

**Ministry of Education**

**ELT General Inspectorate**

# English Language Teaching Approaches

## Approaches to Language Teaching

I preferred to preface the article with some definitions of well known terms which represent difficulty to some teachers and which will help improve their understanding of the topic.

Terminology:

### The Syllabus:

It is the contents of a teaching programme. It is concerned with **WHAT** is to be learned.

### Approach

**An approach** is “a set of assumptions dealing with the nature of language and the nature of language teaching and learning.” It states a point of view or philosophy concerning the language description, psychological theory of learning and teaching pedagogy used in the language teaching-learning process.

“It’s an integrated set of theoretical and practical beliefs embodying both syllabus and method. It involves principles which in the case of language, reflect the nature of language itself and the nature of learning.”

An approach provides principles to decide what kind of content and what sort of procedures are appropriate.

### The Method:

It is **HOW** the teaching is to be conducted , it’s a classroom strategy. it's the practical realization of an approach.

Methods tend to be primarily concerned with **teacher and student roles and behaviours** and secondarily with such features as linguistic and subject-matter objectives, sequencing, and materials. ( types of activities , roles of teachers and learners , kind of material which will be helpful) -

### Procedure:

It is an ordered sequence of techniques. It is the sequence which can be described in terms such as " first you do this , then ..." It is smaller than a method and bigger than a technique.

### Technique

Any of a wide variety of exercises, activities, or devices used in the language classroom for realizing lesson objectives. It is implementational "actually takes place in a classroom". It must be consistent with "a method". And in harmony with an "approach". Techniques depend on the teacher , his art of performance.

If the "**Syllabus**" is the **WHAT** of the language teaching and “**Method**” is the **HOW** , “**Approach**” is the **WHY**.

## **What approach to follow?**

“Many teachers now share the belief that a single right way to teach foreign languages does not exist. It is certainly true that no comparative study has consistently demonstrated the superiority of one method over another for all teachers , all students , and all settings.”

Presented here is a summary of some language teaching methods:

### 1) Grammar Translation Method

#### **Goal:**

**To be able to read literature in target language , learn grammar rules and vocabulary.**

The grammar - translation method is derived from traditional approaches to the teaching of Latin and Greek in the nineteenth century.

The grammar translation method focuses on developing students' appreciation of the target language's literature as well as teaching the language. Students are presented with target language reading passages and answer questions that follow. Other activities include translating literary passages from one language into the other , memorizing grammar rules , and memorizing native language equivalents of target language vocabulary. The main aim of the approach is purely linguistic. Class work is highly structured, with teacher controlling all activities.

#### **a) Its main features are:**

- a meticulous analysis of the target written language, especially its grammar .
- grammar rules are presented and studied "explicitly "
- vocabulary is learnt from bilingual word lists
- a paramount use of translation exercises
- the mother tongue is used as the medium of instruction
- Hardly any attention is paid to speaking and listening skills.

#### **b) Limitations:**

- One of the main arguments against the grammar-translation method was that it did not use language to serve any '*utilitarian* goal' ( useful and practical)
- It takes little account of present-day language usage
- It emphasizes the written language at the expense of the functional nature of the language and of how it is used to convey social functions ( requesting , greeting , expressing feelings
- Pupils practise reading for the sake of memorizing a number of vocabulary items for translation.

- Much vocabulary is taught in the form of lists of separate words.
- It neglects the speaking skills , little attention is given to accurate pronunciation .

**c) Interaction:**

Most interaction is teacher-student

**d)Response to students' errors:**

Heavy emphasis is placed on correct answers; teachers supply correct answers when students cannot.

**e) Means for Evaluation:**

Tests require translation from native to target and target to native language; applying grammar rules , answering questions about foreign culture.

## 2)The Direct Method

**Goal:**

**To communicate in target language , to think in target language.**

The direct method is developed as a reaction against the grammar-translation method. It allows students to perceive meaning directly through the target language because no translation is allowed. Visual aids and pantomime are used to clarify the meaning of vocabulary items and concepts. Students speak deal in the target language and communicate as if in real situations. Reading and writing are taught from the beginning , though speaking and listening skills are emphasized. Grammar is learned inductively.

**a) Its main features are:**

- only use the target language in class
- the learner should be actively involved in using the language in realistic everyday situations
- students are encouraged to think in the target language
- first speaking is taught and then only reading and writing
- grammar rules are not taught. They are acquired unconsciously through practical use.
- Reading and writing are deferred for months.

**b) Interaction:**

Both teacher and students initiate interaction , though student-initiated interaction , with teacher or among each other , is usually teacher- directed.

