

EFL Teaching Methods

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Abstract—Language is a system of communication and it plays a vital role in human society. How can we teach language effectively and serve the purpose for human communication? Many linguists and scholars have dwelt on the question, leading to different approaches and methods in language teaching. Those approaches and methods through history have not only reflected changes in theories of the nature of language and of language learning, but also reflected changes in learners' needs.

Index Terms—language learning and teaching, teaching methods, teaching procedure

I. BRIEF DESCRIPTION

As theories of language and psychology have developed, new teaching approaches and methods have emerged to accompany them. The appearance of these approaches and methods has not only met the needs of contemporary language teaching, but also aroused the interest of the second and foreign language teachers. Though there have been many controversies among applied linguists and teachers. Unique characteristics of each method can be identified. Some methods have been adopted universally: others are confined to limited areas. Whatever the situation may be, a general review of these approaches and methods is necessary in order to get some insights into their nature, strengths and weaknesses. The result will hopefully be more effective language teaching. This passage makes a detailed comparison among influential approaches and methods in language teaching, varying from the Grammar Translation Method to the Communicative Approach in terms of definition, advantages and disadvantages, with the aim to improve language teaching.

Grammar-Translation Method mainly used by my Junior and Senior middle school English teachers although teaching materials in the text books were arranged in ALM way. The features are as follows:

- Language skills. There was no practice of English listening and speaking.
- Language used by the teacher. Students were taught mainly in Chinese, especially when teachers taught grammar and vocabulary and did the exercises. The teachers did not actively use English. My senior middle school English teacher used more English but only when she paraphrased some part of the text.
- Engage. There were no activities to stimulate students' learning motivation and interest besides reviewing the former knowledge.
- Study. The teachers taught vocabulary independently with emphasizing pronunciation, spelling and meaning. Grammar was taught deductively and specifically with emphasizing rules and neglecting more practice. In teaching the text, they put focus on translating and analyzing the sentence structure and grammar. The main task for the students was to remember the new words and all the grammar rules in order to take exams, and the application of them was ignored.
- Activate. There was no more practice apart from doing written work in the books and reciting the words, sentence patterns, grammar rules and the texts.
- The classes were typically teacher-centered. There was no interaction between teachers and students. The teachers spoke for most of the time introducing vocabulary, grammar rules and translating the text. The students just listened to them except answering some questions raised. There were no more activities like pair works or group works for students to use what they had learned.

My college English teacher who taught intensive reading mainly used Audio-Lingual Method in the first and second year. Since intensive reading is a course to train English-major students' integrated skills, I'd like to take it as an example to illustrate the characters of the ALM.

- Language skills. The English skills of speaking, reading and writing were practiced in intensive reading classes, especially speaking.
- Language used by the teacher. Little Chinese was used in the class.
- Engage. Class-report, reciting and show of dialogues or plays were carried out first to motivate students' enthusiasm to enjoy the class. The teacher was to correct some serious pronunciation, intonation and grammar mistakes.
- Study. Firstly, sentence structures were taught inductively through imitating, repeating and replacing drills from the teacher one by one with closing the books. Students are required to memorize the dialogues in pairs and show the dialogues on the stage. Secondly, vocabulary was taught with much emphasis on correct pronunciation, speech and application. In teaching the texts, the teacher usually paraphrased some difficult sentences and raised questions instead of translating the sentences and analyzing grammar rules; students were required to comprehend the reading materials, answer the questions, propose the questions for the teachers or rewrite the article sometimes.
- Activate. The teacher asked the students to make new dialogues or plays after class and checked them in the next

lesson.

- The classes were partly student-centered. The teacher’s role was to organize the class activities, guide the students to comprehend the materials and help them correct the mistakes in pronunciation, intonation and grammar. The students were given much time to participate many different, stressful but interesting and effective activities to practice what they had learned. There was much interaction between teachers and students.

