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**LESSON SIX: LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACHES AND METHODS: PRACTICAL INSIGHTS**

**Introduction**

Think back to your own language learning days. Did you ever have a teacher who forced everyone to learn the same way? Were all the students equally happy with that class? Probably not. The chances are that a teacher who showed no flexibility and appreciation of variety in learning style was not very motivating or successful.

''There is no single acceptable way to go about teaching language today." This quote, from Diane Larsen-Freeman's writings on language teaching methodology, sums up a major trend away from unity to diversity.

There has been a growing realization that people learn in different ways, and that approaches which suit one person may not suit another. For example, some outgoing personalities love to experiment and can hardly wait for the chance to try speaking the new language. Others, more reserved, prefer to listen and understand before speaking. Some people find that studying the grammar is an important step for them in establishing a framework for their language learning. Others never study the rules, but find that putting themselves in situations where they have to communicate is enough to trigger their learning.

Against this backdrop, teachers of English have concluded that no single approach or method is appropriate for all learning styles. A good lesson will therefore be one in which you use a smorgasbord of activities taken from a variety of sources. By varying your technique, you will give students of all styles the chance to shine some of the time. With this thought in mind, you can begin to appraise the language learning approaches used in the country in which you serve. Each approach has something to offer. Your task is to identify and exploit those elements.

As you become more familiar with your job you will find out that you learn to trust your instincts and your ability to judge when to switch techniques. At first you may need to read about methods and approaches, and you should look for opportunities to talk to experienced teachers about what they think of different methods. Then, gradually as you get to know your students, you will find that you can sense when a class is tired, or confused, or in need of quiet time, or particularly interested. And you will find that you know when to dip into your repertoire of approaches, games and exercises to find the appropriate activity which suits the mood of your students and which ensures the get the best out of every lesson

The terms "method" and "approach" will be used interchangeably in this lesson. For example, the chapter refers to the Audio-lingual Method and the Communicative Approach. A number of different ways of distinguishing between methods and approaches have been proposed by experts in the field but the distinctions usually blur. Both deal with theory of the nature of language and language learning; with syllabus, learning and teaching activities, learner and teacher roles, and instructional materials; and with classroom techniques, practices, and behaviours.

**1.Traditional language teaching**

**1.1.Grammar translation method**

**1.1.1. Background:** The Grammar Translation Method looks upon language learningas an intellectual activity. Until twenty years ago, this method was commonly used in Europe to teach Latin in schools. Those countries which wereclosely associated with Britain or France sometimesstill bear the traces of this association in the use of modified forms of Grammar Translation inlanguage classroom.

**1.1.2. Distinguishing features:** In a typical Grammar Translation class the main focus is on reading and writing, with little attention being given to speaking or listening. The central text for each lesson is literary. Passages are selected from authors as Mark Twain, George Orwell, Charles Dickens, or modern writers such as Chinua Achebe and V.S. Naipaul. These passages are read and then comprehension questions are asked and answered, first orally, then in writing. Grammar is taught deductively, through presentation and study of the rules, followed by practice through translations and exercises. Vocabulary selection is based on the reading text sed. Words are taught through bilingual lists and memorization. Students are often asked to write the new word in a sentence.

**1.1.3**. **Impact on your classroom and your teaching**

Many of your students will he used to and may expect Grammar Translation activities. Memorization particularly may be considered a valued teaching tool, especially in societies where oral traditions are strong, or where periods of study in Koranic or Buddhist schools are the norm. In theUnited States, where the emphasis is placed on understanding concepts rather than memorizing texts, the role of memorization tends to be downgraded. However memorization does not exclude understanding, and as a teacher of languages, it behooves you to play to your students ' strengths. If the syllabus followed in your school includes literary texts and you have presented a poem, explored its ideas and are satisfied that your students understand them, then asking your students to learn the poem is a good way to reinforce learning and one that your students will be used to.

Your students may also be used to the style of teacher-student interaction generated by the Grammar Translation Method. In this method, the teacher initiates interaction and there are seldom any student-to-student exchanges. The role of the teacher is a traditionally authoritarian one and the role of the student is to obey. Sudden changes to this dynamic can result in near chaos, so any alteration you want to make should be carried out cautiously. You may want to ask your supervisor if you can sit in on a few lessons given by your colleagues. Observing other teachers can give you an idea of the sort of student-teacher relationship which exists in your school and can give you the parameters of a model to follow.

**1.2.Direct method**

**1.2.1. Background**

The Direct Method developed in the nineteenth century as educationalists attempted to build a language learning methodology around their observations of child language learning. These educationalists argued that a foreign language could be taught without translation or use of the learner's native tongue. The Direct Method therefore insists on thinking and communicating directly in the target language and does not allow translation. The Berlitz School of Languages is the best known proponent of this method.

**1.2.2.Distinguishing features :** The four language skills are taught from the beginning, but a special emphasis is placed on speaking. Classes often start with the reading aloud of a specially graded text which introduces the lesson's vocabulary and grammatical structure. Practice follows with exercises such as guided conversation, where the teacher asks questions on the text and the students answerusing full sentences. Students will then ask each other similar questions. Other practice exercises include filling-in-the-blanks, dictation, controlled composition or listening comprehension exercises. Grammar is taught inductively, that is to say, languagepatterns are presented and practiced, but the rules are not explicitly given. The Direct Method teacher uses mime, demonstration, realia, and visual aids to help students understand grammar and vocabulary.

**1.2.3. Impact on your classroom and your teaching**

The "No translation" rule can become an issue. Teachers complain that it is sometimes time consuming to mime vocabulary, when a simple translation would do. And some words are difficult to mime. Students become frustrated when some members of the class do not understand the teacher's explanations and when the whole class is held up until the meaning becomes clear to all.

