

Study of the Similarities and Differences among the Nine Foreign Language Teaching Methods

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Abstract

Foreign Language Teaching Methods is an inter-disciplinary science and it makes uses of theories of different subjects. According to the application in the foreign language teaching class, the teaching methods can be divided into three groups; The first group is the classical group which has long history and widely accepted by people. The grammatical-translation method; the direct method; the audiolingual method and the cognitive method are belong to this group. The second group is tentative group which contains the Total physical response; Community language learning ; The silent way; Suggestopedia. This group of methods are popular in certain period but lost their influences quickly. The communicative approach belongs to the third group, it can also called the functional approach or notional approach. The brief introduction of the nine teaching methods as well as the similarities and the differences among them are discussed below.

Keywords

Foreign Language Teaching Methods; Similarities; Differences.

1. Introduction

1.1. The Nature of Foreign Language Teaching Methods

Foreign Language Teaching Methods is a science which studies the process and pattern of foreign language teaching, aiming at revealing the nature and laws of foreign language. It examines the practices and procedures in foreign language; studies approaches, methods and techniques; also studies principles and belief that underlie them.

In short, Foreign Language Teaching Methods is an inter-disciplinary science and it makes uses of theories of different subjects.

1.2. A Brief History of Foreign Language Teaching

- 1) The Reform Movement
- 2) Modern language teaching and research
- 3) Structural language teaching
- 4) Communicative language teaching

1.3. The Goal of Foreign Language Teaching

The goal of foreign language teaching is to help the learner master the target language in the shortest possible time.

1.4. Three Groups of Nine Foreign Language Teaching Methods

According to the application in the foreign language teaching class, the teaching methods can be divided into three groups:

(1) Classical group: The grammatical-translation method; the direct method; the audiolingual method; The cognitive method.

(2) Tentative group: Total physical response; community language learning ; the silent way; Suggestopedia.

(3) Other group: The communicative approach.

2. Brief Overview of Nine Foreign Language Teaching Methods

2.1. Classical Group

2.1.1. The Grammatical-translation Method

It is a method of foreign or second language teaching which makes use of translation and grammar study as the main teaching and learning activities.

This method was historically used in teaching Greek and Latin in the Middle Age Europe, but generalized to teaching modern languages. This method was once popular and widely used in teaching Russian in 1950's in mainland China and its trace can still be found everywhere in our English teaching programs today.

The advantages of this method: It puts learners into a problem-solving situation by having them consciously think about the rules of the language; It does not require too much pedagogical skills on the part of teachers; It employs cross lingual techniques that have a place in language learning; It is easy to test students' knowledge of the target language, and the score can be objectively given.

The disadvantages of this method: Little attention is paid to pronunciation, listening and speaking. Vocabulary is taught out of the context. Too much grammar explanation causes the class to be dull, and often leads to rote learning.

2.1.2. The Direct Method

It is a method of foreign or second language teaching in which the target language is the means and end of teaching.

This method was introduced by the German educator Wilhelm Victor in the early 1800's. It was developed initially as a reaction to the grammar-translation method in an attempt to integrate more use of the target language in instruction. This method focusing on oral language, it requires that all instruction be conducted in the target language with no recourse to translation.

The advantages of the direct method: It encourages active participation on the part of learners; Communicative use of the language is activated; Correct pronunciation and intonation can be formed; A host of new language teaching techniques has resulted from the method such as miming, demonstrations of pictures and objects, and paraphrasing.

The disadvantages of the direct method: The demands of the language proficiency in the target language are high on the part of the teacher; Students may develop an inaccurate fluency in trying to communicate, which may lead to early fossilization; It robs students of the chance to have a systematic knowledge of the language form.

2.1.3. The Audiolingual Method

It is method emphasizing the teaching of speaking and listening before reading and writing.