As a teacher mainly teaching intensive reading in the English department of the college, my method is a hybrid of ALM, CLT and GTM. I’ve followed my college English teacher, but the difference is that I add CLT and TBT methods sometimes according to different teaching tasks. The differences are as follows:

- More group works such as discussion, retelling and debating are added in speaking, listening, reading and writing activities.
- CLT is popularly used in speaking activities. Students are encouraged to master the pragmatic, authentic and functional use of English in order to improve communicative competence. I put more emphasis on fluency than accuracy in students’ oral English.
- Vocabulary is taught individually in Grade 1 but in Grade 2 it is mainly taught in teaching the text.
- Difficult grammars in the text are pointed and explained with more examples.
- Translation is used in late Grade 2 and 3 because sometimes paraphrase is not effective enough to help students appreciate those well-written literature works.

The teachers who teach us MA courses mainly use Task-based teaching method and ask students to have a self-discovery study.

More group tasks like presentation and discussion are given to us to prepare before the class. Naturally it’s because MA students are engaged in academic study and research instead of learning more English knowledge.

II. COMMENTS

The different teaching methods mentioned in my learning and teaching experience should be contributed to predominant EFL teaching conceptions and their corresponding textbooks in different periods in our country.

1. GTM, in many peoples’ eyes, has been out of fashion, but I have to admit I benefited a lot although I was poor in speaking and listening before I entered the college. A large amount of English words, the comparatively good grammar knowledge and writing ability paved the easier way for my further English study in the college. GTM is still widely employed as a contributory method together with other strategies today. The following table can show my personal comments on GTM.

TABLE 1:
MY PERSONAL COMMENTS ON GTM

Limitations	Advantages
Listening and speaking are neglected.	Reading and writing are improved.
Function and meaning are neglected.	Syntax and form of the language are emphasized.
Teacher-centered Students are passive and easy to get bored. Interaction between teachers and students is not cared.	Much knowledge is presented deductively. It’s easy to be used, esp. in big classes. There’s no higher requirement for teachers.
It’s hard to memorize much information.	It’s helpful to master basic language knowledge.
<i>My view:</i> It’s suitable to be used in big classes where it’s hard to organize class activities or it can be used by the teachers whose English proficiency is not high, especially in speaking. It can be used to explain some part of grammar rules or difficult texts but shouldn’t be completely used in the whole process of teaching.	

2. ALM is one of the methods that I prefer to use because my pronunciation, speaking and listening, which used to be poor in my middle school study, was greatly improved in the college, especially in Grade 1 and 2. However, it seemed that my vocabulary and reading competence were not improved enough as speaking. Every coin has two sides, but from my experience, I still personally think that ALM is more suitable to teach those who are English majors in lower grades because most of them are poor in pronunciation and speaking, but it’s better to be combined with other effective methods like CLT, TBT.

TABLE 2:
MY PERSONAL COMMENTS ON ALM

Advantages	Limitations
Students’ abilities of sentence production, grammatical structures can be well trained.	Endless pattern drills may produce boredom. Training is carried out mechanically.
Oral ability can be better improved.	Reading ability may be a little weaker.
Syntax and form are emphasized.	Function and meaning are neglected.
Partly student-centered Students are more active to enjoy practice. There’s more Interaction between teachers and students.	Class activities for the learners to practice are not enough and effective. Different activities should be organized in different teaching tasks such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, text, etc.
<i>My view:</i> Its’ suitable to be used in middle school English teaching or in lower grades for English majors in the college because there are many sentence patterns, grammatical structures which should be practiced and learned. However, it’s better to be combined with other effective methods like CLT, TBT.	

3. CLT is a fashionable method, but according to my teaching experience, it's better to be used together with ALM so that students can improve both English knowledge and communicative competence effectively.

TABLE 3:
MY PERSONAL COMMENTS ON CLT

Advantages	Limitations
Students' communicative competence can be improved.	There is high requirement for the teachers' English proficiency and teaching techniques.
Oral ability can be better improved.	It's possible for students to be poor in systematical grammars.
Function and meaning are emphasized.	Syntax and form are less emphasized.
Student-centered Students are motivated to enjoy practice actively. There's more interaction between teachers and students and between students themselves.	Students' errors cannot be corrected in time. Accuracy is less emphasized.
<i>My view:</i> Its' more suitable to be used to teach primary students so that they have better communicative competence. It can also be effectively used in oral teaching. It' better to use it together with ALM.	

