

ESL: Teaching Methodology

By A. Rusma Kalra

In this paper I compared and contrasted three teaching methodologies. The three different teaching methods that I have chosen to discuss are the communicative approach, the grammar-translation approach and the direct method.

Introduction

There is no denying the fact that both accuracy and fluency are essential in language learning. However, in English teaching using grammar-translation method, accuracy is emphasized more than language fluency. Students in such classrooms are extremely particular about linguistic details. On the contrary, the emphasis in the communicative approach and the direct method is on the ability to communicate in the target language.

Nevertheless, one method which could be considered successful in a particular class might not be a very good method for another class. It all depends on the context, the teachers and the students.

Ultimate goal

Each of the teaching methods has different goals. Diane Larsen-Freeman's book 'Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching' points out that the main goal of the communicative approach is that the one learning the language must be able to communicate in that language (Freeman, 2000). Or in other words, it can be said that the goal is to enable the students to communicate in the target language. Students must know when to say what and to whom. Likewise, Hymes mentioned in his book 'On Communicative Competence in the Communicative Approach to Language Teaching'

that one of the important components of communicative competence is the ability to select a linguistic form that is appropriate for a specific situation (Hymes, 1981). Moreover, Littlewood, in his 'Communicative Language Teaching', claims that the students or the one learning the language in this approach must attain as high a degree as possible of linguistic competence (Littlewood, 1996). By this it means that he or she must develop skills in manipulating the linguistic system so that he or she can use them spontaneously and flexibly in order to express his or her intended message.

Unlike the communicative approach, the grammar-translation method's fundamental purpose is to enable the learner to be able to read literature written in the target language. Freeman points out that students should be conscious of the grammatical rules of the target language (Freeman, 2000). She also added that if the students can translate from their own language to the target language and vice versa, they are considered successful language learners. Students are supposed to remember the vocabularies in isolation. Brown points out in his book 'Teaching by Principles' that the main focus was on grammatical rules, the memorization of vocabulary and of various declensions and conjugations, and translations of texts, is achieved by doing written exercises (Brown, 1994).

The direct method is totally opposite to the grammar translation method as no translation of the target language to the native language is allowed (Freeman, 2000). However, it shares some features with the communicative approach as according to Freeman, the purpose of language leaning in this way is also to be able to communicate. The students need to learn how to ask questions as well as be able to answer them. Even though there is some communication process in the direct method but it is not in a real context as it is in the communicative approach.

Characteristics of Teaching and Learning Styles

In the grammar-translation method the process could be quite boring as the students have to translate from one language to another. As Freeman wrote, they have to memorize native language equivalents for target language vocabulary words (Freeman, 2000). According to Brown, much of the vocabulary is taught in the form of lists of isolated words. Long elaborate explanations of the intricacies of grammar are also given. There is not as much emphasis on communication as there is in the communicative and direct approaches (Brown, 1994). Unlike the communicative approach and the direct method, the grammar-translation method is based on the idea that learning a second language is similar to learning a first language, so the teacher attempts to recreate an environment similar to the situations when they learned their first language.

On the contrary, a student learning the language with the communicative approach doesn't have to remember each and every vocabulary without the real context. Freeman mentioned that in the communicative approach the grammar and vocabulary that the students learn follow from the function, situational context and the roles of the interlocutors (Freeman, 2000). She also added that errors are tolerated and are seen as a natural outcome of the development of communication skills. Hymes (1981) added that in teaching grammar, it is important to make the language situations and language material as realistic as possible. This is almost the opposite to that of the grammar translation method. Moreover, there could be some games in this approach which would not make the ambience of the class boring like that of the grammar translation approach.

In contrast to the two methods mentioned earlier, Brown explained that in the direct method, only everyday vocabulary and sentences were taught. Just like in the communicative approach, the student learning the language in the direct method learns the grammar inductively, not by memorizing as in that of the grammar- translation approach (Brown, 1994).

Even though the direct method has many things in common with the communicative approach, according to Brown it can be distinguished from the communicative approach as correct pronunciation and correct usage of grammar are emphasized in the direct method.

The Role of Teachers

In the grammar-translation method, the roles of teachers are very traditional; by this, I mean to say that he or she has the highest authority in the classroom. Freeman also said if the students make errors or do not know the answer, the teacher has to supply them with the correct answer (Freeman, 2000). This also signifies that teachers are supposed to know everything and also more than the students do. However, in the communicative approach the teacher's role is like that of a facilitator. Littlewood stated that one of the teacher's major responsibilities is to establish the situation that would promote communication (Littlewood, 1996).

