods that have been propounded till date, and how they can be helpful in the course of second language teaching. It is proposed that these methods be seen as a continuous process of growth, with the methods playing a unique role in the trajectory of a learner's second language development. Each method contributes in creating a naturalistic environment at consecutive levels for the second language learner. For example, a bilingual word list can be used during the initial stages, whereas communicative language teaching can be used at a later stage of the second language teaching class, once the learner has attained basic language proficiency.

People acquire their first language when subjected to environs that facilitate language learning. However, when it comes to second language, a debate arises on whether an individual method or methods or no methods should be followed for teaching the language. In a multi-lingual country like India, all languages (native languages/English) are taught as academic subjects in schools, and mostly in a similar manner. Generally, a student in India knows three languages, viz. the mother tongue, Hindi, and English. In this essay, let us see how the different methods to learn the second language benefit the students at different stages of the learning process. As Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) state, the methods could be replaced by the methodological inventions to facilitate language learning.

Methods

All the methods which have been followed till today in SLT, like grammar translation, audiolingualism, silent way, Suggestopedia (Desuggestopedia), and so on, possess a unique place in the language teaching/learning process. To understand this, let us divide the classroom teaching process of the students into learning stages, beginning from primary level to higher levels. For convenience, we will assume the primary level to correspond to the primary class children of the school. However, we can see that all methods hold an important place in different stages of teaching and learning, and hence can be applied to language learners of all ages. We can see how the pattern of teaching and the pedagogical syllabi of CBSE–NCERT correspond to a number of these methods.

Total Physical Response

Total Physical Response (TPR) holds the first place in the stages of learning. As a child learns the first language by listening, TPR follows the same process. The teacher uses imperatives and performs the same actions herself. Students repeat and act accordingly (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Students are subjected to the environs of the TL. This method helps create awareness of the language and provides necessary exposure to the target language. It improves the listening skills of the students. This method is best suited at the primary level when children begin their second language classes. The physical activity involved keeps them enthusiastic.

Audiolingualism

This method believes in formal drills and repetition by the students. It has been proven that spoken form precedes written language. Just as a child learns the first language (speaking) through exposure, audio-lingualism serves a similar purpose of subjecting learners to the atmosphere of the language. Pronunciation could be corrected without importance given to errors. This method, which could improve the speaking and reading skills of the students, is followed in the primary classes in our schools. The most important fact to be remembered is that the students do not have to face the real world after this stage. This is just the beginning.

Suggestopedia/Desuggestopedia

Ideally, suggestopedia could be resorted to at the initial phase of a language teaching class. If the target students are young, suggestopedia could be followed along with TPR, which could be effective. If the target students are adults, it could prove more fruitful at this stage, but not independently. It could be combined with audiolingualism. Students need time to understand (desuggest their limitations) that learning is possible even through music and that understanding the culture of the second language is important. Savignon (2007) has emphasised the importance of culture in language studies: "Interest in teaching culture along with language has led to the emergence of various integrative approaches." The Russian scholar Saphonova (1996) has introduced a sociocultural approach to teaching modern languages that she describes as "teaching for intercultural L2 communication in a spirit of peace and a dialogue of cultures" (p. 62). In addition to the grammatical, discourse, and strategic features of language use in the L2

curriculum, Saphonova places particular emphasis on the development of sociocultural competence (Savignon, 2007).

According to Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), suggestopedia is now called desuggestopedia, to reflect upon the importance placed on desuggesting limitations on learning. They have quoted Lozanov and Miller to establish the role of desuggesting in a language class. The students are helped to desuggest their mental limitations. This is accomplished by dramatisation/role playing, singing, and dancing. Students are given roles and names according to the TL culture. In an Indian classroom, wherein children come from various cultures, it is important to honour the cultures and make them adapt to the culture of the TL. This method can help in turning the heterogeneity of an Indian classroom into a homogeneous environment to facilitate effective language teaching and learning.

Grammar-Translation Method

The second language is taught by translating texts into the native language of the students. It texts believed that this method is useful in making the learners proficient in the grammar of the NL, but not proficient in the TL.

During this fourth phase of second language learning, TL can be taught through translation into NL when teachers are dealing with words/sentences, as well as the use of grammar. The purpose of translation is to overcome the errors committed due to interference of the NL at the time of learning. This method inculcates error-free speaking and writing.

Students understand the content of prose/ poetry well if they are taught the difficult words/phrases through their NL. They participate in the discussions because they feel comfortable. "The first language is maintained as the reference system in the acquisition of the second language" (Stern 1983 cited in Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). The importance of first language in teaching the second language has been established repeatedly. When students learn a second language, they establish a correlation between the target language and their first language. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) have quoted Paradowski (2007), who observes that the Council of Europe encourages plurilingualism, and that teachers should take advantage of learners' proficiency in the first language to render instructions in the target language. Mahboob and Lin express a similar observation. "One of the most consistent findings in the NNEST (non-native English speakers in TESOL) literature is that both students and teachers find the NNESTs' (and other teachers) proficiency in the students' vernacular as a positive and useful resource…. If these findings are indeed valid, then one might ask: why is it that ELT teacher education programs and teacher educators do not train the teachers in judicious and pedagogically appropriate uses of local languages in the classrooms?" (Mahboob & Lin, 2016)

Teaching the nuances of the language inculcates confidence in students. Under the guise of making language learning easy for students, researchers and teachers should be on guard that they are not making the future path difficult for the learners.

