

**CONTEXTUALIZING THE RELEVANCE OF LANGUAGE TEACHING
METHODS IN L2 ENGLISH CLASSROOM**

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Cite This Article: Javeed Ahmad Raina, "Contextualizing the Relevance of Language Teaching Methods in L2 English Classroom", International Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Arts and Humanities, Volume 3, Conference World Special Issue 1, Page Number 134-136, 2018.

Abstract:

English, though a foreign language has always occupied a unique position in the educational system in India. Its gradual evolution begins right from the stepping in, on the Indian soil, of the East India Company in 1600. Today, English not only acts as lingua franca, linking diverse and multi-lingual communities together, but is also taught as a compulsory subject right from the class first. Since the very inception of English language in school curriculum, in both native and non-native speaking countries, there have been several teaching methods to help learners develop essential language skills. The earliest of these methods like grammar-translation method overemphasized on translating the whole grammatical rules and regarded language as a mass of unusable vocabulary. With the advent of structural approaches like Direct Method and Audio-lingual Method, some radical changes were noticed in language teaching methodology. The cognitive revolution of the 1950s brought a new understanding of how the human brain processes information. It gave rise to a competing theory of language learning known as communicative language teaching. This paper would be an attempt to trace the evolution of some widely used language teaching methods and finally contextualize the relevance of Communicative Language Teaching in second language teaching-learning process.

Key Words: Methods of Language Teaching, Communicative Language Teaching, Effectiveness & Relevance

Introduction:

Teaching English in a foreign or L2 context has always been guided by various methods and approaches from the times immemorial. In every period, several methods have been brought forth to help in learning language skills as well as exploring literature on the basis of some practical assumptions. Since, the onset of the technology driven world and the widening of the mental horizons, several of these methods have proved to be only as experimentations rather than a complete and holistic way of rendering language learning issues in an actual class-room situations. In almost all the traditional methods of language teaching, the role of the teacher was considered only to facilitate and develop certain language skills, particularly, reading and writing, and the other two important skills, listening and speaking, were completely neglected which resulted in the production of generations of non-communicators. The traditional methods of language teaching like Grammar Translation Method laid overemphasis on the language as a mass of unusable rules and vocabulary to be memorized and translated perfectly. Similarly, Lecture Method mostly rely on the one sided transfer of knowledge and the teacher like the protagonist of a dramatic monologue acts as one and the only speaker, competent to interpret and decipher the meaning without even consulting or taking students' actively on board. This method does not encourage learners to participate in the process of decoding the literary text. On the other hand, the structural Methods-Audio-lingual Method was a reaction to grammar-translation, aimed to create new language habits by drilling new sounds and language patterns without explicitly teaching grammar rules. Direct Method also focused too much on the structural aspects of a literary text, leaving less scope for subjective interpretation. These along with other traditional methods and approaches usually focus on the disinterested teacher centered exercises. The demise of these methods was obvious because the teaching approaches, predominantly, teacher centered neither can arouse students' genuine interest in the content being taught nor do they directly involve the students in the teaching-learning process. The fundamental premise of teaching English at school level was mastering all the four language skills in order to help the pupils achieve a good command over the language. But, in actual practice only two skills were taught, reading and writing. With the development of notional/functional approach, as advocated by Wilkins and his colleagues, and communicative language teaching, teaching and learning of English has undergone a radical change. Modern approaches to language teaching concentrate more on functions and meanings that the language used to convey than on how grammatical structures are formed. The result has been a shift from a purely grammatical syllabus to a communicative one. Mohammad Aslam in his book, Teaching of English: A Practical Course for B Ed Students observes that Linguists provided very useful insights into language that directly influenced the teaching of English in the 1940s and 1950s, especially after the world war-II. Structural approaches to language teaching- the Direct Method and Audio-lingual Method, in particular are living examples of how much the linguistic study of the early 20th century influenced language teaching in the USA and elsewhere. (p. 24)

Discussion:

It is an admitted fact that effective use of appropriate teaching methods envisages the greater chances of language learning (English in our case). There has to be blend of two or more methods of teaching in order to make a language class interesting, entertaining and goal specific. The main tenets as well as fallacies of some of the most widely used methods of teaching will be examined one by one, finally contemporary relevance of communicative Language Teaching will be discussed at the end.

Grammar Translation Method: Grammar-Translation Method dominated European and foreign language teaching for over a century- 1840s-1940s- and is still present in one form or the other in many parts of the world. However, this method is slowly witnessing its demise due to the fact that this book oriented method does not cater to the needs of the new generations. It was questioned and rejected as an ineffective method of teaching a foreign or L2 language. Its major fault lies in its over emphasis on translating all texts and sentences into the learners mother tongue as a result of which students never get free from the dominance of the latter. (M. Aslam p. 40)

Direct Method: The impetus to the Direct Method came from the need to foreign languages to facilitate trade, commerce and travel between the European countries. The increasing opportunities after the industrialization opened new ways of trade and hence the growing demand of foreign language teaching methods. This method however also has a fallacy- it presupposes that second language could be learned in way in which first language was acquired, but that could not be done as there was far less time and opportunity available in schools than a child has acquiring his mother tongue. (M. Aslam p. 43)

Lectures: Lectures are perhaps the most-used method in teaching literature, especially for exposition of individual texts or groups of texts to large numbers of students. Typically they are monologues (sometimes monologues with time set aside for questions or discussion at the end); and they appear appropriate to transferring information from the teacher to a group of students, or for providing an uninterrupted opportunity for a teacher to develop a complex critical argument as a model of individual interpretation or critical thought. The major drawback of this method is that it mostly relies on the transfer of one sided point of view or knowledge from a teacher to students, without encouraging their participation.

