

Approaches and Methods of Teaching English in Professional Classrooms

Dr. Meenakshi Dey

Associate Professor, Department of English,
Haldia Institute of Technology, Haldia,
West Bengal, India

Dr. Jyoti Doley

Associate Professor, Department of English,
Haldia Institute of Technology, Haldia,
West Bengal, India

ABSTRACT

In the last five decades, the value of English has grown to a new height owing to the change in the mode of our business. The globe has shrunk to a small village in which businesses are carried out across different time zones and spaces in the virtual world. In such a small world with multiple business networks, English stands out as the most important lingua franca. The language has achieved the stature of a world lingua franca as the numbers of non-native speakers are growing in numbers. In such context, English becomes an important language for the professional students who aspire to become a successful professional in his/her own right. Aligning with the need of the students, the teachers and practitioners of English Language Teaching, work tirelessly to meet the needs and requirements of the students. This paper attempts to present the various approaches and methodologies of teaching English to the students of Engineering and Management in order to develop their communication skills in English.

Keywords

Language Teaching, Approaches, Methodologies

1. INTRODUCTION

For more than a century, there had been deliberations and debates within the teaching fraternity on how to teach second or foreign languages to native speakers. The focus of these deliberations has been mainly on teaching correct grammar, developing fluency and accuracy in teaching the language, developing a vocabulary of the learners, learning theories of language and their application in teaching, developing effective strategies for enhancing the four language skills namely speaking, reading, writing, listening and understanding the role of technology to enhance the language learning aptitude of the non-native speakers. Among the various second or foreign languages are spoken all over the world, English, as we all know is the lingua franca of the world. Though more people speak Mandarin Chinese as their first language, yet few would disagree that English is a global language. In an interview, Prof. David Crystal said, “a language becomes a global language because of the power of the people who speak it” (“Global English with David Crystal”). The ‘power’ of English was originally grounded on political and military factors, most remarkably the extension of the British imperial Empire. Eventually the role of English as the language of science, industry, finance and economics further amplified its power and impact.

The rise of English as a global language is largely due to its democratic nature. McCrum is of the opinion that “there’s a quality to the English language which is different from German or French or Chinese. That quality is approachability, usefulness, adaptability” (“Author Robert McCrum Discusses ‘Globish’”). Approachability signifies that English is easy to learn due to its simple grammar, easy spellings and pronunciation in comparison to other languages. Usefulness entails that English is widely spoken in the business and academic world and it is the language of science and technology. With respect to adaptability, it can be observed that the English language is flexible as it borrows heavily from languages — chiefly Latin, Greek, and French. These ‘loanwords’ are incorporated into the English language in their original form or through partial modification. With time these words either become common through daily usage or fade into obscurity due to lack of its application. Another reason for the growth of English as a lingua franca is that it is the language most used when disseminating socio-cultural concepts of democratic freedom, universal rights, females' rights, human equality, human rights, racial impartiality and also the language of entertainment in many parts of the world such as Hollywood, Disney World, Film-Awards, Society etc.

2. LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACHES

2.1. Structural Approach

Having explored the usefulness of the English language, it has become imperative in the present-day world to teach non-native speakers the ways of mastering this English language in their professional classrooms. There are three major language theories that inform current approaches and methods of teaching any language. The first theory of language is the traditional one in which there is a structural approach to teaching the English language. The structural approach is a technique wherein the learner becomes adept in understanding and executing the patterns of sentences. Breminton opines, “Structural approach is a scientific study of the fundamental structures of the English language, their analysis and logical arrangement” (Arora 156). These fundamental structures are phonological units, grammatical units, grammatical operations and lexical items (Richards and Rodgers 21). The structural approach to language is based on the conventions that language can be best learnt through a scientific comprehension of the structures or patterns of sentences and vocabulary.

2.2. Functional Approach

The second view of language is the functional view where the focus is on the expression of the functional meaning of language. In the year 1972, British linguist D.A. Wilkins formulated a new approach and that was to teach language on the basis of what students might want to communicate in particular situations. This was called functional-notional approach where meanings were formed on the grounds of how language should function in a given state of affairs. Functionalists opine that language can be best taught “with reference to the semantic and communicative functions of language, whose primary function is to be a vehicle for social interaction among human beings.” (Allen 254). Teachers who apply the functional method of teaching set up situations or bring up topics in which students can use language which matches the given situation. For instance, if the topic being learnt is picnic, the situation may be organizing a day out with family and friends or teachers. In such a situation, the language functions specific to the situation are activated and students have a better understanding regarding how to express themselves.