**c) Limitations:**

The method has been criticized for being time-consuming. The insistence on giving the meaning of words and structures through dramatization, demonstration or association without resorting to the mother tongue has led to the using of roundabout techniques which are time wasting.

**d) Means for evaluation:**

Students are tested through actual use ,such as in oral interviews and assigned written paragraphs.

**3)The Audio- lingual Method ( aural-oral approach )**

**Goal:**

**Use the target language communicatively , over learn it , so as to be able to use it automatically by forming new habits in the target language and overcoming native language habits.**

The audio-lingual method is also known as the aural-oral approach (it is said to result in rapid acquisition of speaking and listening skills.) “ developing listening and speaking skills , as the foundation on which to build the skills of reading and writing “. It is based on the behaviourist belief that language learning is the acquisition of a set of correct language habits. The learner repeats patterns until he is able to produce them spontaneously. Once given a pattern – for example, subject-verb-prepositional phrase – is learned , the speaker can substitute words to make new sentences . The teacher directs and controls students’ behaviour , provides a model and reinforces correct responses.

**a) It is based on the following main principles:**

- speaking and listening competence precedes competence in reading and writing
- use of the mother tongue is discouraged in the classroom
- language skills are a matter of habit formulation, so students should practice particular patterns of language through structured dialogues and drills until the language is sufficiently rehearsed for responses to be automatic.

**b) Limitations:**

- This method emphasizes speech at the expense of other language skills , especially writing.
- The ordering of listening , speaking , reading and writing is not essential.
- The method fails to prepare the learner to use the foreign language for meaningful communication

**c) Teaching / Learning process:** New vocabulary ,structures presented through dialogues , which are learned through imitations , repetition .Drills are based on patterns in dialogues. Students’ correct responses are positively reinforced ; grammar is induced from models

**d) Interaction:**

Students interact during chain drills or when taking roles in dialogues , most interaction is between (teacher and student ) , initiated by the teacher.

**e) Means for evaluation:**

Discrete point tests in which students distinguish between words or provide an appropriate verb for a sentence.

**4)Total Physical Response Method ( TPR )**

**Goals:**

To provide an enjoyable learning experience, minimizing the stress that accompanies learning a foreign language. This method was developed mainly to reduce the stress associated with language learning ; students are not forced to speak before they are ready and learning is made as enjoyable as possible. Meaning is made clear through actions. TPR asks students to respond physically to the language they hear. Language processing is thus matched with physical action.

**Objectives**

Here are some of the objectives of Total Physical Response

- Teaching oral proficiency at a beginning level
- Using comprehension as a means to speaking
- Using action-based drills in the imperative form

**Aspects of language:**

Grammatical structures and vocabulary are emphasized, imbedded in imperatives. Understanding proceeds production, spoken language precedes the written word.

**Basics:**

- Listening should develop before speaking
- Children respond physically to spoken language, and adult learners learn better if they do that too
- Once listening comprehension has been developed, speech develops naturally and effortlessly out of it.
- Delaying speech reduces stress.

**Role:** At first the teacher gives the commands and students follow them. Lessons begin with commands by the teacher, students demonstrate their understanding by acting these commands out .

**Interaction:**

Teacher interacts with individual students and with the group , starting with the teacher speaking and the students responding nonverbally ( without saying anything ). Later this is reversed ; students issue commands to the teacher as well as each other.

**Means of Evaluation:**

Teachers can evaluate students through simple observation of their actions. Formal evaluation is achieved by commanding a student to perform a series of actions " Stand up- Move around – Turn left....." walk to the door" open the door" and instructions become more complex as students advance in learning.

## 5)The Communicative Approach

### Goal

**To become communicatively competent, able to use the language appropriate for a given social context ; to manage the process of negotiating meaning with the one you talk to.**

The communicative approach was a reaction against the grammar-translation method and the audio-lingual method. They did not stress the communicative uses of language.

This is an approach to foreign language teaching which emphasizes the learner's ability to use the language appropriately in specific situations. It tries to make the learners 'communicatively competent'. Learners should be able to select a particular kind of language and should know when, where and with whom they should use it. It stresses the need to teach communicative competence as opposed to linguistic competence , thus functions are emphasize over forms.

One of the main challenges of the communicative approach is to integrate the functions of a language (information retrieval, problem solving, social exchanges) with the correct use of structures. The question is how to combine communicative fluency with formal accuracy.

### a) Roles

Teacher facilitates students' learning by managing classroom activities , setting up communicative situations , students are communicators , actively engaged in negotiating meaning.