Communicative Language Teaching or (CLT): This method developed in the United States in the 1970s and 80s in reaction to grammar based teaching methods. It grew out of dissatisfaction with earlier methods that were based on the conscious presentation of grammatical forms and structures or lexical items and did not adequately prepare learners for the effective and appropriate use of language in natural communication (Celce-Murica et al., qtd in Communicative Approaches to Interactive Whiteboard Use). Its main proponents are Stephen Krashen (1982) and Sandra Savignon (1991, 2002). There are three important elements of CLT. First, the study of grammar must be subordinate to the understanding and use of language in meaningful context. Second, learners' individual interests, motivations and anxieties must be taken into account and the third, no particular teaching method is defined for the CLT classroom. The teaching method that generally matches CLT criteria while also addressing second language acquisition requirements is task-based language teaching (TBLT). The important element of TBLT includes an insistence on real world, meaningful and authentic language use, a focus on goal oriented activities. Tasks may be relatively open-ended and include pre-task activities, and then the task itself, followed by post task planning and the presentation of a report focusing on the language used in the task. Communicative Language Teaching do involve some attention to grammar rules, although the objective is to focus on linguistic form in a communicative context, rather than explicitly teach grammar rules, and to encourage learners to reflect on their own language use, rather than have the teacher identify errors for them.

The Communicative Language Teaching method draws insights from Chomsky's theory of competence that characterizes a native speaker's capacity to produce grammatically correct sentences. Dell Hymes, an American anthropologist, maintains that the aim of language teaching should be to develop communicative competence, i.e., the ability to use language effectively and appropriately in social contexts and situations. (M Alam, p. 56, 57)

A British applied linguist, MAK Halliday, complemented Hymes' communicative competence theory by identifying seven basic functions that language performs for children learning their mother tongue or L1:

- ✓ The instrumental function: Using language to get things
- ✓ The regulatory function: Using language to control the behavior of others
- ✓ The interactional function: to create interaction with others
- ✓ The personal function: Using language to express personal feelings and meanings
- ✓ The heuristic function: using language to learn and to discover
- ✓ The imaginative function: using language to create a world of the imagination
- ✓ The representational function: using language to communicate information

So, language is not just grammar and structures, but is much more than that. Learning a foreign or second language requires certain skills in order to acquire linguistic means to express different functions. CLT is eclectic in nature, drawing ideas from broad and diverse sources. The learner is not assumed a passive recipient of knowledge rather than a knowledgeable source to be engaged in a meaningful task based activities. He is an active participant in the classroom, as the ultimate responsibility of solving the communicative problems lies with the learner. Another important prospect of CLT is that it can accommodate interactive technologies to enhance language teaching and learning. The new and emerging approaches like digital pedagogy, blended learning and serious games can be adequately executed through a Communicative Language Teaching Method. Since language teaching is currently undergoing major transformations. In many classrooms teachers are confronted with new theories, new methods and new technologies. The interactive whiteboard (IWB) fosters interaction among their language learners in a variety of languages and contexts, and at different age and proficiency levels. The common thing between CLT and new technology rich classroom is a commitment to communicate and task based approaches to language teaching. This method has the ability to assimilate these new changing trends in an effective way, widening scope for better understanding of English language teaching-learning in an L2 class-room.

Conclusion:

Communicative Language Teaching refers to both processes and goals in classroom learning. The central theoretical concept in communicative language teaching is "communicative competence," a term introduced into discussion of language use and second or foreign language learning in the early 1970s. Competence is defined in terms of the expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning and looks to both psycholinguistic and sociocultural perspectives in second language acquisition. Communicative language teaching puts much focus on the learner and develops his/her functional competence. Functional goals imply global, qualitative evaluation of learner achievement as opposed to quantitative assessment of discrete linguistic feature. Current efforts at educational reform favour essay writing, in-class presentations, and dialogue writing. The collection and evaluation of learners' poems, reports, stories and similar projects encourage learner achievement. Culture is recognized as instrumental in shaping speakers' communicative competence, in both their first and subsequent languages. Thus, in a way, Communicative Language Teaching appears as holistic teaching method that prescribes no set theoretical principles of language

teaching, yet drawing on multidisciplinary sources, effectively assimilates wide range of emerging technological innovations to foster reliable and meaningful classroom interaction.

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