

METHODS AND APPROACHES OF LANGUAGE TEACHING

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APPROACH, METHOD AND TECHNIQUE:

In the late nineteenth century linguists like Otto Jespersen, Henry Sweet and Harold Palmer attempted an organization of the general principles and theories of language learning and teaching. A subtle difference between philosophical and theoretical principles of language teaching and derived processes for teaching language in practice emerged and to clarify this difference American applied linguist Edward Anthony proffered three distinct levels, namely approach, method and technique. Edward M. Anthony, in his article, 'Approach, Method and Technique (1963), defined the terms as follows:

The arrangement is hierarchical.

An approach is a set of correlative assumptions, dealing with the nature of language and the nature of language teaching and learning...An approach describes the nature of subject matter to be taught.

Method is an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material, no part of which contradicts, and all of which is based upon, the selected approach. An approach is axiomatic, a method is procedural. Within one approach there can be many methods.

A technique is implementational, that which actually takes place in a classroom. It is a particular trick, stratagem, or contrivance used to accomplish an immediate objective. Techniques must be consistent with a method, and therefore in harmony with an approach as well (Anthony 1963:5-7).

According to Anthony an approach is then a conceptual level in which beliefs and theories of language teaching are determined. Method on the other hand, is that stage where the theory is put into practice and choices are made between the alternative skills, content and the order in which the content is to be presented. Techniques are at a stage in which the classroom procedures are described.

This description/definition held good till 1985, when Jack C. Richards proposed an alternative definition. He said:

But since we prefer method as an umbrella term for the specification and interrelation of theory and practice, we find it convenient to modify Anthony's terminology for the present purpose and speak of approach, design and procedure...approach, defines those assumptions, beliefs and theories about the nature of language and the nature of language learning that operate as axiomatic constructs or reference points, and provide a theoretical foundation for what language teachers ultimately do with learners in the classrooms...design specifies the

relationship of theories of language learning, to both form and function of instructional materials and activities in instructional settings...procedures comprise the classroom techniques and practices that are consequences of particular approaches and designs (Richards 1985:17)

This definition and redefinition of terms may seem relatively unimportant, but in the context of studying different approaches and methods, they are significant because they are tokens used in discussions. The Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics (1985:15) offers this definition:

Different theories about the nature of language and how languages are learnt (approach), imply different ways of teaching language (method), and different methods make use of different kinds of classroom activity (technique).

The dictionary defines a method as a way of doing things. Methods are theoretically linked with approaches and are held to be largely determined by them. Methods deal with the 'how' of doing things. Methodology indicates the sequence to be followed in a language task/creativity and the role of the learners and the teacher in this sequence.

Approach

The practices in language teachings are based on the theories concerning the nature of language and language teaching. These theories together form the first component of a method. The two main views of language learning are as follows:

The behaviorist view of language learning: behaviorists believe that learning, both verbal and non-verbal, takes place through the process of habit formation. Learners are exposed to the language in their school/college, family and neighborhood. They try to imitate the people around them. If the imitation is proper, they are rewarded, which motivates them further for imitation, leading to reinforcements and habit formations. The behaviorists think that learners should be corrected as soon as they make mistakes in order to avoid fossilization.

The cognitivist view of language learning: According to this theory, exposure to language is important, but language learning is not a cheat merely through repetition and imitation. Human beings construct individual linguistic concepts and structures, discovering the underlying pattern of the language they are exposed to, with the help of their innate faculties and linguistic abilities of the brain. Errors are an essential part of this learning process.

Design

Design in a method has the following components:

- Objectives of the course

- The syllabus model which the method incorporates.
- Teaching and learning activities
- Role of teachers and learners

Procedure

Procedure signifies practices and behavior in the actual classroom situation. It refers to the production, practice and feedback phases of teaching.

Approach and method are treated at the level of design by modern linguists. At this level the objectives of teaching a language, the syllabus, and content, along with the role of the teachers, students and instructional materials are specified. The implementational stage or Anthony's "technique" is what modern linguists tend to identify as "procedure". Thus according to modern linguists, the theories of an approach moulds a "method", organization of the method is achieved through "design" and practically realized through what they prefer to call "procedure" today.

