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Trends in Language Teaching Methods

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The basis for this discussion comes from my foreign language *learning* experiences in Finland and ESL (English as a second language) *teaching* experiences at various levels in the United States in schools and at universities teaching English to adults from many different language backgrounds. Additionally, I will incorporate information from my *teacher training* experience at Georgetown University, where we have more than 200 graduate students studying for the M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Linguistics and ESL. Of our students 60% come from abroad, mainly from the Middle East and South America.

Grammar-translation method

Grammar-translation method is the one that learners of my generation received in Finland. The em-

phasis was on vocabulary and grammar study, reading of classical texts with emphasis on grammar rather than on content, with little attention to pronunciation. The classes were, of course, held in Finnish. As a positive point of this method I would mention the solid basis in language forms and the rich approach to the study of text. Also, some students found this approach appealing because of the security a text brings. Some students also like to memorize chunks of text.

The grammar-translation method has come under attack from many directions. For example, according to the current reading comprehension theories, emphasis should be on the knowledge that the reader brings into the reading situation. This new theory with attention to the reader's background knowledge would consider the kinds of classical texts that we read inappropriate

— neither motivating nor comprehensible because they contain schemas that are unfamiliar to the reader. Even though I generally believe in familiarizing students with the content of the reading passage, it amazes me what the human mind finds fascinating. I will never forget a story by Somerset Maugham called "Luncheon" that I studied in an English book at high school. It had only two characters, a young Oxford scholar and a lady whom the young man was taking to dinner. The man was on a low budget and the lady, despite her repeated assurances of never eating much, ate the most expensive delicacies on the menu. The final result was that the poor man ended up spending all his money, which was supposed to take him through the next months. The point is that the story had many unfamiliar schemas for me as a high school girl from Kattilainen, Virolahti — restaurant

going, British college tradition, unfamiliar foods, dating, etc. Nevertheless, the story is clear in my mind, perhaps because of the masterful writing style of Somerset Maugham and because it tapped my curiosity, a necessary condition for any learning.

Audiolingualism

The audiolingual tradition was a reaction to the lack of spoken language in the grammar translation method. As you know the method emphasized use of dialogues, mimicry, memorization, over-learning; structures were sequenced from simple to more complex; drills were common; skills were sequenced: listening, speaking, reading and writing; vocabulary was restricted; contrastive analysis was used to predict errors; pronunciation and intonation lessons formed a great

part of instructional time and language was often manipulated with disregard to content. The audiolingual method has been used to teach languages in the United States for the past twenty years or more and is still popular in intensive English programs like the one that we have at Georgetown University where hundreds of adults come from various countries to learn the English language in a year or two, a short period of time. The strongholds of this method in the United States have been the University of Michigan and Georgetown University, the latter having Professor Robert Lado, a world famous linguist in audiolingualism and contrastive analysis.

Audiolingualism was the method drilled in me in my first teaching positions in Wisconsin and in the methodology courses I attended at the University of Wisconsin at Madison in the early 1970's. At that time ESL teaching in the United States was manned by former Peace Corps volunteers who had been trained by Dr. Earl Stevick. He had studied languages audiolingually and is now the head linguist for the language training at the Foreign Service Institute of the United States. I found many of the meaningless drills in the textbooks inapplicable in my teaching of children in ESL situations where they were exposed to English all day long. I could not wait for several months to teach the present perfect tense if the student heard questions like: "How long have you been in this country" all day long. In other words, I had to teach my students language that they could use to ask direc-

tions to the bathroom, filling forms, etc. Naturally, I had to teach all the language skills (listening, speaking, and writing) simultaneously. Additionally, in terms of actual techniques, children were not very enthused by mechanical repetition and drills, but if I added some physical involvement (walking in circles, dancing) to get the blood moving, learning became easier. I certainly was not the only teacher to supplement audiolingualism with other techniques, that is sure.

Cognitive code

Gradually in the 1970's the cognitive approach became a fad, thanks to our new ways of thinking about language acquisition — as a child learning L₁ generates language, similarly L₂ language acquisition is creative construction. In language teaching then emphasis is on communication, pronunciation is de-emphasized; group work is popular; there is renewed interest in vocabulary; teacher is viewed as facilitator; errors are accepted; written language is important; repetition is discouraged; language is contextualized and use of L₁ is more acceptable. I'd like to point out that this approach reintroduced practices from the grammar translation method such as: a) deductive explanation of grammar; b) renewed interest in teaching vocabulary and c) importance of written language in general.

Eclectic methods

The eclectic method utilizes the best parts of all existing methods. The basic prin-

ciples behind it are similar to the cognitive code approach: meaningful language learning; learner centered instruction; integration of skills; acceptance of learner errors and language learning in L₂ with use of some L₁. Some people call this enlightened eclecticism, selection of the best materials and techniques as well as teaching content based on learner needs and situations — e.g. for a 12th grade high school ESL student in the United States, one would teach language through math and science; thus functional language use with methodological focus on attitude and motivation.

New trends

Yet, despite the acceptance of eclectic methods I think that today we are searching for another better defined methodology; teachers want well-defined methods and techniques they can use in classrooms. At the 1982 international TESOL conference in Hawaii (over 2000 participants) there were a host of papers related to various areas of methodology representing current thinking on language teaching. I would divide the themes of these papers into three major categories: a. notionalism; b. neo-audiolingualism and c. humanism.

