The Past and Future of English Language Teaching

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the development of English language teaching to reveal the trends and problems of methods in this field, and aims to provide reference for future English teaching and research. It introduces the methods and approaches of four periods---the grammar-based, the alternative, the communicative approach and the approaches in post era (esp. in China) --- with their main characteristics and impact on English language teaching and also with their application to the current English teaching. Then the paper gives critical comments and prospect towards its future development.

1. Introduction

1) Development of English language teaching---3 periods and their features, critical comments.

2) The methods and approaches that are more applicable to the current College or High School English teaching.

3) Prospect of the future development of English teaching. Mainly from the aspect of teachers' role; the comments and suggestions on how to reform China's College or High school English teaching.

4) Conclusion

2. Review (Main Periods of Approaches in English Language Teaching)

2.1 In the Grammar-Based Approach Period.

Major trends in twentieth-century language teaching: first stage, the adoption of grammar-based teaching methods that came to be known as the Structural approach or Situational Language Teaching in the United Kingdom, and Audiolingualism in the United States. Situational Language teaching in and Audiolingualism were mainstream teaching methods developed by linguists and applied linguists. Take Oral Approach or Situational Language Teaching for example, the methods make a strong emphasis on oral practice, grammar, and sentence patterns. To be specific, its characteristics go as follows:

(1). Language teaching begins with the spoken language. Material is taught orally before it's presented in written forms.

(2). The target language is the language in the classroom.

(3). New language points are introduced and practiced situationally.

(4). Vocabulary selection procedures are followed to ensure that an essential general service vocabulary service is covered.

(5). Terms of grammar are graded following the principle that simple forms should be taught before complex ones.

(6). Reading and writing are introduced once a sufficient lexical and grammatical basis is established.

Advantages of Situational Language Teaching

The teaching content is graded, and the students will not suffer from the difficulties of a flow of ungraded speech in the target language.

In presenting the language structure, it emphasizes the function of situations (which can help learners to apply what they have learned into real-life practice).

The attempt was made to firstly establish theoretical principles.

A methodological framework for the first time was developed.

Disadvantages of Situational Language Teaching

Not concerned necessarily with appropriateness or with rules for use in real discourse.

Its main purpose is to illustrate the grammatical points which have been isolated for study in a particular lesson.

The situations are merely the vehicle through which the grammatical syllabus is conveyed

In audiolingualism, there is no explicit grammar instruction—everything is simply memorized in form. The idea is for the students to practice the particular construct until they can use it spontaneously. In this manner, the lessons are built on static drills in which the students have little or no control on their own output; the teacher is expecting a particular response and not providing that will result in a student receiving negative feedback

2.2 The Alternative Approaches and Methods.

The period from the 1970s through the 1980s witnessed a major paradigm shift in language teaching. The communicative movement sought to move the focus away from grammar as the core component of language, to a different view of language, of language learning, of teachers, and of learners, one that focused on language as communication and on making the classroom an environment for authentic communication. The alternative approaches and methods include: Total Physical Response, the Silent Way, Community Language Learning, Suggestopedia, the Whole Language, Multiple Intelligences, Neurolinguistic Programming, the Lexical Approach and Competency-based Language Teaching. Rather than starting from a theory of language and drawing on research and theory in applied linguistics, most of these methods are developed around particular theories of learners and learning, sometimes the theories of a single theorizer or educator. Alternative approaches have had a somewhat varied history. Total Physical Response, the Silent Way, Community Language Learning, Suggestopedia did not succeed in attracting the support of mainstream language teaching, each can be seen as stressing important dimensions of the teaching-learning process. They can be seen as offering particular insights that have attracted the attention and allegiance of some teachers and educators, but they have each seen their popularity rise and wane since the 1970s. They are called Humanistic approaches. Their features are as follows:

1) They concerned the learner as a whole person. They were concerned with treating a learner not just as a student in the classroom, but as a human being with feelings and emotions.

2) They aimed to lower the inhibitions of the language learner, which are seen as the greatest barrier to language production on the part of the learner.

3) They created the learning environment where there is no pressure put on the learner to produce language until he feels confident enough to do so, and errors are tolerated, not punished.

2.3 Limitations in Humanistic Approaches.

Total Physical Response is not a fully developed method. It only represents a useful set of techniques and should be used in association with other methods and techniques. Students play a passive role in language process. They have little influence over the content of learning.

In the Silent Way, language is separated from its context and taught through artificial situations. Students are not exposed to authentic language use, but knowledge of the grammar of language. There is not enough teacher modeling, and language input is limited. Therefore, the development of students' ability to use the language for communication might be hampered.

