

APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODOLOGY

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Abstract

This article examines, in chronological order, the principal methods and approaches used in foreign language teaching, with particular reference to English. It traces the theoretical foundations, classroom application, and respective strengths and limitations of the Grammar-Translation Method, the Audiolingual Method, the Communicative Approach, the PPP model (Presentation-Practice-Production), Task-Based Learning, the ESA framework (Engage-Study-Activate), the Humanistic Approach, and the Lexical Approach. Each method's role in the learning process is illustrated with concrete classroom examples, and its relevance to contemporary language-teaching practice is discussed. The findings are intended to be of practical value to foreign-language teachers and methodologists.

Keywords: Language teaching methodology, communicative approach, PPP, task-based learning, ESA, lexical approach, humanistic teaching, grammar-translation method, audiolingual method.

Introduction

A distinction should be drawn between the theory of language teaching and the methodology of language teaching: the former concerns why a given technique works, while the latter concerns how it is applied in the classroom [1, p. 9]. Over

the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, foreign-language pedagogy has moved through a succession of methods and approaches, each responding to the perceived shortcomings of its predecessor. Understanding this progression is essential for practising teachers, since elements of every method examined below continue to surface, in one form or another, in present-day classroom practice [2, p. 14]. The present article reviews eight such methods and approaches in the order in which they gained prominence, beginning with the Grammar-Translation Method and concluding with the Lexical Approach.

The Grammar-Translation Method has been among the most widely used methods since the early twentieth century and remains, even today, common practice in many school settings [1, p. 11]. Its core procedure consists of translating written texts into the learners' first language and analysing the grammatical structures they contain; consequently, very little attention is devoted to oral or spoken communication [1, p. 12]. The method's principal strength lies in the precision with which it can develop learners' explicit knowledge of grammatical rules and their reading comprehension of literary or academic texts [3, p. 6]. Its principal weakness, conversely, is that it prepares learners poorly for spontaneous, real-time interaction, since the skills of listening and speaking are largely left untouched [1, p. 13].

Methodology

The Audiolingual Method draws on behaviourist psychology and treats the learner's response to a stimulus as the central mechanism of learning [1, p. 15]. In a typical lesson, the teacher presents a stimulus commonly a picture and prompts learners to describe or contrast what they see; a correct response is immediately reinforced through praise, so that the target structure is acquired and consolidated at the same time [1, p. 16]. Explicit grammatical explanation is minimised, while repetition and drilling occupy the centre of the lesson. For example, the teacher may hold up a picture of a boy who owns a bicycle and toys, next to a picture of a girl who owns nothing, in order to elicit the target items bike, toys, and the quantifiers some/any [1, p. 16]. The teacher first models the target sentence "He has got a bike" for the class to repeat in chorus; if learners produce the form incorrectly, the teacher models it again and elicits a further attempt [1, p. 17]. In later stages of the same lesson, the teacher supplies only prompt words, from which learners must construct the full sentence

independently, thereby developing the drill technique mechanical, repeated practice that trains learners to produce grammatically accurate sentences rapidly and without extended deliberation [1, p. 17]. Once a structure of this kind has been mastered, the following lesson typically introduces the corresponding question form. The chief criticism levelled at the Audiolingual Method is that it is not communicative in any meaningful sense: the exchanges it produces do not constitute genuine interaction [1, p. 18].

The Communicative Approach responds directly to learners' need for authentic interaction. Its aim is not the exhaustive mastery of grammatical rules in isolation, but their acquisition through use [1, p. 21]. Pollard illustrates the distinction with a simple shopping-list task: if every learner in the class is given an identical list, with the quantity of every item already specified, and learners simply rehearse a fixed exchange such as “How much meat do we need?” – “One kilogram will be enough”, the activity amounts to nothing more than a speaking drill, since each learner already knows the answer before asking the question [1, p. 22].

A genuinely communicative version of the same task instead distributes two different lists to two different learners: List A is missing the quantity of butter, List B is missing the quantity of meat, so that Learner A must ask Learner B for the missing information, and vice versa [1, p. 23]. Because neither learner already possesses the information the other needs, an authentic information gap is created, and the resulting exchange constitutes real communication rather than rehearsed dialogue [1, p. 23]. Although the Communicative Approach is most often discussed in relation to speaking, the same underlying principle that practice should serve a genuine, non-linguistic purpose beyond the exercise itself can equally be applied to reading, writing, and listening tasks [1, p. 24].

PPP is an abbreviation of Presentation, Practice, and Production. It represents a comparatively traditional way of structuring a lesson, one that became especially widespread during the 1980s and has proved particularly effective for learners at beginner and elementary levels; it remains in wide use today [1, p. 27].

During the presentation stage, the teacher introduces a specific item of language a grammatical structure, a lexical phrase, or similar to the class [1, p. 27]. This stage may resemble the Audiolingual Method insofar as it relies on visual prompts and tightly focused instruction, but it may equally be carried out through direct explanation and demonstration [1, p. 28].

The practice stage consists of controlled exercises, in which learners use the target language within strictly defined limits; this includes drills, controlled written and spoken exercises, and repetition [1, p. 28].

The production stage allows for freer practice, in which learners use the target language in their own sentences, independently, and may combine it with other language they already know; it should not be equated with entirely free conversation [1, p. 29]. For example, once learners have studied the question form “Have you ever...?” – used to ask about past experience, as in “Have you ever been to Mexico?” or “Have you ever eaten a snail?” – they might work in pairs asking one another about their own personal experiences. Here the structure (“Have you ever...”) remains constant across every sentence produced, while the vocabulary varies freely; this constitutes the freer practice referred to as production [1, p. 29].