When monitoring carefully the amount of your students' native language you use in class, you should use your common sense in this question of translation. If you judge that your students are not getting the point, or the meaning of a particular word, if you think that your lesson is straying from its objectives, and if you know the word in your students' language, then give a translation and get on with your lesson.

Many of the textbooks based on the Direct Method, most of which are by now quite dated, were written for Western school children. This can be problematic since the method is heavily dependent on the text, and the texts are not guaranteed to be culturally accessible. A textbook used in Francophone Africa describes children having comflakes or breakfast, putting on their Wellington boots because it is raining, and catching a double-decker bus to go to school. It is not difficult to transfer this lesson into a cultural context that your students will understand, but it is an additional barrier for your students to overcome. And your role in thisprocess will be to provide the necessary cultural translation.

**1.3.Audiolingual method (ALM)**

**1.3.1. Background:** During the Second World War, army programs **w**ere set up to teach American military personnel languages such as German, French, Japanese and Tagalog. Strong emphasis was placed on aural-oral training. TheAudiolingual Method developed from these programmmes**.** This method was also influenced by behavioral psychologists who believed that foreign language learning is basically a process of mechanical habitformation.

**1.3.2.Distinguishing features:** In the Audiolingual Method, skills are taught in the natural order of acquisition: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Audiolingual classes begin with a dialogue which introduces the lesson's sentence patterns. Thestudents memorize thisdialogue, then practice grammar patterns in drills such as listen and repeat, substitution, chain, and transformation. Accuracy in pronunciation is emphasized and fostered through minimal pair drills where students learn to differentiate between sounds such as the vowels in "ship" and "sheep," "hit" and "heat," and "bit" and "beat." Lessons are sequenced according to grammatical complexity.

Translation, considered to cause interference from the mother tongue, is not allowed. Learning is tightly controlled by the teacher, who follows the text closely.

**1.3.3. Impact on your classroom and your teaching**

Many of your students will be familiar with the type of activities described above. For most Americans variety and change is an essential part of their learning experience. Therefore, you may sometimes find yourself amazed by your students' stamina and capacity to repeat drills in mantra-like fashion seemingly for hours ata time.

To ensure that mindless chanting does not take over, you may wish to emphasize some of the speed and competitiveness promoted by the Audiolingual Method.

**2. Communicative language teaching**

**2.1. Communicative approach**

**2.1.1.Background**

The emphasis is placed on using the target language to accomplish a function such as complaining, advising, or asking for information. Attention is also paid to the social context in which this functiontakes place. For instance, different language will be used when complaining to a teacher than when complaining toa close friend.

**2.1.2.Distinguishing features**

All four language skills are taught from the beginning. In speaking skills the aim is to be understood, not to speak like a native. In the sequencing of lessons, priority is given to learner interests and needs. This is in contrast to a grammar driven method which may start with verb tenses, and work through from the present simple to the conditionals. In the Communicative Approach, if a learner needs to know how to give advice ("If I were you, I would ....") then this conditional is taught. Interaction between speakers and listeners or readersand writers is at the root of all activities. Learners usually work in pairs or groups for role play, information sharing, or problem solving.

**2.1.3. Impact on your classroom and your teaching**

The communicative approach will challenge your creativity to set up situations in which your students candemonstrate their competency in the four language skills. Group work is basic to this demonstration. But you may face difficulties in the logistics of organizing your groups. Lack of space, or complaints from otherteachers about the noisy moving of desks, might feature in your first few weeks of asking your class to divide into groups. You will have to consider all of your options. Can you work outside? Is it possible to use the library for your lessons'? Can you set up a reward system to encourage your students to move quickly and quietly into their groups?

You may also encounter resistance to group work from your students. Some of the better students may resent having to "share" their skills and grades. Some of the less motivated students may take the opportunity to do even less work.Your grading policy for group work will have to be spelled out and you will need to monitor that everyone is contributing to the group effort. You should also leave the time and theopportunityto earn grades **f**or individual work.

**2.2. Total physical response (TPR) and the natural approach**

**2.2.1. Background**

TPR is a language teaching method built around the coordination of speech and action. It attempts to teach language through physical activity. The Natural Approach shares with TPR an emphasis on exposing the learner to hearing and understanding the language before requiring the learner to speak.

**2.2.2. Distinguishing features**

Language skills are taught in the natural order of acquisition: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Both the Natural Approach and TPR focus on the importance of listening comprehension as the basis for language acquisition. Both approaches believe that language is acquired, not learned. In other words, learners acquire a language through an unconscious process which involves using the language for meaningful communication. Learning, on the other hand, involves a conscious process which results in knowledge about the rules of a language, but not necessarily in an ability to use the language. The learner's mother tongue is seldom used. Meaning is made clear by mime, drawing, etc. Great attention is paid to reducing learner anxiety. The Natural Approach stresses that self-confident learners with high motivation are successful learners and that teachers should create a learning environment which promotes self-confidence.

**2.2.3**. **Impacts on your classroom**

In both of these approaches, the role of the teacher is to generate comprehensible input. This means that when presenting new materials you have to be prepared to speak, mime, draw, or use real objects to get your meaning across. Only when you are satisfied that your students understand and are ready to speak do you ask them to do so.

These approaches can be useful and funny especially when you are working with beginners or with students at a technical or a vocational center who only take one hour of English a week, or with students whose greatest need is for listening comprehension. It is also useful when you lack adequate textbooks. Very few institutions offer courses which use only TPR or the Natural Approach, but many teachers have commented that comprehension-based activities reduce learning stress.

*\*\* Teaching is a hard work because it is heart work\*\**