Community Language Learning might not be feasible in teaching large classes for general language purpose.

In Suggestopedia, comprehension cannot be guaranteed.

The Whole Language, Multiple Intelligences, Neurolinguistic Programming, the Lexical Approach have to be fully determined. They have limited influence and relatively slight literature.

The Competency-based Instruction, however, has a different status, since it is used as the framework for the design of national curricula in English as well as other subjects in some countries.

2.4 The Communicative Approach.

The communicative approach includes Communicative Approach, Natural Approach, Cooperative Language Learning, Content-based Instruction, and Task-based Language Teaching. The core of this approach is function, context and meanings.

2.5 Core Features of Communicative Approach.

1) Appropriateness:
Language use must be appropriate to the situation (the setting, relationship of participants, and the purpose of communication.
2) Messages focus:
Learner is able to create and understand the real meanings.
3) Psycho-linguistic processing:
Take into account learning process and the factors in SLA
4) Risk-taking:
Learners are encouraged to make guesses an learn from their errors
5) Free practice:
Encourage the use of "holistic practice"—reading, listening, speaking and writing.

3. The More Applicable Methods and Approach to the Current College or High School English Teaching.

3.1 Task-Based Language Teaching and Its Features.

(1). An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language. Meaning-focused instead of form-focused. It is for the accomplishment of certain tasks that students use certain language forms to communicate meaningfully

(2). Authenticity. The task given to students should be clear and authentic to the life reality and have some information transfer.

(3). Provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language, but also on the learning process itself.

(4). An enhancement of the learners' own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning. Student-centeredness. Teachers should always be aware to plan a lesson for the aim of students' mastery of how to use a language. Encourage students' involvement in the task activities

(5). an attempt to link classroom language learning with language activation outside the classroom. (Nunan 1991).

(6). Teamwork. Cooperation is greatly valued during the process of reaching an outcome of a task. They should help others, rely on others and learn from each other.

(7). Feedback and evaluation. The reaching of an outcome is by far not the end of a task. Teachers should pay much attention to the process of feedback. Give students a chance to report on their findings and experience their achievements. Teachers should give appropriate evaluation to their outcome as well.

3.2 The Might-be Problems.

(1).Students can give the impression that they are comfortable with the new language s they are producing it accurately in the class. Often though a few lessons later, students will either not be able to produce the second language correctly or even won't produce it at all.

(2). Students will often produce the language but overuse the target structure so that it sounds completely unnatural.

(3). Students may not produce the target language during the free practice stage because they

find they are able to use existing language resources to complete the task.

3.3 Task-based Learning has Some Clear Advantages.

Unlike a PPP approach, the students are free of language control. In all three stages they must use all their language resources rather than just practicing one pre-selected item.

A natural context is developed from the students' experiences with the language that is personalized and relevant to them. With PPP it is necessary to create contexts in which to present the language and sometimes they can be very unnatural

The students will have a much more varied exposure to language with TBL. They will be exposed to a whole range of lexical phrases, collocations and patterns as well as language forms.

The language explored arises from the students' needs. The needs dictates what will be covered in the lesson rather than a decision made by the teacher or the course book.

It is a strong communicative approach where students spend a lot of time communicating. PPP lessons seem very teacher-centered by comparison. Just watch how much time the students spend in communicating during a task-based lesson.

It is enjoyable and motivating.

4. The Prospect

4.1 Post Methods Era (changes of the role between teachers and students).

In this period, English teaching methods vary greatly. Here are some common ones as follows:
- Autonomous Learning
- Strategies-based Instruction
- Learner-centered Individualized Instruction
- Reflective Teaching
- Computer Assistant Instruction (CAI)
- Multimedia Courseware-aided Instruction
- Web-based English Teaching/Learning
- Web-based Long-distance Instruction

4.2 English Language Teaching Methods from Indigenous Aspect (Post Methods Era in China).

The modern teaching theories believe that the essence of the teaching is students' physical and emotional development. Instead of blind copy of some foreign teaching approaches, we should pay attention to the applicability, feasibility and scientific nature of the teaching methods. The best way is to innovate to adapt to the local teaching climate.

