



METHODS OF LANGUAGE TEACHING : AWARENESS AND PREFERENCES IN THE INDIAN SCENARIO

Gayathri Paliath¹, Marie Evangeline²

Article History: Received: 13.03.2023

Revised: 02.05.2023

Accepted: 27.06.2023

Abstract

Language evolved as a means of communication. With travel, commerce and administrative needs increasing, the need for learning multiple languages increased. This paper briefly covers the major language learning theories and some important language teaching methods which have evolved over the years. The sample study of English students and teachers at tertiary level in Chennai probes the awareness levels of the various methods and their relative preferences. It indicates that while the grammar translation method is still popular among the older generation, the evolving trend is for methods which focus on quick and fluent communication in the target language, rather than on perfection in the target language.

Keywords: Language Teaching Methods, English Language Teaching, Language Learning Theories,

¹Research Scholar, Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science,
Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

²Assistant Professor (SG), Hindustan Institute of Technology and Science,
Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

DOI: 10.31838/ecb/2023.12.s3.560

1. Introduction

Language is as old as humankind. From the guttural sounds of the caveman, oral communication has evolved manifold over the years. Written communication has also evolved - from the crude natural representations of early man, to pictorial scripts like the hieroglyphics of the ancient Egyptian civilisation or cuneiform writings of the Sumerians, to simple characters to represent words or ideas and then on to alphabetic characters, which can be combined to form different words and meanings. The evolution of languages is a fascinating area of study.

From the notion that language is automatically learnt to the concept that language can be taught in a structured way, the shift was rather recent in time of human life on the planet. It was in the 5th century AD that Europeans developed teaching methods in a structured approach, especially for Latin, which was the language of the Romans. Indian scholars had been working in the field of language codification even earlier. It is said that Panini's work in codification of syntax, semantics and morphology of Sanskrit was developed around 500 BCE. Tamil is another ancient language of India which had evolved early.

Different languages developed as L1 or mother tongues in different parts of the world, and with the gradual increase in interactions between peoples of different regions, it became necessary to learn each other's languages, or a link language (L2). Even within a language, different local dialects emerged with hardly any difference in the script or grammar, but distinct variations in the way certain words are pronounced, used or combined.

As the need for teaching of languages became more pressing, especially for commerce, travel, military and legal needs, research was carried out by scholars in cross functional disciplines, such as Language, Psychology, Social Sciences and so on - both in terms of language learning

theories and in terms of methods for language teaching.

At the outset, it must be clarified that although the basic tenets of language teaching are common to almost any language, there could be minor differences in application for different languages. Effective teaching methods or approaches can be easily adapted by a good teacher for any language. For example, Hindi has gender for all nouns and verb conjugations are more complex than for English. On the other hand, English has a larger vocabulary and a more complicated phonology. Hence, while one may require more focus on grammar, the other may require more focus on speaking.

Literary Review

In the latter half of the 20th century, Professor Edward Mason Anthony Jr. developed a framework to describe various language teaching methods, which consisted of three hierarchical levels, namely, a) approach, b) method, and c) technique (1963, p.63). Techniques are to be used to carry out a method which is consistent with an approach. According to him, approach was of a set of principles about the nature of language learning which would be consistent over time; method was more procedural and is basically a plan for presenting the language material to be learned; and technique referred to the actual implementation in the language classroom (Anthony, 1963)

Anthony's framework was perceived as a good means for classifying different teaching practices. However, the difference between approach, method, and technique was not perceived to be clearly defined, and genuine concerns were raised with it (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Richards and Rodgers' approach expanded on Anthony's framework; however, instead of approach, method, and technique, they chose the terms approach, design, and procedure (1982). Their concept of approach was similar to Anthony's, but their design and procedure were of broader

scope than Anthony's method and technique. Their design referred to all major practical implications in the classroom, such as syllabus design, types of activities to be used in the classroom, and student and teacher roles; procedure referred to different behaviors, practices, and techniques observed in the classroom. Evaluation process based on the specific criteria was a key way that their formulation differed from Anthony's, as Anthony's framework was purely descriptive.

Despite Richards and Rodgers' efforts to clearly define *approach*, *design*, and *procedure*, their framework has been criticized by Kumaravadivelu for having artificiality in its conception and subjectivity in its operation (2006).

In this paper, we are not trying to make a distinction between the different terminologies, but consider methods and approaches to language learning as just different terms to understand how languages are taught, and the relative merits and demerits. Before we delve into specific methods of language teaching, it is useful to understand the different schools of thought on language learning. One of the early theories of language learning developed was the Behaviorist theory which explained language learning as the result of observation and copying by the child, reinforced by rewards and punishments by the parents, teachers or other adults. J.B. Watson, Pavlov, Skinner and Bandura were some of the proponents of this theory of language development. Noam Chomsky proposed the Nativist or Innatist theory of language learning, wherein children are born with a natural ability to learn languages, there is a universal grammar for all languages, and language acquisition by a child is independent of its efforts. (1993). The third major school of thought is that of Vygotsky who argued in his socio-cultural theory that language is formed through social interactions. According to him, information is created collectively by people's societies and that anyone can

acquire knowledge if they enter groups of knowledge (1978).