The NCERT grammar workbooks (classes IX and X) provide exercises in the context of the outside world. There are other publishers whose grammar books follow this pattern in lower classes. Thornbury (2002) has provided tips for grammar instruction and shown its importance in language teaching/learning. A review of Thornbury's book by Parrott and Swan (2001) foregrounds the importance of imparting second language education through grammar. Parrott and Swan (2001) have quoted others, while reviewing Thornbury's book, to provide evidence of this fact.

"Where are we now, on the theoretical swings and roundabouts? A brief glance round the fairground (see for instance the papers in Doughty and Williams (1998)) suggests the following state of affairs:

1. It is all right in general to teach grammar. We have noticed once again that adults learning foreign languages through unstructured exposure do not get all their grammar right. And recent experiments have established that instruction does make a difference to accuracy (Long 1983; Doughty 1991).

2. There is less agreement about how to teach it. Giving explicit rules, which used to be a Bad Thing (it involved 'teaching about language' rather than 'teaching language') is now probably OK if it relates to a point that comes up in the context of communicative activity. This leads to 'consciousness-raising' and 'noticing', which in turn lead to 'restructuring of the learner's internal grammar', and these are all Good Things.

Once the concept is clear to the learners, dependency on the NL should be slowly reduced.

Direct Method

By this stage, students are expected to have entered the medium level of the learning stage. Once the teacher starts reducing dependency on the NL for certain structures of the TL, the teacher should follow the direct method, wherein the TL is taught directly and meaning is conveyed through demonstrations and visual aids. Direct method was initially called the natural method as it did not depend on translation, grammar, or dictionaries. Direct method could be followed with some modifications, such as restricting the use of the NL. The teacher can encourage students to use a dictionary, which will give meanings of words from TL to TL (instead of TL to NL). This will enhance vocabulary. As the learners have been given instructions through GTM, reported speech and passive voice can be taught directly. The direct method was modified so that language could be taught communicatively. This can be pursued through texts as well as grammar. Teaching grammar beforehand will render finer results, as it establishes confidence, thus enhancing the students' speaking skills. By this stage, students are expected to have gained sufficient knowledge and confidence to communicate in the language.

Errors should be analysed, categorised, corrected, and explained to the learner. Otherwise, there will be recurrence of the error in the future. Depending on the skill a particular learner is taking more time to imbibe, any of the methods could be repeated at any point of time. There is no rigidity in the linearity of the methods, as every learner is different.

Methods – Separate identities or are they *interwoven*?

From the above discussion, one might have the

impression that these methods are traditional pedagogical instruments, which should be followed in a language class. This is not completely true. We are trying to amalgamate the methods of a language class with the syllabus of the students, trying to understand how the four skills of LRSW can be developed.

The earlier methods were teacher-centric. The following methods are student-centric so that students gain confidence in using the language.

Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative language teaching is important, as people should understand what to speak and when. This shows that CLT presumes that students have preliminary knowledge of the language, which should be worked upon to achieve communicative results. Hence, CLT could form a part of language teaching at this learning stage, i.e. after the students have learnt the linguistic and functional aspects of the language. In addition, classroom activities could be conducted, keeping in mind not only the linguistic and functional aspects, but also the communicative aspects.

The questions at the end of the chapters in the CBSE syllabus facilitate this kind of learning. For example, in the middle and higher classes, students have a 'think and answer' section, which goes beyond the content of the chapter. There is diary writing, in which students imagine themselves as one of the characters in the story and write. Dialogue writing includes real-life situations.

Content-Based Instruction

This is one of the best methods of a language

teaching course. This is already happening in India, as we have English-medium schools where students study all subjects (science, geography, and so on) in English, although this method presupposes existing knowledge of the language. Hence, in our SLT strategy, we expect this method to be followed at this stage.

Task-Based Language Teaching

Task-based language teaching and problem-solving fall under the analytical syllabi (instead of the synthetic syllabi) as given by Wilkins. This facilitates language learning as the need arises. However, this assumes that the students have prior knowledge of the language. Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2011) have quoted Candlin and Murphy, "The central purpose we are concerned with is language learning, and tasks present this in the form of a problem-solving negotiation between knowledge that the learner holds and new knowledge" (Candlin and Murphy cited in Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

Following this method can enhance the analytical skills of the learners. Although TBLT has been associated with teaching the language in a communicative way, if tasks are introduced to teach the forms of the language, both fluency and accuracy could be tackled simultaneously.

The tasks are given to the students in a group in this method. However, Prabhu (1987) observes that students should do problem-solving in TBLT by themselves and with the help of the teachers, but not in a group or by interacting with other learners. For Prabhu, these tasks are the inputs for learning, hence his method is in consonance with the

comprehensible input hypothesis of Krashen. Krashen (1982) places importance on the comprehensible input in language learning, but Swain (1985) observes that it is not only comprehensible input, but also comprehensible output, which plays an important role in language learning. According to Long, interaction also plays an important role. Hence, if TBLT is followed, along with student interaction with the teacher, and student output is corrected with feedback, it could result in successful language teaching and learning.

Conclusion

The process of learning stages can be applied to learners of any age. Depending on the target learners – their age, existing knowledge of the language, and so on, the methods and their implementation could be modified by the teacher. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) observe, "I think that teachers should be exposed to all methods and they themselves would 'build' their own methods or decide what principles they would use in their teaching. We cannot ignore methods and all the facts that were considered by those who 'created' or use them in their teaching. We need a basis for building our own teaching".

With these methods, both fluency and accuracy can be achieved successfully in second language teaching.

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