4. Task-based Teaching, the newest EFL teaching method developed in recent years, has been reflected in the new English textbooks of middle school in China.

TABLE 4:
MY PERSONAL COMMENTS ON TBT

Advantages	Limitations
Students are highly motivated to learn through solving problems.	There is a very high requirement for the teachers' English proficiency and teaching techniques.
Listening and speaking are lead-in activities, which was followed by reading and writing.	It's possible for students to be poor in systematical grammars
Function and meaning are emphasized.	Syntax and form are explained in limited time.
Student-centered Teachers are advisors. Students are required to finish tasks in simulated life situations by using English.	It's difficult to organize task activities and manage the students, especially in big classes. It is lack of corresponding assessment system.
<i>My view:</i> Its' a good method and suitable to be used in primary, middle school and even college teaching, but it should have two premises: Teachers' high English proficiency and effective teaching techniques; Moderate number of students.	

After reviewing the different teaching methods, I am clear that evaluation of a particular method depends on many factors, such as language and learning theories, teaching techniques, syllabus design, learner's learning stage, and teacher and learners' roles. One factor that is easily ignored is that of context. A method that can be considered beneficial in on context may not be so in another. Furthermore, a method that can be considered effective in teaching one language skill or one section of language knowledge may be ineffective in another.

As I mentioned above, I personally think in Chinese context, teachers should use different methods at the different stages of the learners' learning and different methods should be integrated to teach different English knowledge and skills. TGM is still possible to teach the course of literature, explain difficult language points and enlarge students' vocabulary by way of synonyms and antonyms. ALM can be exploited to train students in good pronunciation and necessary sentence patters. So these two traditional methods can still be used in our teaching today if they are modified appropriately or combined with CLT or TBT.

III. REVISION

As theories of language and psychology have developed, new teaching approaches and methods have emerged to accompany them. The appearance of these approaches and methods has not only met the needs of contemporary language teaching, but also aroused the interest of the second and foreign language teachers. Though there have been many controversies among applied linguists and teachers. Unique characteristics of each method can be identified. Some methods have been adopted universally: others are confined to limited areas. Whatever the situation may be, a general review of these approaches and methods is necessary in order to get some insights into their nature, strengths and weaknesses. The result will hopefully be more effective language teaching. This passage makes a detailed comparison among influential approaches and methods in language teaching, varying from the Grammar Translation Method to the Communicative Approach in terms of definition, advantages and disadvantages, with the aim to improve language teaching.

After reviewing the main teaching methods in this passage, we have a clear idea of the advantages and disadvantages of each method. But evaluation of a particular method depends on many factors, such as language and learning theories, teaching techniques, syllabus design, and teacher and learners- roles. One factor that is easily ignored is that of context. A method that can be considered beneficial in one context may not be in another. Furthermore, alternative approaches to those so far described can be found for teaching different language skills. Based on this thought, personally I think that Counseling-Learning is not appropriate to the Chinese context. For one reason, classes in middle schools and colleges are usually very large, so it is impossible for only one teacher (mower) to handle and organize a class. For another, there

are no possibilities to train large numbers of teachers with the required counseling skills. The same is true for Suggestopedia. Few teachers are likely to have the required proficiency in both Chinese and the target language. Moreover the decor and arrangement of classrooms and the use of music are beyond present conditions in China. Despite people's negative attitudes towards the Grammar-Translation and the Audio lingual Methods, with modifications they still receive wide acceptance in our teaching today.

While putting more emphasis on communication and interaction, it is still possible to use the Grammar-Translation method to teach students literary works, explain difficult language points and enlarge students' vocabulary by way of synonyms and antonyms. The Audio lingual Method can be exploited to train students in good pronunciation and necessary sentence patterns. Such training can be accompanied by an explanation of their appropriateness in the target situation. As for Total Physical Response and the Silent Way, they can compliment our teaching. The former can be reflected in our classroom language through the teachers' use of commands to elicit students' physical response. The latter shows its value in pair work, group discussions and role play where the teacher keeps silent and acts as a listener and observer.

As a common English teacher, what I can do is to look for the best combination of some methods that are suitable for the course I teach in our Chinese teaching context. I'll try to make some revision mainly on ALM and CLT methods because they are still popularly used in our country and I usually use them in my teaching of intensive reading course. The following revisions are made according to their disadvantages.

