

METHODS AND APPROACHES OF TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN INDIA: AN ECLECTIC OVERVIEW

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Abstract

The problem of teaching English language in India is multidimensional and goes back to the times of the East India Company which started teaching English in India in 1612. This paper gives a glimpse of the different methods being used in the Indian educational system from the traditional Grammar-Translation Method to the more recent skill-based approach. The Grammar-Translation Method has continued to be used because it is useful in teaching large classes and a large syllabus, and the drawbacks of the method, in terms of its inability to produce communicative competence, have not been a serious problem. On the other hand, the Direct Method and the Structural Approach were developed in the middle of this century, focusing on the inductive learning and habit building in the language structure. Today's context is shaped by Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task Based Learning (TBL) that emphasize the importance of fluency and learner autonomy over rote memorization. In addition, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2005) has been a promoter of constructivist approach such as Discourse Oriented Pedagogy (D.O.P) which has promoted the linkage of classroom learning with reality. These innovations do not prevent a large gap of inequality to emerge between the rural and urban areas, as can be seen from the recent studies conducted in such areas as Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, where students' graduation with a "defective language apparatus" is frequently recorded due to inadequate teacher training and overcrowded classrooms.

The aim of this overview is to suggest that none of the methods is a solution to all India's linguistic needs. Rather, a prudent eclectic method is still the most feasible option for contemporary teachers, that is, choosing appropriate strategies from different methods. Teachers can create interactive learning spaces by combining the use of digital technologies, such as Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL).

Keywords: methodology, sociocultural framework, globalized world and workforce, Computer-assisted language, Mobile-assisted language

Introduction

Language is an essential part of human life and the world today is globalized with English being the language that is the most important in the world. The history of English in India is a long and complex one – dating from the arrival of the East India Company in 1612, and the subsequent advent of British colonial rule. English became a language of administration to a language used mainly for communication and teaching over the centuries, in the Indian educational system. Although India was independent from England on August 15, 1947, it decided to keep English as a compulsory subject in the schools and colleges, as a condition for social mobility and as an entry to jobs.

English language teaching in India is still a significant challenge for teachers and students. The country has unique and old pedagogical culture which is encapsulated by the expression “Matha Pitha Guru Deivam” (Mother, Father, Teacher, God) but there is no single and unique teaching method for English in India and it follows various methods and approaches adopted in the contemporary world. This study is designed to offer a selection of these techniques, from the basic to the more recent, innovative and technology-driven. This field can be understood by separating "method" from "approach" as the latter is a broader framework or "loom" over what is taught and learned by the teacher and learner in the former.

The present scenario of English Language Teaching (ELT) in India is characterized by conflicting demands of extensive syllabus which is examination-oriented and functional communicative competence. In the traditional schools, with large classrooms and limited resources, the old ways are still in place and becoming more common in private and special schools, innovative, learner-centred approaches are gaining in popularity. This study shows the historical evolution and practical implementation of Grammar-Translation Method, the Structural Approach and Communicative Language Teaching in the study of English, thus emphasizing the need for an "eclectic approach". Educational experts have pointed out that none of the methods will serve as a "panacea" for all learners, but teachers need to tailor methods to the pupils' needs, backgrounds and resources to ensure the provision of a quality education "enfouillé de connaissances.

The "Loom" has been defined through philosophical and methodological frameworks.

In order to discuss the English Language Teaching (ELT) in India, it is necessary to define the terminological boundaries to be used in the discussion of the field. The English teaching profession uses terms like approach, method and technique interchangeably, but they actually make use of hierarchical levels of theory and practice in teaching English. An approach (following the work of Edward Anthony (1963)) is a series of correlative assumptions concerning the nature of language and the nature of language teaching/learning. It is the general attitude or "loom" that is used in the weaving of the fabric of instruction. By contrast, a method is a general program for the systematic presentation of language material, according to the selected approach, that affects the way the teacher teaches and the student learns. Finally, techniques are the specific, implementational activities that are expressed in the classroom, the "tricks" or "stratagems" used to achieve immediate goals. The history of ELT in India, as mentioned above, is a fascinating blend of these approaches, which have developed as responses to the shortcomings of the previous models in the context of a globalizing society.

II. The Traditional Epoch: Grammar-Translation and the Direct Method

The Classical Method (also referred to as Grammar-Translation Method) has one of the greatest footprints in the Indian educational scene. GTM is based on the study of the source language (Greek and Latin) and focuses on the source language as the main medium for the translation of the target language (TL) texts. The two values that underlie GTM are teacher-led instruction and building comprehension and writing skills rather than listening and speaking skills. Even though it is criticized for being "tedious" for the students to memorise irrelevant rules and not build communicative competence, the GTM is still popular in India. This is because it allows for massive syllabus and class sizes, where typically the students are of average or below average intellectual ability, and they need a structured, predictable environment.

The Direct Method (DM) was developed as a response to the seeming absurdity of rote translation in the early 20th century. DM is also known as the "Natural Method" and is an attempt to emulate the natural process of children learning their first language by excluding the language of the mother or home country from the classroom. It focuses on thinking in the target language and on the participative construction of grammatical rules from the knowledge provided by the teacher. DM was successful in primary school activities where teacher movement and visual aids such as pictures and gestures are used, but it has not been successful

in most Indian High Schools. There are three main challenges: the shortage of professionally qualified teachers who can create an all-English teaching environment; and the systemic problem of overcrowding in classrooms.

III. The structural and situational approaches: Mid-Century Paradigms

The Structural Approach had started to gain institutional recognition in the 1950s in India, especially in the University of Madras affiliated colleges. This perspective sees language as a collection of basic "structures" to be scientifically analysed and organised. It follows the four principles of teachability, productivity, simplicity and usefulness. The underlying principle is that language learning is a process of habit formation and needs intensive drills and conscious repetition. In its power to teach accuracy in sentence patterns it achieves its goal, but critics believe that it fails to work in the context of an overcrowded setting, and that it does not account for the totality of reading.