Unlike those two methods, in the direct method the teacher's main duty is to demonstrate, but he or she doesn't explain or translate (Freeman, 2000). Although the teacher directs the class activities, the student role is less passive than in the grammar translation method. Teachers who use this method believe that students need to associate meaning and the target language directly. So, in order to do this, Freeman explained that when the teacher introduces a new target language word or phrase, he demonstrates its meaning through the use of visual aid, pictures or pantomime and never translates it into the students' native language.

Advantages and Disadvantages

The main advantage which the grammar-translation method has over the other methods is that the target language is quickly explained. This method is a good way to use for those learning dead languages such as Latin (Freeman, 2000). However, the drawbacks surpass its benefits. Orrieux (1989) also added that the grammar-translation method may also frustrate the students as when they travel to countries where the studied language is used ,they would not be able

to use the language in context. According to Prator and Celce-Murcia, in 'Teaching English as a Second Foreign Language, (Prator, 1979) the key features of the grammar translation method are as follows:

- Classes are taught in the mother tongue language.
- Much vocabulary is taught in the form of lists of isolated words.
- Long elaborate explanations of the intricacies of grammar are given.
- Grammar provides the rules for putting words together.
- Little attention is paid to the content of texts.
- Often the only drills are exercises in translating disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue.
- Little or no attention is given to pronunciation.

In addition, this method might make the language learning experience uninspiring and boring. Furthermore, this method neither enhances nor encourages the students' communicative competence which is the main advantage found in the communicative and direct approach (Brown, 1994). Lastly, according to Prator and Celce-Murcia in 'Teaching English as a Second Foreign Language' the exact translation is not possible. Translation is, indeed, a difficult task and exact translation from one language to another is not always possible (Prator, 1979).

The good point of using the direct method is that students learn in the same way as they learn their first language and they might learn faster. However, this approach is not as real as that of the communicative approach where the conversation takes place in a

natural context. In the communicative approach classroom activities maximize opportunities for learners to use the target language in a communicative way for meaningful activities (Littlewood, 1996). The weak point to this approach is that if the teacher doesn't know how to act as a facilitator, this method would fail (Nunan, 1998).

According to Van Lier, the traditional grammatical approach is out-of-date and teaching grammatical forms in isolation does not lead to successful development in using forms communicatively. “The middle way, covering both form and meaning, accuracy and fluency, would seem to be the most reasonable way to proceed, and of course there currently appears to be a general consensus that it is unwise to neglect either area” (Van Lier, 1988).

Conclusion

All in all, in the communicative approach teachers believe sufficient exposure to the target language to learners might make learners acquire the rules of the language. On the contrary, the Grammar translation, method believes that the complete grammatical rules provided to learners beforehand might benefit the learners the most. As far as the direct method is concerned, students are taught in the same way as when they learned their first language. I think it would be better if these methods are used together so as to prevent students from being bored as well as to give them more knowledge depending on the context, time and the students themselves. My point is simply that the teacher must consider the situation or in other word, the context, before selecting any kind of teaching methodology.

My conclusion is that there is no one best way of teaching and none of these three techniques is superior to another. By this I mean that the selection of the teaching methods depends mainly on what sorts of goal the teacher wants to accomplish as each of the techniques has its advantages and at the same time inevitable drawbacks.

References

- Brown, Douglas H. (1994) *Teaching by Principles*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall Regents.
- Freeman, Diane Larsen (2000) *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. Oxford University Press.
- Hymes, D. H. (ed.) (1981). *On communicative competence. In The communicative approach to language teaching* . Oxford University Press.
- Littlewood, William Communicative Language Teaching 1996 Cambridge University Press
- Nunan, David (1998) *Language teaching methodology: a textbook for teachers*. New York: Prentice Hall
- Orrieux, C. (1989: 79) *History of Ancient Civilizations*
- Prator and Celce-Murcia (1979:3) *Teaching English as a Second Foreign Language*, Newbury House Publishers
- Van Lier, L. (1988). *What's wrong with classroom talk?* Prospect, 3(3), 267-283.

A.Rusma Kalra received her B.A. in Business English (First Class Honors) from the Faculty of Arts, Assumption University and later completed her Master's Degree in English Language Teaching (MA-ELT), Assumption University. She is currently working as a full-time lecturer in the Department of Business English, Faculty of Arts.