1. Revision on ALM method

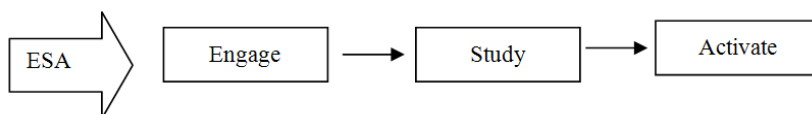
Since ALM is based on Behaviorism and Structuralism, syntax and form of the language are over emphasized while function of the language is ignored. It is easy to find that many students still can't speak English though they are trained in practicing countless sentence patterns mechanically. In my mind it is very necessary to help students master the sentence structures accurately, but teaching materials and activities in practice should be improved in order to make students less bored and master the function of the language.

1) Revision on the speaking activities of sentence pattern training. It is clear that mechanical training of sentence patterns should be the reason why the students can't speak English in the real communicative situations, so we have to try to revise it by designing some communicative activities after practicing sentence structures. From my English learning and teaching experience, some of the speaking activities used in ALM are effective and necessary, such as repetition, imitation, inflection, completion, replacement, integration, transformation, rejoinder, restatement role-play, etc. However, the aim of such activities is to make students master the language structures, which is only the first step to learn the language and receive plenty of language input. So more communicative activities should be added to help students use the language and output the language in a certain communicative environment. You may ask "Aren't those practicing activities the process of output?". Yes, of course. But I personally think that they are not the real output because language output should be the creative use of it rather than mechanical repetition and memorization.

To design communicative activities, we can refer to CLT and TBT methods. Pair works and Group discussions are two activities that can be easily and widely applied in our teaching context. Teachers can give students the following tasks:

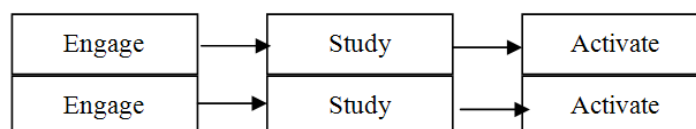
- Teachers can ask students make new dialogues or short contextual plays in pairs and groups by themselves with using some key sentence structures they have learned and practiced. These activities can be finished both in class and after class according to the difficulty of the work, the time and the students' different level at different stage.
- Teachers can design some questions about the use of the sentence structures and on the topics related to the lesson. These students are required to discuss them together at first, then answer them properly and develop further tasks such as organize the answers together to make a short speech or write a short passage.
- Teachers can ask students to finish some tasks together in pairs or groups by using the key sentence structures depending on teaching content. For example, when students are going to teach some language or structures used in our real life such as shopping, teachers can ask students to prepare some objects as articles with prices on them, and make the tables as shopping counter so that students can practise using the language in a real situation. Sometimes, students can be required to draw pictures, design or fill in some forms, tell the stories, do experiments, etc to make preparation for the speaking later.

2) Teaching procedure. ALM follows PPP (Presentation → practice → production) teaching procedure and also we can say it arranges the three teaching elements ESA (Engage, Study and Activate) in Straight Arrows sequence.

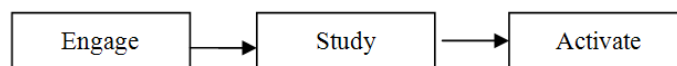


Actually, PPP or Straight Arrows lessons work well for certain structures such as "can" and "can't" because it gives students a chance to practise the language in a controlled way (during the Study phase) and then gives them a chance to Activate the new language in the enjoyable way. However, we may not be giving our students own learning styles a fair chance. These two procedures may be effective for teaching simple language at lower levels for straightforward language because lower level students need teachers' instruction in a deductive way.

Since I put more communicative activities in ALM, the procedure of the lesson should be a little different, especially for the more advanced students. For students at intermediate levels such as senior middle school students, they have mastered some basic English knowledge and formed their learning styles, so the teachers' role is to activate them to try to discover the rules by showing a lot of materials and help them to practice the rules. For advanced students such as college students as English majors, the different courses are designed to let them revise the language rules and improve their language skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. In this way, the main learning task is to do a lot of practice in these aspects. In this sense, Boomerang sequence and Patchwork sequence are more suitable, where activation is the first goal and Study comes later if and when appropriate. The following two diagrams can be clear to see the procedures specifically.