The Structural Oral Situational (S-O-S) Approach (or Situational Approach) is a development of the structuralism and the view of the whole is that no language item should be presented in isolation. It is a technique that was advocated by people such as Hornby and Palmer that language be practiced in meaningful contexts that are real life contexts using objects and pictures. The final goal is an automatic control of the basic structures. This approach, however, for many of the young educators in India is difficult to be sustained over a wide curriculum due to the time-consuming aspect of creating the situations.

IV. The Oral-Aural Shift and Alternative Psychologies

The Audio-Lingual Method (ALM), a spin-off of the "Army Method" which was used to train interpreters during the WWII, is based on the stimulus-response-reinforcement model. Repetitive drills, like repetition, inflection, and replacement are used in ALM to "overlearn" the target language so that it becomes automatic. Errors are considered to be first language interference and are to be "avoided at all costs". The ALM approach is primarily found in small class sizes and audiovisual equipment in private institutions in India, where the cost of the equipment and their finances allow.

Moreover, there are a number of alternative approaches to humanistic psychology that have been utilized in particular Indian settings:

The Silent Way developed by Caleb Gattegno is taught in the teacher's absence or with minimal verbalization, allowing the students to learn and discover the meaning themselves by using Cuisenaire rods and Sound-Color charts.

Bulgarian psychotherapist, Georgi Lozanov, suggested that psychological barriers inhibit the learning process, a view that is known as 'Suggestopedia'. Suggestopedia employs the use of music, relaxation, and positive suggestion to unlock the unused 90% of human mental capacity and it claims that the learning process is supposedly accelerated by 25 times.

Total Physical Response (TPR): This approach is based on the work of James Asher and emphasizes the use of physical coordination and motoric learning. Students perform the actions in response to verbal instructions, similar to the "silent period" of L1 acquisition prior to being pushed to speak.

V. The Communicative Turn and Task Based Learning

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was introduced in the 1960s and it was based on the principle of focusing on the form rather than the content. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) began to be used in the 1960s and it emphasized the functional communicative competence rather than the grammatical competence. CLT has a belief that language is for communication and that grammar is 'useless if it doesn't work in the real world'. It emphasizes fluency rather than accuracy and allows learners to communicate even if they get some of the details wrong. Common CLT approaches involve using information gap games, role playing and storytelling to help address the "element of doubt" by engaging in interaction.

One of the important developments of CLT is Task Based Learning (TBL or TBLT), a pedagogical approach in which learning is structured around meaningful tasks that mimic real-life situations in which students need to interact with others, such as planning a trip or solving a problem. TBL is highly learner-centred and learner-driven because students must perform the task using the language(s) available to them to ensure the non-linguistic outcome is clear and effective. TBL is now adopted in Indian urban centres and technical institutions to encourage critical thinking skills needed in today's global world.

VI. The focus will be on contemporary Indian perspectives on NCF 2005 and D.O.P.

Constructivism first came into India with the introduction of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF 2005). This paradigm focuses on learning as an active process in which pupils construct meaning or conceptual structures by reflecting on and abstracting from the stimulus. The result of this is Discourse Oriented Pedagogy (D.O.P.) which states that words and sentences are without meaning unless they are part of a discourse—a way of meaningfully communicating ideas in particular contexts. D.O.P. emphasizes language experiences in a variety of modalities (stories, songs, news reports) so the learner will have ample opportunity to relate the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) to one another and to the language in an integrated way.

VII. There are three types of technological innovations: CALL, MALL, and VR. Technological Innovations: CALL, MALL and VR.

Digital technology has revolutionized the conventional classroom in India. Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) provide interactive software and apps (such as Duolingo or Quizlet) with flexible and personalized language learning pathways. The tools employ adaptive algorithms and gamification to boost engagement and motivation within the classroom. Moreover, the advent of Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) offers the opportunity for students to engage with virtual characters in "face-to-face" scenarios, promoting richer cognitive interaction and cultural awareness.

VIII. Integrated Models: CBI and CLIL

In today's English-medium technical college in India, the concepts of Content Based Instruction (CBI) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) are gaining significance. These strategies combine the learning of content with language learning (e.g., teaching Engineering in English). In CBI the target language is used as means of delivering disciplinary knowledge, making it personally meaningful and intellectually stimulating for the learner. Research shows that CLIL leads to a more balanced development of basic vocabulary and advanced oral and writing skills.

IX. The Rural Urban Divide and systemic challenges.

There are a number of systemic challenges to implementing these different approaches in India. In districts such as Visakhapatnamia, Andhra Pradesh, the English teaching is typically done in an elementary way of translation, as many teachers do not have the proper qualifications in English Language Teaching. In these areas pupils frequently leave school with what is termed a "defective language apparatus" after having completed nine years of schooling. In addition, classrooms are often too crowded and students are not usually using up-to-date textbooks that are relevant to the communicative needs of the present day. The constant need is for In-service Teachers to modernize their methodologies and use of resources.

X. Conclusion

This is what has been observed in the Indian ELT history- there is no single method which can be a “panacea” for the entire country. The most practical approach is the judicious selection and adaptation of the best of the different approaches for a given context, which is the Eclectic Approach. There is a need to give new freedom to modern Indian teachers to look at their individual classrooms and understand the students' proficiency levels, the resources and the socio-cultural milieu of the classroom, and provide a "new modus" of quality education. With the increasing need for English proficiency worldwide, the emphasis must continue to be on the quality of the system with knowledge to handle real life situations.

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