2.3. Interactional Approach

The next view of language is the interactional view which recognizes the genetic predisposition for language acquisition along with the social environment that plays an important role in language acquisition. The interactional approach sees language as a means of building and maintaining interpersonal relations and “for the performance of social transactions between individuals” (Richards & Rodgers 21). In the words of Lightbrown and Spada, “When learners are given the opportunity to engage in meaningful activities they are compelled to ‘negotiate for meaning,’ that is, to express and clarify their intentions, thoughts, opinions, etc., in a way which permits them to arrive at a mutual understanding. This is especially true when the learners are working together to accomplish a particular goal” (122). These meaningful activities can be firstly interaction with the learner and the content such as text, audio-video recordings, radio and television broadcasts and other interactive media. Secondly it can be interaction between the learner and the instructor. This can include sessions where the instructor presents the content and assists the learners in interacting with the content while maintaining the learner’s interest and motivation. Last but not the least, there can be learner-learner interaction. These sessions can be inter-learner discussions for reflecting on a particular subject matter, group discussions among the learners, telephonic conversations, role plays etc. In compliance with the aforementioned approaches to teaching language, the teaching fraternity has adopted various modes and approaches to teaching the English language. These are the grammar-translation method, direct method, total physical response, suggestopedia, lexical approach, silent way, task-based learning, and content-based instruction.

2.4. Grammar Translation Method

The grammar-translation method (GTM) is a structuralist approach, where the focus is on the rules of grammar, reading and writing and less on speaking and listening. Teachers teach the students grammar and language in their mother tongue and less in the targeted language i.e., English. Most of the vernacular medium schools or higher institutions apply the grammar translation method where in addition to grammar rules, students memorize bilingual vocabularies and engage in translation from mother tongue to English language and vice versa. The students learn words, phrases, idioms and in the end sentence. They also

learn the art of translation and English grammar is learned by comparing it with the grammar of the mother tongue. While GTM allows learners to become proficient in reading and writing in the English language, it also leads to less interaction among the learners and so language fluency is compromised. Also, the emphasis on formal grammar rather than development of natural speech causes disinterestness among the learners and delays the process of second language acquisition.

2.5. Direct Method

The next method of teaching English language is the direct method where the students are exposed to the English language directly. The students are taught English language as if it is their first language. The direct method of teaching English language is a response to the grammar-translation-method where writing and reading exercises were more stressed upon than speaking. In the direct method, the students are encouraged to listen and speak more in English language which is not verbose and ornamental but everyday common language. In order to facilitate the teaching-learning process, the teachers using the direct method take help of audio-visuals, realia, demonstrations etc. While the direct method is useful in gaining fluency in English language, its weakness lies in the fact that often the teachers consider that the conditions in which the first and the second language is learned are equivalent. Consequently, they get frustrated when their attempts to teach the language to the student fail and they place the blame on learner’s lack of interest to learn the language. Similar to the direct method of teaching is the Audio-lingual Method (ALM) which originated during the World War II. This method, also known as the army method, propounds repetitive drills in order to learn correct pronunciation of the words in English language. In ALM, the emphasis is more on grammar than vocabulary and accuracy of sentence construction and pronunciation is prioritized over fluency. Consequently, there is less room for errors and the learner learns the target language mechanically.

2.6. Total Physical Response (TPR)

This mode of teaching was developed by James Asher, professor of Psychology at the San Jose State University in California in 1970. Asher opined that teaching a second language such as English in an adult classroom can be made effective if the students not only observed the teacher giving verbal and non-verbal signals attentively and gave spoken responses but also resorted to physical responses such as miming the meaning of a word or sentence. TPR is advantageous as it cuts down the monotony of theoretical teaching, aids students with disabilities such as dyslexia or other learning disabilities, functions effectively with mixed abilities students and makes learning fun and enjoyable. On the other hand, TPR can be a challenge for shy students who prefer to be physically active and introvert and also the use of imperatives can make the learner using this method seem impolite or insensitive.

2.7. Suggestopedia

This is a mode of language teaching which was originated in the 1970s by Bulgarian psychologist Georgi Lozanov. The name is a portmanteau of two terms “suggestion” and “pedagogy”. In this method of teaching the learners learn the target language in a free, relaxed and a positive environment. The language facilitator or the instructor creates a pleasant environment for the learners to acquire the target language spontaneously. The teaching tools and materials for this method of teaching include

classic or popular music, visual images like photographs, films and comic strips, etc., relaxation exercises. The aim of this method is to tap the hidden talent of the learners while engaging in conscious and sub-conscious language learning activities. Learning a language is often burdened by the negative feeding of the mind like “it is hard”, “it is boring,” “I can’t learn,” “I don’t have the capability to learn,” etc. Such negative feeding raises a very high and heavy obstacle in the teaching/learning process of the learners; therefore, the practitioners of this methodology create an environment of positive feedback and pleasantness. It applies the technique of inducement, where the facilitator motivates the learners to practice the target language without any hesitation.

2.8. Lexical Approach

The Lexical Approach of language teaching was developed by Michael Lewis in 1993 who emphasised the importance of lexicon than grammar. He professed, “language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalised grammar” (The Lexical Approach, 1993). The Lexical Approach emphasises upon the importance of lexical grammar (how words are connected like Collocation and Cognate) and “suprasentential features” or the text grammar. The practitioners of this approach of language teaching use “language chunks” to show how certain words are invariably placed together. Like “[It is] [going to] rain” the lexical chunks here are “It” and “Is”. They are used together. Likewise, “[Log in] to your office system,” Don’t [log out] without my permission. Here, ‘Log in’ and ‘Log out’ are examples of “lexical chunks” which are used together. In a language classroom for professional students like Managers and Engineers, teachers and facilitators can apply this approach along with other approaches. Though this approach of teaching English was favoured when it was first introduced in 1993, many practitioners were of the opinion that the lexical approach can be applied for students to quickly pick certain phrases or combination words but it doesn’t foster creativity, as the learners only get to reproduce what they just heard. It gives less scope for creativity.