Here I'd like to suggest a new teaching procedure, which I think is appropriate for ALM I revised above. It is similar to Patchwork sequence. For example, students are required to learn some structures on the topic of dreams.



- Engage: Teachers and students discuss the topic together. The teacher tells the students about his or her dreams briefly. Then ask students what their dreams are.
- Activate: List some questions and encourage the students to make a conversation or have a group discussion freely on this topic.
- Activate: To invite students to show the dialogues or introduce their dreams
- Study: The teacher points the main grammatical or structural mistakes in speaking and then provide some necessary words, sentence structures or speech structure that should be used in speaking.
- Engage: The teacher gives a good and complete example of the speech on this topic.
- Activate: The teacher asks students to practise using the new words and structures and prepare a speech by themselves.
- Activate: Students are invited to make the speech on the stage.

2. Revision on CLT method

CLT is based on Functionalism and Sociolinguistics, which emphasizes the function of the language and learners' communicative competence. However, the importance of syntax and of the language should be concerned because accuracy is as important as fluency, especially in language writing.

1) Revision on the teaching materials in CLT. Since both syntax and function of a language are important, so in my opinion, syntax practice should be added before students have free expression in CLT. Imitation is necessary to improve students' correct and effective expression, but I think input in CLT should be given with considering structure and grammar learning but not function learning only. If systematic English grammar rules can be properly added to teaching materials together with the functions of the language, it will be better. The following material is chosen from one lesson of a primary English textbook (for grade 3 students) I compiled and I think it is arranged as a hybrid of CLT and ALM:

Unit 7 Toys

Lesson 13

1. Look, listen and say

1. Hi, Lupy. Look, I have a new toy.

Tom

3. It's a toy car.

5. Of course.

2. Really? What is it?

Lupy

4. May I have a look?

6. How nice!

2. Look and say

I have a new *toy car*.

○
doll

○
flag

○
bike

○
balloon

○
teddy bear

○
kite

From the picture above, we can see in the first part the sentence pattern “I have...” appears in the communicative dialogue between Tom and Lupy. In the second part students can practice the structure by replacing the italicized words. So it is a good example of hybrid of ALM and CLT.

2) My thought about teaching procedure of CLT. The common procedure of CLT is: exposure → imitation → free expression. If the ideas in 1) can be acceptable, the third step — free expression should be based on enough practice and correct use of sentences. So no matter learners are primary students, middle school students or college students, the better procedure for CLT is Boomerang sequence or Patchwork sequence. It is because CLT method emphasizes activate more than study.

IV. EVALUATION

Language is a system of communication and it plays a vital role in human society. How can we teach language effectively and serve the purpose for human communication? Many linguists and scholars have dwelt on the question, leading to different approaches and methods in language teaching. Those approaches and methods through history have not only reflected changes in theories of the nature of language and of language learning, but also reflected changes in learners’ needs.

After reviewing the main teaching methods in this passage, we have a clear idea of the advantages and disadvantages of each method. But evaluation of a particular method depends on many factors, such as language and learning theories, teaching techniques, syllabus design, and teacher and learners- roles. One factor that is easily ignored is that of context. A method that can be considered beneficial in one context may not be in another. Furthermore, alternative approaches to those so far described can be found for teaching different language skills. Based on this thought, personally I think that Counseling-Learning is not appropriate to the Chinese context. For one reason, classes in middle schools and colleges are usually very large, so it is impossible for only one teacher (mower) to handle and organize a class. For another, there are no possibilities to train large numbers of teachers with the required counseling skills. The same is true for Suggestopedia. Few teachers are likely to have the required proficiency in both Chinese and the target language. Moreover the decor and arrangement of classrooms and the use of music are beyond present conditions in China. Despite people’s negative attitudes towards the Grammar-Translation and the Audiolingual Methods, with modifications they still receive wide acceptance in our teaching today