**b) Principles & Characteristics**

- There is emphasis on communication “ the main objective is to enable pupils to use the language to express their needs.
- The classroom atmosphere tends to be relaxed so that students can enjoy English lessons.
- Group work is encouraged.
- Teachers assist student in any way that motivates them.
- The center of classroom activities is transferred from the teacher to the student and this leads to socialization.
- The importance of comprehension is emphasized , especially listening comprehension.
- The language skills – both written and spoken – are equally emphasized.
- Errors are considered inevitable in the process of language learning. the teacher need not correct every mistake.
- A closer link is required between the classroom activities and their transfer to the real world outside.
- Deductive explanation of grammar is preferred.

**Communicative activities have three features:**

- **information gap:** An information gap exists when one person in an exchange knows something that the other person doesn't. If we both know today is "Tuesday" and I ask you, "What is today?" our exchange isn't really communicative.
- **choice:** In communication, the speaker has a choice of what he will say and how he will say it. If the exercise is tightly controlled so that students can only say something in one way , the speaker has no choice and the exchange ,therefore , is not communicative.
- **Authentic material:** Another characteristic of the communicative approach is the use of authentic material. It is desirable to give students an opportunity to develop strategies for understanding language as it is actually used by native speakers.

**The most common pillars of the communicative approach are:**

- **Communication**
- **Socialization**
- **Individualization**
- **Enjoyment**

**Interaction:**

Teacher initiates interactions between students and participates sometimes. Students interact a great deal with each other in many configurations.



**Means of Evaluation:**

Informal evaluation takes place when the teacher advises or communicates , formal evaluation is by means of an integrative test with a real communicative function.

**Limitations:**

- 1- Various categories of language functions are overlapping and not systematically graded like structures of the language. This creates some confusion and makes it difficult to teach functions properly.
  
- 2- It's not possible to have big number of competent teachers who can communicate as native speakers of the target language.

**6)The Eclectic Approach (or Eclecticism)**

The Eclectic Approach was proposed as a reaction to the profusion of teaching methods in the 1970s and 1980s and the dogmatism often found in the application of these methods.

**The idea of choosing from different methods to suite for one's teaching purposes** and situations is not a new one.

A main proponent of the Eclectic Approach is Rivers (1981, Teaching Foreign Language Skills). According to Rivers, an eclectic approach allows language teachers "to absorb the best techniques of all the well-known language-teaching methods into their classroom procedures, using them for the purposes for which they are most appropriate" . This is necessary and important because teachers "faced with the daily task of helping students to learn a new language cannot afford the luxury of complete dedication to each new method or approach that comes into fashion."

The main criticism of the eclecticism is that "**it does not offer any guidance on what basis and by what principles aspects of different methods can be selected and combined.**"

The problem inherent in an eclectic method centers in the tendency to combine contradicting elements and the lack of organizing principles to guide instruction

**Criteria Necessary for Effective Method in Learning / Teaching a Foreign Language**

1. It must be simple for both teacher and learner, and must be within the capabilities of all teachers.

Also, the teacher must feel that pupils are progressing satisfactorily.

2. It must bring about a balance between the spoken and written or printed word (and must be flexible enough for the teacher to concentrate on the area (s)he wants).
3. It must overcome the conflict between fluency and accuracy.
4. It must increase the rate and amount of learning which takes place in the classroom.
5. Testing must be part of the method, and not a separate entity.
6. Constant revision must be part of the method.
7. It must enable the teacher to set defined limits and have control over oral responses.
8. It must be variable (cf. the difficulty of the Direct Method where framing the right question to make the pupils apply various persons / tenses / cases and vocabulary is most difficulty without pre-arranged coding).
9. It must reflect the linguistic habits the child has already acquired by learning his/her mother tongue and their ability to assimilate a new language.
10. It must offer a new approach to the application of translation work.
11. It must give the pupils a stimulus to say something in the first instance - and it must find ways of supplying the pupils constantly with ideas which they can use for their expression in the foreign language.
12. It must enable work done with modern teaching aids (e.g. audio-visual aids, computer) to be an extension of the method used in class.
13. It must give the teacher an opportunity to speed up intercommunication between Himself/herself and individual pupils.

14. It must be sufficiently flexible to cope with various class conditions (as far as pupils' Specific / general interests are concerned)
15. It must ensure that pupils are given the opportunity of having the greatest number of meaningful contacts possible both with and in the foreign language - THE most important criteria for the validity of any modern method.

**Conclusion:**

- 1-Since our aim is to have our learners “ master the foreign language , no matter what approach we adopt”. We should adopt an approach which makes our learners master the foreign language in **listening, speaking, reading and writing** with understanding. Such approach is not only structural or only functional but co- joins both.
- 2-Each of the above mentioned approaches has advantages as well as disadvantages. Each approach served the purpose in the time when it was considered the best one available. We should not deny the fact that there are learners of English, who learned the language through any of these approaches and they could master the language.

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