- Accuracy, Appropriacy, Fluency:

Accuracy refers to the mechanics of language, the principal features of which are-

- i. Clear and articulate speaking and writing
- ii. Minimal grammatical errors
- iii. Words spelled correctly
- iv. Correct pronunciation
- v. Appropriate use of language in given situations
- vi. Contextual use of language in proper manner

Appropriacy refers to the suitability of a word for the context that it is used in. It is a complex element as such a perception regarding the suitability of application of a word is largely culture-specific and varies with time, place, situation and socio-cultural aspects. The discussions on communicative competence above have revealed that the linguists have repeatedly recognized the socio-linguistic aspect of an individual's communicative competence and emphasized appropriacy in any communicative effort or speech-act. Some linguists believe that focusing on inappropriate forms of linguistic use in class is conducive to generation of awareness about what is not acceptable. Creating contexts and then matching language to those specific contexts with reference to the learner's own socio-cultural position is also effective for inculcating a sense of appropriacy in functional use of language.

Fluency is a complex term that has several significatory levels. Fillmore (1979) referred to certain basic features of fluency, which are applicable to both native and non-native speakers.

These were (i) fluency in speech as identified by Kuipper and Tillis(1986), (ii) coherence, complexity and density in rapid speech as embodied by Noam Chomsky (Fillmore), (iii) appropriate applications in varying socio-cultural contexts and (iv) an exceptional control over aesthetic functions of language in forms of creativity, innovation, punning, creation of metaphors etc. Lenon(1990) again perceives fluency as a “global ability” that is almost synonymous with language proficiency. Early linguists like Segalowitz(1991) tend to discuss the phenomenon in relation to receptive processes, but the modern trend is to analyze fluency in terms of productive processes involved in planning and delivery of speech. Carlson, Sullivan and Schneider (1989) define fluency as an automatic mechanical process of speech production that is characterized by the fact that the “psycholinguistic processes of speech planning and speech production are functioning easily and efficiently” (Lenon, 1990). Non-fluent speech needs greater effort and attention. Faerch and Kasper(1984) assert that fluency belongs to the domain of procedural knowledge rather than declarative knowledge, the former signifying the knowledge of how to do something, and the latter signifying knowledge about something. Richard Schimdt prefers to define fluency as a productive skill.

Even as the humanistic approaches to learning the second language may tend to discount accuracy, the humanistic approaches apparently put a premium upon appropriacy. The humanistic approach specifically tends to come close to the concept of BICS or Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills, popularized by Jim Cummins, that refers to language skills needed in social situations, or the day-to-day language needed to interact socially with other people. English language learners (ELLs) employ BIC skills in every sphere of day-to – day life, which is when they are on the playground, in the lunch room, on the school bus, at parties, playing sports and talking on the telephone etc. Social interactions are usually contextual and not very demanding cognitively. The language required is not specialized and thus evidently the focus is on fluency and appropriacy rather than on accuracy. The structural approach however seems to emphasize accuracy along with an overt recognition of the importance of appropriacy. The breakdown of sentences and verbal modules into specific structures for better familiarity and acquisition of the structural elements before proceeding towards the whole naturally calls for greater attention paid to accuracy of the structures, though at the same time, it may be said that the ultimate whole, ideally effective and meaningful, involves an implicit acknowledgement of the appropriacy of the evolved structure. However, accuracy should not be relegated as redundant in second language learning since it is important that the learners acquire correct speech habits. Linguists suggest some steps for effective introduction of accuracy in the second language lessons:

- i. Initial sections of the lesson may be devoted to development of accuracy, giving the learners a scope of learning a new target structure and thus attention may be directed towards a near perfect production of the verbal modules. The emphasis would be on minimizing the errors.
- ii. Repetitions in form of systematic drills in vocabulary and grammar makes the target structure increasingly familiar to the learners and would enable them to learn it easily

iii. Learners may be made aware of the primary need of accurate language production in tandem with fluent and appropriate language production

iv. A student centered class with greater scope of peer-review would enable the learners to take responsibilities and self-correction. The learners then would be naturally inclined to monitor and rectify mistakes as they proceed toward greater fluency in speaking and writing in the target language.

However in functional approach to second language teaching accuracy is not granted the place of primary significance since the learners' ability to convey intelligible messages with considerable fluency and appropriacy is what emerges as the ultimate objective of the second language lessons. Apprehension of over emphasis upon rectification that may discourage the learners and impair fluency leads to lesser emphasis upon the accuracy of speech or written verbal modules.