While putting more emphasis on communication and interaction, it is stilt possible to use the Grammar-Translation method to teach students literary works, explain difficult language points and enlarge students’ vocabulary by way of synonyms and antonyms. The Audiolingual Method can be exploited to train students in good pronunciation and necessary sentence patterns. Such training can be accompanied by an explanation of their appropriateness in the target situation. As for Total Physical Response and the Silent Way, they can compliment our teaching. The former can be reflected in our classroom language through the teachers use of commands to elicit students’ physical response. The latter shows its value in pair work, group discussions and role play where the teacher keeps silent and acts as a listener and observer. The distinction between acquisition and learning seems to be reasonable, but it is hard to put into practice, because it is difficult for us to distinguish where the learners’ knowledge comes from: the acquisition process or the

learning process or both of the two process; the NA emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input, but it is hard to define the so-called $i+1$ input and how to make the input comprehensible by every student; it also undervalues the importance to improve the quality of output; it is too simplified to explain the individual differences through the effective filter. Therefore we can see that there still exist both conceptual problems and practical problems in the NA. The NA belongs to a tradition of language teaching methods based on observation and interpretation of how learners acquire both first and second languages in non-formal settings.

However we must realize that this creative approach firstly occurs in American and is firstly applied in American. So if the NA is applied to China, a non-English environment, things will be different. To employ the approach well in China, it is necessary to create a native-like language learning environment. In our teaching practice, we should make our choice in accordance with the specific situations and then it will be of great significance to employ the NA in China to develop language communicative competence.

Learning is a serious matter. It is like the medicine of the day, bitter and tough to swallow. It requires consistent effort and energy on the part of the students to progress successfully. And there are more arguments about other things, such as: the role of the teacher and student-centered class; the relationship among the four skills-listening, speaking, reading and writing; the value of the intensive reading course and how to handle it; the content and quality of text-books etc. As opinions often differ, no decision has ever been reached. Problems remain unsolved. Things stand as they were. We, language teachers, sometimes feel rather frustrated for not being able to move a step forward. Moreover, foreigners who have had the experience of teaching English in China for some time will always raise an objection to our way of language learning and teaching. They think the teaching of English in our country is inferior and our method rigidly traditional. They are strongly against our intensive reading course, describing it as mere memorization of grammar rules and pre-digested texts by the students and explanation by the teachers of the grammar structure of every sentence and the semantic content of nearly every word in the texts. They say changes must take place in our EFL education. Yes, we feel the same way though we might not be of the same opinion as to the evaluation of our intensive reading course. The question is what change must be brought about and how. If change is a must, then it is necessary, I think, for us to make a study of the past so as to get a key to the understanding of why things are as they are. EFL education in China has almost always been influenced by language teaching abroad. Most of our EFLT methods or approaches have stemmed from those applied in foreign countries. So we might as well start by looking back briefly on the history of the language teaching in foreign countries, especially in Europe and America, and then proceed to see the influence of their language teaching on EFLT in our own country.

Different approaches and methods have great impacts on foreign language teaching. It is better to absorb in their advantages and combine some of the methods or approaches together instead of using only one method. It's not easy to fuse the advantages of those approaches and overcome the disadvantages, requiring painstaking effort and constant trial in concrete foreign language teaching. Thus, the flexible combination of those approaches and methods is a key factor in promoting foreign language teaching, which can bear fruitful results. To sum up, whenever a new method or approach appears, it always becomes a hit for some time. But as teachers of foreign languages, we must hold a critical attitude towards such innovations, for no single method is perfect. It would be profitable to draw on the advantages of suitable methods to make our classes effective, informative and enjoyable and eventually reach the pedagogical goal of our language teaching.

V. SUMMARY

To summarize, teaching procedure is not fixed and it depends on teachers' teaching techniques and English proficiencies. All of my revisions come from my English learning and teaching experience. Maybe they are not complete and not persuasive because teaching methods and procedures are too practical and are influenced by many factors such as teaching tasks, courses, training skills, learners' levels, student's characters, teachers' abilities, teaching materials, teaching aids and teachers' preferences, etc. For example, to use CLT and TBT methods, teachers are required to have good teaching abilities. So we teachers have to revise these different methods and adjust different teaching procedures all the time according to such influential factors listed above so that we can improve our teaching quality gradually.

NOTES

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