There is a wide range of methods available for teaching languages, including many which are proprietorial and developed by educational consultants and universities. Let us restrict ourselves to the major ones cited by most researchers in their lists. Most of us are familiar with the methods used in our schooling or collegiate education; some are more suited for specific languages or for certain types of learners. An understanding of many different teaching methods enables a good teacher to teach languages to different sets of students in different situations. Some of the major methods and approaches of teaching languages are listed below:

a) Grammar-Translation Method

Classic languages like Greek, Latin or Sanskrit were traditionally taught without a focus on speaking them. The Grammar Translation method evolved in the late eighteenth century from this classic approach. As the name suggests, it focuses on two critical elements, namely, translation from the mother tongue (L1), and structured grammar of the target language (L2).

b) Direct Method

The grammar-translation method was criticized for its lack of focus on oral communication skills, and emphasis on accuracy over fluency. In the late nineteenth century, the direct method of language learning evolved, wherein L2 was taught without the crux of L1. New vocabulary is taught through pictures, models or miming. Grammar is deduced by the student based on examples. This method was widely popularised by many of the Language training institutions such as Allianz Francaise and Berlitz.

c) Audiolingual Method

The military needs of the US Army during World War II to train large number of people in different languages led to the

development of the audiolingual method in the 1950s. This method was focused on mass training with focus on listening and speaking skills, and drew inspiration from the Behaviorist school of thought on language learning, with its emphasis on repetition, and reinforcement.

d) Total Physical Response

Developed by American psychologist James Asher in the 1970s, it was typically meant for young children and in combination with other methods. It involved commands by the teacher along with demonstrations which the students copy and learn. The combination of language learning and physical action was believed to enhance the learning experience.

e) Silent Way

Around the same time, Egyptian educator Caleb Gattegno used the principles of discovery, problem-solving and use of physical tools to develop this method, wherein the teacher is mostly silent except for gestures to indicate corrections.

f) Counselling Language Learning

American priest Charles Curran is credited with this method, where the teacher's role is more that of a counsellor and the learners are asked to work together and help each other in earning a language without anxiety.

g) Communicative Language Teaching

In the 1980s Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) evolved as an approach to language teaching. It emphasises all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) through considerable learner interaction.

It will be difficult to make an exhaustive list of language teaching methods, as the list is constantly evolving, with minor changes or improvements over previously existing methods, and it also includes methods which are proprietorial.

Of the different methods cited above, The Grammar Translation Method essentially focuses on the mother tongue as the base for any language learning. The Direct Method

and the Total Physical Response methods ignore the mother tongue and focuses entirely on the target language. The other methods make use of both the mother tongue and the target language.

In terms of the key person for language education, the silent way method is learner-centred; grammar-translation method, audiolingual method and the total physical response methods are teacher-centric. The other methods involve active participation by the teacher as well as the learner.

Research Objectives

A dipstick study was undertaken to understand the following:

- a) Awareness among Indian teachers and students of English at college level about the different methods of language teaching?
- b) Correlation, if any, between the preference of teaching methods and their individual demographic background

2. Methodology

As it was a dipstick study, the sample size was restricted to 100. The respondents were from Chennai and those who were not from English medium background at the school level were excluded. Data collected through structured questionnaire included both multiple choice as well as open ended questions. Data collected included their personal background, methods of language teaching/learning that they are aware of, preferred method(s), and their views on each method. The personal profile of the respondents and their views on the methods were analysed for possible correlation. Conclusions were drawn on the basis of analysis of the data collected.

3. Results And Discussion

Of the respondents, 36% were English faculty members and 64% were students. 52% of the respondents were male. In terms of age profile, the mix was as shown in Fig.1