Notionalism

Notionalism seemed to attract the largest audiences at TESOL. At the present the functional/notional view of language in the United States has been successful only in adult immigrant education where necessary functions of

language seem easier to identify. With regard to the academic adult and the L₂ child, notionalism is still in its infancy in the United States.

Judging by the textbooks there does not seem to be a well-defined notional methodology. While in the grammar-translation and audiolingualism methods we were told exactly what kinds of drills and exercises to use, we do not have an orthodox notional methodology yet, just as we are not in agreement with the name for the "beast." Instead, we use approaches based on learner needs and borrow methods that develop learners' knowledge and use of grammatical and sociolinguistic strategies (register, tone, situation, speaker role). As techniques, role play, drama, communicative games have been recommended. These were used in audiolingualism, too; what is different is the communicative urgency and interactional skills in conversation.

A lot of related research in the United States is being conducted on the role of speech acts in L₂ acquisition crossculturally and interactional strategies, which will contribute to improved teaching techniques and materials. While these studies are conducted in the United States with many cultures, of course, there is some very good research going on in Finland on speech act differences between Finnish and English. Auli Hakulinen, and Raija Markkanen, researchers at Jyväskylä University, for instance, discussed with me their current work involving politeness formulas in Finnish and English in making requests. They say that because in Finnish you can use the imperative to

► request politely "Anna(s) leipää," Finns may sound impolite in asking for bread in English, for instance, because there is no equivalent in Finnish for the English "please." English speaking children, on the other hand, learn at age two or so a variety of request forms for different situations. I have observed my son Timo learn polite request forms in English at the age of 2.5. He would say sentences such as: "Garbage men, would you stop that noise," using a proper intonational pattern when he was looking at the garbage collection outside our house. Talking with his mother and father Timo continued to use the less polite forms using the imperative form; he said and (still does): "Give me milk (please)," "Take my shoes off." Thus, as his English-speaking peers, Timo is learning at an early age polite forms of requests for appropriate situations.

Differences in conventions carry over to written forms, too. In Finnish you would not start a business letter with "Rakas Kari," even though in English "Dear Kari" is the convention. The research in speech act theory is ongoing — if there are 2000 speech acts as has been suggested, linguists will have work for another hundred years!

The other aspect of research, interactional pattern has studied conversations between teacher-student and student-student. More work needs to be done in this area, we need to analyze more situations formal classroom situations as well as informal situations — travel agencies, banks, shopping — to predict real-life conversation. Also this research will show that real-life is not as perfect

as textbooks make it look — there are many more how's, hmm's, topic abandonments, etc., in real-life conversation than textbooks show.

Neo-audiolingualism

The second major category of papers presented at the 1982 TESOL convention was on neo-audiolingualism. There is a revival of pattern practice thanks to research findings about children's L₁ acquisition — lots of repetition, need for practice, but now it is communicative and learner generated.

Further, neo-audiolingualism is reflected in new methods that sequence skills strictly, such innovative methods as Asher's "Total Physical Response," in which students listen to commands and perform participating actively and Winitz's "Delayed response," which also has a silent period. These methods are receiving strong criticism from linguists because these methods have ignored findings from L₁ language acquisition such as that children learn to vocalize at birth and from educators who raise the question: "Why should we waste time and not use all the senses in the learning?"

Further, from a cultural and personal point of view, "Total Physical Response" may not appeal to all personalities. Not all adults want to be subjected to commands from the instructor.

Humanistic approaches

In the domain of the humanistic approaches there are such popular methods as "the Silent Way," "Community Counseling Learning," and "Suggestopedia."

All of these methods emphasize the importance of a positive psychological state of mind of the learner. "The Silent Way" is a system developed by Gattegno in 1972. The name is misleading because students make oral statements and responses in L₂; teacher speaks less, students are encouraged to think and say. In the United States many linguists and language educators doubt the method's usefulness and ask questions like: "How do students learn the proper pronunciation if the teacher does not correct them? Can one use the Silent Way beyond elementary lessons? How can one teach present perfect tense and other complex structures?"

Based upon Stevick's excellent discussions of the method (1976, 1980) and my own learning experiences of elementary Japanese through this method, I would mention the method's positive psychological effects that help create the non-authoritarian view of the teacher and increase attention on the students' part both to what the teacher says and what the other students say.

In the "Community Counseling Learning" method the teacher is the counselor, moving around a circle (community) of learners developing a freeing atmosphere where the topics come from the students. But again, cross-cultural difficulties may arise; some cultures expect teacher authority. Further, not all personal topics are considered worthy or appropriate for classroom discussion.

Finally, "Suggestopedia," the method I know the least about but hope to learn more here. I see it fitting in this framework of learner centered instruction with empha-

sis on the psychological effects on the learner. For Finnish learners, who are shy and reserved by nature, this method may be successful since it convinces the learner that learning is easy — anyone can learn. The method encourages positive thinking and puts the student at ease.

Summary

The goals of language teaching have moved from teaching about the language to teaching about how to use the language — communicative competence. I feel that we are in search of a comprehensive method; we are trying to find the optimal linguistic input on one hand and on the other hand, the best techniques to involve the learner in interactive communication to achieve communicative competence. In the search for a new methodology, we have borrowed from the formerly tried-out methods, which have been based heavily on linguistics as well as the introduction of new methods developed outside the domain of linguistics.

I think that these psychologically and affectively oriented humanistic methods are well-suited for teaching in Finland, where students have a homogeneous linguistic background and where the interactive mode might have been missing (due to the class size and the students' shy nature). These methods will have their most positive points in bringing mutual respects from both the teacher and students as well as from the students themselves. ■