This method is based on the behaviorist belief that language learning is the principles of behavior psychology, that is, language learning is habit formation. It evolved from the principles and procedures of the Direct Method, in part as a reaction to the lack of speaking skills of the Reading Method. New material is presented in the form of a dialogue in the classroom, and then the learner repeats phrases and patterns until he (she) is able to reproduce them spontaneously and fluently. It was once widely used in the army training program during the postwar years in 1940's in the United States and achieved some of its goals such as good pronunciation and formulaic speech, although it did not always result in communicative competence. The method is still being applied to teaching oral English in China.

The advantages of this method: Language structures are scientifically graded and sequenced; Varied features of the target language can be intensely practiced; Language learning is made accessible to large groups of learners, especially beginners. Correct pronunciation, intonation, and error-free utterances are reinforced; It develops techniques of auditory and oral practice such as the use of tapes, language labs, and visual aids.

The disadvantages of this method: There is overuse of repetition and memorization of pattern drills; The emphasis on correctness leads to over-learning and boredom; In making language learning less of a mental burden, it tends to downgrade problem solving and discovery learning; It lacks flexibility in that learners cannot use what they have learned in class when they communicate in real-life situations.

2.1.4. The Cognitive Method

A method which is based on the belief that language learning is a process which involves active mental processes and not simply the forming of habits. It is an approach that lays much stress on the intelligence of the learners, and on the understanding of language rules, and on cultivating the practical and overall language competence.

Based on the idea that language learning is a process which involves active mental processes such as thought, reasoning, intelligence, sensory perception, comprehension, memory and regards language as a way of explaining and understanding human behavior and not simply the forming of habits, cognitive method attaches importance to the learners' active part in using and learning a language, particularly in the learning of grammatical rules, and emphasizes the conscious acquisition of language as a meaningful system.

The advantages of this method: It attaches importance to essential features of the language such as meaning and creativity; It gives due attention to receptive skills such as reading and writing. Meanwhile the skills of listening and speaking have not been neglected; Students are encouraged to use the target language in a meaningful context; It integrates the merits of both the grammar translation method and the direct method.

The advantages of this method: Teachers may have difficulties in presenting the target language in a meaningful way so that it can be geared to students' different cognitive styles; By favoring an explicit learning strategy it would be more of a mental burden for students to learn a foreign language; In rejecting behavioristic view of learning it overlooks some of the merits of audiolingualism.

2.2. Tentative Group

2.2.1. Total Physical Response

Total Physical Response Method is defined as one that combines information and skills through the use of the kinesthetic sensory system. In the TPR classroom, students can hear, see, act out and repeat. This combination of skills allows the student to assimilate information and skills at a rapid rate. This method can be widely seen to teach children English in China, but seldom found in universities.

The advantages of this method: Physical activity helps retain the language; Learning is made a matter of effortless process; It gives due attention to right-brained learning, which is supposed to precede left-brain language processing; It facilitates students to communicate uninhibitedly.

The disadvantages of this method: It may not appeal to learners as they advance in their competence; A lot of complex language structures cannot be effectively incorporated into the imperative; Learners' needs for unrehearsed language cannot be met by such dramatic nature of language learning; It does not have basic textbooks, which may be difficult for both teachers and learners.

2.2.2. Community Language Learning

It is an application of counselling learning to foreign language teaching and learning. It uses techniques developed in group counselling to help people with psychological and emotional problems. The method makes use of group learning in small or large groups. The groups are the "community".

Teachers recognize that learning can be threatening and by understanding and accepting students' fears, they help their students feel secure and overcome their worries and fears of language learning ultimately providing students with positive energy directed at language learning. It is believed that this method works with adult learners.

The advantages of this method: It helps overcome some of the threatening affective factors that learners are likely to encounter in language classrooms; It capitalizes on intrinsic motivation in that students may determine the type of conversation to their liking; The target language is not learned in a way imposed from external forces. It comes naturally from learners' internal drives to express themselves.

The disadvantages of this method: The teacher can become too non-directive in playing the role of the counselor; It plays down the role of deductive learning as a viable strategy for adult learners; Too much dependence on translation may lead to misunderstanding of the target language, especially in terms of subtle aspects of the language.