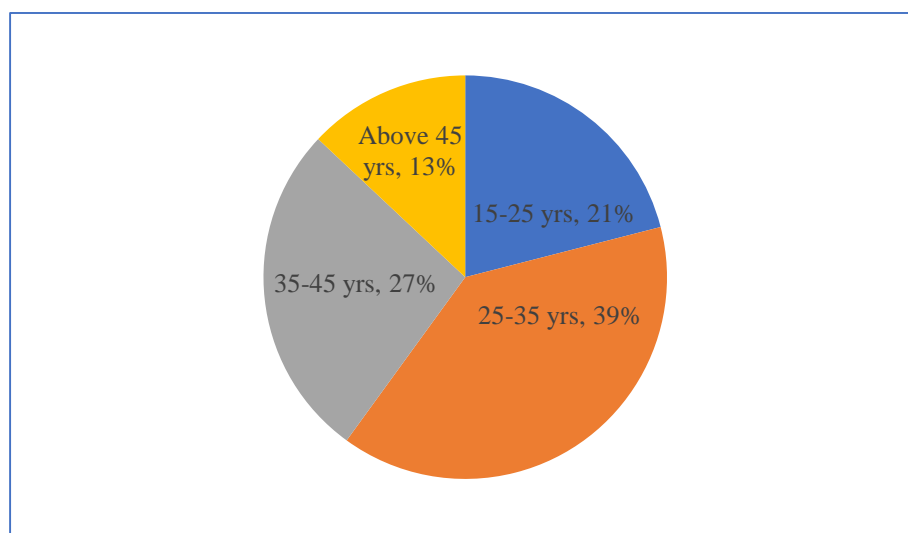


Fig.1 Age Profile of Survey Respondents

Almost all of the respondents were aware of the Grammar Translation Method and the Direct Method (Fig.2). 18% of the respondents were aware of the Audiolingual method. Other methods were mostly unknown to the respondents. About

12% were citing “Chalk-and-talk”, “multi-media” and “blended learning”. However, as these are more to do with the medium of teaching, and not restricted to language learning, these were ignored.

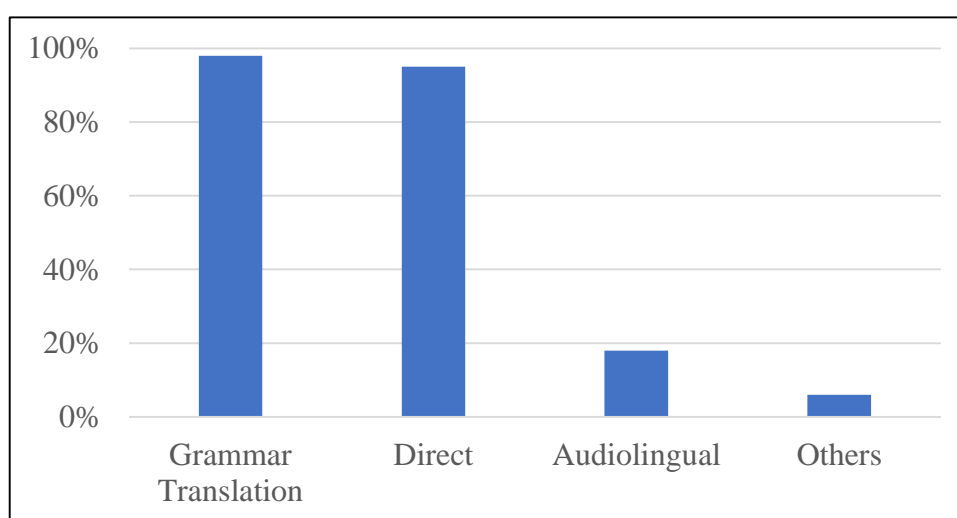


Fig.2 Awareness of Language Teaching Methods by Respondents

Majority of the respondents (71%) preferred the direct method of teaching to the grammar translation method. However, it was noticed that there was a moderate level of correlation between the age of the respondent and the preference for grammar translation method ($r = 0.67$). This sounds logical as the older generation are more familiar with the Wren and Martin grammar

book rules, and spelling thumb rules such as “i before e, except after c”. While the older generation placed a lot of importance on grammar, spelling and pronunciation, the modern trend is to focus on fluency of communication, rather than accuracy in the use of language.

4. Conclusion

While there are many methods of language teaching which have been developed over the years, the methods which have made an impact on the typical Indian student or teacher of English language are the older ones, namely, Grammar Translation Method and the Direct Method of teaching. The former method focuses on grammar, spelling and pronunciation of the target language, and mental formation of the communication in the mother tongue before “translating” to L2. The latter method focuses more on confident communication of the message than on perfection in the language. With the trend of social media and quick prolific communication, it is probable that the grammar translation method will become less popular in the years to come.

5. References

Anthony, E. M. "Approach, Method, and Technique". *ELT Journal*. Vol. XVII, Issue 2, 1963, pp. 63–67. [doi:10.1093/elt/XVII.2.63](https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/XVII.2.63).

- Kumaravadivelu, B. *Understanding Language Teaching*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006. [ISBN 978-0-8058-5176-2](https://doi.org/10.1080/080585176.2006.10555555).
- Richards, Jack and Rodgers, Theodore. *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. [ISBN 978-0-521-00843-3](https://doi.org/10.1017/C09780521008433).
- Richards, J. *Communicative Language Teaching Today*. Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006.
- Liu, Qing-xue, and Shi Jin-fang. “An Analysis of Language Teaching Approaches and Methods — Effectiveness and Weakness”, *US-China Education Review*, Vol.4, No.1, S.No.26, January, 2007, pp. 69-71.
- Chomsky, N. *Language and Thought*. Moyer Bell, London, 1993, p 29. ISBN- 1559210745
- Vygotsky, L. S. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978.