Some English teachers and researchers tried to set up a whole indigenous English teaching and learning approaches' system based on their own teaching practice, experimental reform and approach hypothesis. Four typical English teaching method includes: Zhang Sizhong teaching method---sixteen-character foreign language teaching method; foreign language three dimensional teaching approach; English three-in-one teaching approach and English four-in-one teaching approach. Although four approaches had their unique formation route, they went through similar forming stages---reflection eroticization, rational thinking, theoretical summary and practical test. They not only had certain theoretical views on linguistics, psychology, pedagogy and philosophy but also had same indigenous characteristics. These explorations the researchers made deepened the characteristic teaching and learning approaches' study in indigenous environment and pushed English teaching forward to more suitable and rational development.

4.3 My Viewpoint on the Role of Teachers and Students in the New Era.

The role of teachers in the whole process of teaching activity has been changed constantly. From the very beginning of the twentieth century, teachers were regarded as model, conductor of an orchestra, manipulator in Situational Teaching Method; then monitor in Audio-lingual Approach; then Facilitator, Participant, Needs analyst, Counselor, Group process manager in Communicative

Language Teaching and Task-based Language Teaching. It seems that the in-class job of teachers is getting simpler and easier----no longer teacher-centered. Actually it has required high quality of teachers. The role of teachers has changed in great way. In the post-methods era, take the role of teachers in Autonomous Learning method for example, Ho and Crookall (1995) argue that the teacher can help the learners redefine their views about responsibility for autonomous learning and create an environment for them to exercise their responsibility. In autonomous learning, teachers should take control of the teaching process so that they are able to provide enough room for the learners' action, besides they should develop the capacity of self-directed teaching. Teachers need to mediate the process of learner autonomy and the constraints which impede autonomy. Teacher should assist and guide learners to reflect and monitor the learning. Apart from that, teachers are capable and free in using the multimedia to facilitate learning by means of video, radio and the internet. In order to prompt learner autonomy, teachers should also equip themselves with essential skills, for instance, they need the personal skills, thus, they are able to evaluate learners' potential and recognize what they expect in learning; secondly, they need to have the educational skills in order to present the proper material and information to the learners and guide the learners to-wards the right way to autonomous learning. What is more, teacher has to develop learners' awareness and capacity in independent learning.

In the way to achieve learner autonomy, there is still a lot of room to develop teacher's role and learner's role. It is indispensable for teacher and learner to lead a positive and supportive relationship in teaching and learning. There are some implications for teacher role and learner autonomy.

On the one hand, attention should be paid to motivation in learner autonomy. It still leaves much room of improvement for both teacher and learner. For the part of the teachers, since "one of the main tasks for teachers is to provoke interest and involvement in the subjects even when students are not initially interested in it" (Harmer 1998, cited in Xue and Yu 2005, p.68). In order to motivate learners, teachers should be capable to select the materials which can be used to arouse learners' interest and cater to their learning level so that this ensures the learners' satisfaction and confidence. What is more, teachers might help learners to set goals towards the direction of learner need and encourage them to make out their own goals, all of which will be helpful in motivating learners. For the learner's part, they need to know that their attitudes towards learning concerned a lot with the autonomy. They should cast away the passive style of learning and encourage themselves to perform more actively. In another word, they need to motivate themselves in order to cooperate with teachers in learning. They ought to bear their responsibility of autonomous learning in mind, thus they are able to perform well with the guideline of their teacher.

In addition, it is teacher's responsibility to construct a good environment for learners so that learners are able to take risks, and be creative and active in acquiring the knowledge and practicing autonomously in the harmonious atmosphere. Meanwhile, learners will overcome the obstacles and uncertainty which they encounter during learning. A good environment can enable the teacher to transmit the knowledge and information and guide the whole process more conveniently and efficiently as well.

5. Conclusion

No teaching method can be value-free and hence no teaching method can be universally applicable. Teachers and teachers in training need to be able to use approaches and methods flexibly and creatively based on their own judgment. In the process, they should be encouraged to transform and adapt the method they use to make them their own. Training in the techniques and procedures of a specific method is probably essential for novice teachers, because it provides them with the confidence they will need to face the learners and it provides techniques and strategies for presenting lessons. In the early stages, teaching is largely a matter of applying procedures and techniques developed by others. An approach or a predetermined method, with its associated activities, principles, and techniques, may be an essential starting point for an inexperienced teacher, but it should be seen only as that. As the teacher gains experience and knowledge, he or she will

begin to develop an individual approach or personal method of teaching, reflecting the teacher's individual belief, values, principles and experiences. He needs to take the following points into consideration:

His role in the class

The nature of effective teaching and learning

The difficulties the learners face and how these can be addressed

Successful learning activities

The structure of an effective lesson

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