In a task-based lesson, the teacher sets learners a task that requires them to use language which has either not yet been formally taught or which the teacher wishes them to revisit and consolidate; the specific item targeted in this way is referred to as the target language [1, p. 33]. The task itself may be drawn directly from a coursebook exercise or from a supplementary resource [1, p. 33].

Discussion

The teacher organises the task and then monitors learners as they carry it out, paying particular attention to how accurately and appropriately the target language is used; errors are noted but are not corrected during the task itself [1, p. 34]. For instance, in order to assess learners' command of prepositions of time, the teacher might ask them to negotiate and agree on when and where to meet; as learners talk, the teacher records both correct and incorrect uses of forms such as on Monday, in the afternoon, and at 5pm [1, p. 34].

On the basis of learners' performance, the teacher then decides whether to re-present the target language in full and provide intensive further practice, or to conduct only a brief review a decision that is made in light of how well learners handled the task [1, p. 35]. The original task, or a closely comparable one, may subsequently be repeated, allowing teacher and learners alike to compare initial and final performance [1, p. 35].

ESA is an abbreviation of Engage, Study, and Activate. Each of the three components is considered in turn below [1, p. 38]. Engage refers to capturing

learners' attention or interest and drawing them actively into the lesson. This may be achieved through a personal anecdote from the teacher, a thought-provoking image, or any other stimulus that arouses learners' curiosity; the underlying rationale is that learners who are engaged or genuinely interested will be more receptive to what follows [1, p. 38].

Study, as its name suggests, refers to a focused examination of a particular item of language this may involve grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, or textual structure, and the possibilities are effectively unlimited. This stage may be conducted through direct teacher explanation or through guided discovery, in which learners work out the underlying rule for themselves from examples [1, p. 39]. Activate refers to learners using the target language in a context that approximates, as closely as possible, genuine real-world communication. Here learners should not be restricted to a single, controlled structure but should instead be encouraged to draw on the full range of language they know [1, p. 39].

All three stages may be combined within a single lesson, though they need not always follow the sequence implied by the acronym. A lesson might, for example, begin by engaging learners, proceed to activate language through a speaking task, and only afterward study whatever difficulties emerged during that task. Equally, an entire lesson may be devoted solely to speaking practice, in which learners are engaged and the language is activated, while the study of that language took place in a preceding lesson [1, p. 40].

Results

At the centre of the Humanistic Approach lies the learner's full participation in the learning process as a whole person. The classroom is conceived as a supportive environment in which learners are listened to, their opinions are received without judgement, and they are encouraged to share their feelings and experiences [1, p. 43]. Typical activities invite learners to talk about their own emotions and experiences, and learners may sometimes take part in setting the objectives of a course or of an individual lesson. In its most extreme form, a teacher may enter the classroom without any prepared plan at all, ask learners what they would like to do that day, and proceed accordingly an approach not recommended for a teacher new to the profession [1, p. 44].

As a specialist with a background in psychology, the author cautions that this approach must be applied with care, since certain individuals, or members of

certain cultures, may feel uncomfortable disclosing their feelings in front of people they do not know well [1, p. 44]. Notwithstanding this caveat, the author fully acknowledges the value of creating a supportive, non-judgemental learning environment [1, p. 45].

The central premise of the Lexical Approach is that grammar and vocabulary cannot be as strictly separated as traditional teaching methods have generally assumed. A further core idea is that language is not built by inserting vocabulary into grammatical frames, but is instead organised around lexical units, with grammar serving to support those units [1, p. 48]. Lexical units are words or word combinations that carry their own distinct meaning; the meaning of some combinations differs from the sum of their individual parts, as in expressions such as to mean, to check something out, or video player. Longer stretches of language, such as what I mean is..., are likewise treated as single lexical units [1, p. 48].

According to this theory, a language is acquired primarily through the acquisition of lexical units rather than through the study of grammar; the focus therefore falls on lexis rather than on syntax or grammatical rule as such [1, p. 49]. Critics of the approach point out that it is difficult to determine a principled sequence in which lexical units should be taught. Proponents respond by arguing that a syllabus can instead be organised around collocation that is, words that habitually co-occur, such as to make a phone call, to sign up for a meeting, heavy rain, or by chance [1, p. 49].

A further principle of the Lexical Approach is that teaching should proceed through observation, hypothesis, and experiment. In the observation stage, learners are exposed to language, typically through a reading text; they are then encouraged to infer independently the meaning of unfamiliar lexical items, which constitutes the hypothesis stage. The experiment stage, finally, refers to putting the language into practical use [1, p. 50].

Conclusion

The eight methods and approaches reviewed above did not develop in isolation from one another; each emerged, at least in part, as a response to the limitations of the method that preceded it, and elements of every one of them can still be observed in present-day classrooms [2, p. 18]. The Grammar-Translation Method and the Audiolingual Method demonstrate the value, and the limits, of an exclusively form-focused pedagogy; the Communicative Approach, PPP, Task-

Based Learning, and ESA each offer a distinct route toward genuine, purposeful use of the target language; and the Humanistic and Lexical Approaches broaden the picture further, drawing attention respectively to the learner as a whole person and to the central role of lexis in language acquisition. No single method should be regarded as universally superior: an effective teacher selects and combines techniques according to learners' level, needs, and cultural context [4, p. 8]. Further classroom-based research into the comparative effectiveness of these approaches within the specific context of Uzbek higher education would be of considerable value to local methodologists and practitioners [6].

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