2.9. The Silent Way

The Silent Way is a language teaching approach that facilitates greater autonomy to the learners. The learners actively participate in the learning process with minimal intervention of the teacher. The teacher only intervenes when it is absolutely necessary to correct or redirect the course of learning. The teacher/facilitator provides space and opportunities for learners’ introspection, and provides feedback whenever necessary. As for the teaching materials, Cuisenaire rods replaces the traditional materials like textbooks, Charts, Verb-Conjugation tables, etc. The aim of this approach is to familiarize the learners with the sound patterns of the target language. So, they start the course with familiar sounds which is followed by the students’ engagement in language learning process. The teacher/facilitator takes a back-seat, and observes keenly while the learners are engaged in group learning activities. There learners are not corrected frequently, as it goes by the dictum, “errors are necessary.” Such methodologies can be applied with small group of students/learners in engineering colleges in India.

2.10. Task Based Learning

The Task Based Language learning approach focuses on the task as the core unit of language learning course. It is a logical development of the Communicative Approach of language Teaching. Here the learners use the target language to perform real life tasks. They use the language in context of the task they perform which make them understand the elements of a target language for better understanding of how the language works. For example, in the Engineering and Management Institutes, students are to write term papers, project reports, Summer Training Report along with presentations. These tasks are essential for them as they are to apply knowledge of the core subject using English while writing their reports. Such activities provide natural context for the students to experience the nuances of the language that is personalised and relevant to them. This way the students will have much more varied exposure to language while they use the language in a customized context along with the exposure to a whole range of lexical phrases, collocations and patterns as well as language forms. As students use the target language to complete the task, they realise their language learning needs which makes learning of the target language interesting and relevant.

2.11. Content Based Instruction

The Content-based Instruction focuses on what is being taught using the language, instead of studying the language. Here emphasis is made on using language as a medium to learn new knowledge and ideas. The students learn about their favourite subject of interests ranging from trends of technological developments to their favourite film or actor. They learn about their subject of interest using the target language they are trying to learn, rather than their native language in order to develop their linguistic ability in the target language. This is thought to be a more natural way of developing language ability and one that corresponds more to the way we originally learn our first language. It can make learning a language more interesting and motivating. Students can use the language to fulfil a real purpose, which can make students both more independent and confident. The information that the students gather from different sources, the process of re-evaluating and restructuring helps the learners’ cognitive skills. They learn the target language without losing on to the creative thinking ability. It is due to this monitored involvement of the learners, the teaching learning process becomes interesting and effective.

3. CONCLUSION

Thus, it can be seen that linguists and English language teaching fraternity have time and again developed various modes and approaches for teaching English language to the students in their classrooms. These approaches for teaching a foreign language have both merits and demerits. But language teachers are constantly working upon the lacunae in these modes of teaching in order to develop a methodology of teaching English language which is highly effective and holistic in itself. Presently, trained and skilled teachers prefer a teaching method in which learners are more active such as task-based and/or content-based teaching. Teaching and learning aids such as audio, video, graphics, presentations etc. also play a major role in rousing the learners’ interest. Digital language laboratories have been set up in engineering, management and other higher education institutions in order to facilitate the learning of English

language. Grooming sessions are also conducted before placement drives in order to prepare the students for their job interviews which usually takes place in English language in many parts of the world. Considering the usefulness of English as a global language, it is therefore imperative for both the teachers and the learners to make the most of the available different modes of teaching and learning English language and strive to discover more learner-centric teaching approaches for easier learning of the English language.

REFERENCES

- 1) Allen, Keith. 2007. *The Western Classical Tradition in Linguistics*. Equinox, Indonesia.
- 2) Arora, Navita. 2012. *English Language Teaching: Approaches and Methodologies*. Tata McGraw Hill Education Private Limited, New Delhi.
- 3) Asher, James J. 1969. "The Total Physical Response Approach to Second Language Learning." *The Modern Language Journal*, Vol. 53, No. 1., Wiley Online Library, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1969.tb04552.x>
- 4) Feeney, Mark. "Author Robert McCrum Discusses 'Globish.'" Boston.Com, Globe Newspaper Company, 5June2010, archive.boston.com/ae/books/articles/2010/06/05/author_robert_mccrum_discusses_globish.
- 5) "Global English with David Crystal." YouTube, uploaded by Macmillan Education ELT, 2 Nov. 2009, youtu.be/WZ11EjxxKKw.
- 6) Lightbrown, P. M. & Spada, N. 1999. *How Languages are Learned*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- 7) Richards, Jack, and Rodgers, T. 1986. *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press, U.K.