2.2.3. The Silent Way

It is a method which makes use of gesture, mime, visual aids, wall charts, and in particular situation to help the students to talk.

This method begins by using a set of colored rods and verbal commands. The teacher is active in setting up classroom settings while the students do most of the talking and interaction among themselves. The teacher's silence helps to foster self-reliance and student initiative. It is based on Noam Chomsky's argument that language acquisition could not possibly take place through habit formation since people create and understand utterances they have never heard before. This method impinged little upon FLT in China, because teachers facing a large number of students dare not use this method.

The advantages of this method: It require students to be responsible for their own learning; Accuracy of language forms is constantly given attention. It capitalizes on discovery-learning procedures.

The disadvantages of this method: It would be dull to use the techniques at more advanced stages; The teacher's role of guidance has been denied; It is controversial that students may best learn by struggling for hours for some complicated forms of language if this can be done quickly by being told the rule.

2.2.4. Suggestopedia

This is a method which makes use of dialogues, situations, and translation to present and practice language, and in particular, makes use of music, visual images, and relaxation exercises to make learning more comfortable and effective.

The principle of this method is that language learning environment should respect for students' feelings. Suggestopedia helps reduce or eliminate psychological barriers to learning. It aims at providing a relaxed and subdued learning environment, with low lighting and soft music playing in the background. Students choose a name and character in the target language and imagine being that person. Students relax and listen while dialogues are presented accompanied by music. Students later practice dialogues during an "activation" phase.

The advantages of this method: This kind of environment can minimize the anxiety of students; Teachers around the world see some merits in various forms of music as a way to get students to enjoy their studies.

The disadvantages of this method: Comfortable chairs, soft lighting, and baroque music can be unavailable luxuries for the school, and students who study in such an environment may feel sleepy.

2.3. Other Group: The Communicative Approach

This is an approach which emphasizes that the goal of language learning is communicative competence.

The goal of this method is to create a realistic context for language acquisition in the classroom. This approach emphasizes the real, meaningful communication between learners. It is sometimes called Communicative Approach or Communicative Language Learning or Functional-notional Approach. This approach is already widely spread in China, especially at secondary education level.

The advantages of this method: It attempts to link classroom language learning with communication in the real world; It introduces authentic language into the language learning situation; It gives priority to learners' needs to communicate in the target language; It encourages experiential learning, which may enhance learners' own experience as an important contribution to classroom learning; It involves cooperative learning among learners, which helps create a sense of belonging; It develops a knowledge of the process of learning by emphasizing on learning through interaction in the target language.

The advantages of this method: Because of the numerous interpretations of CA, it has nearly become a bandwagon on which a lot of people would like to climb; The syllabus based on functions gives rise to problems in material designing, for example, some difficult structures may be introduced at the early stage; Standardized tests of foreign language are not orientated to testing communicative competence, so teachers and students are not motivated to go beyond grammatical knowledge; In places where there are constraints of teaching resources, classroom size, time and the teachers' target language proficiency, it would be difficult to use this method.

3. Similarities among Nine Foreign language Teaching Methods

In terms of teaching objective: DM, AM, CM, CA shared one same objective, They all tend to develop students' communicative competence.

In terms of the attitude towards skills: CM and CA hold the view that the ability of speaking, writing, listening, speaking should be cultivated at the same time. CA tends to develop the four skills at the beginning of the foreign language study.

In terms of the approach: 1) Theory of language: DM, AM, TPR, and the silent way are influenced by structural linguistics. 2) Theory of learning: GTM, DM, AM, TPR are influenced by Psychology. Although the specific branches are different, they all belong to the category of Psychology. DM and AM are influenced by Behavioristic Psychology.

As for the roles of teachers and students: GTM, AM, TPR are teacher dominated methods; CM, CA are students-centered methods, students have high autonomy in such methods.

What's more, the same attitude towards mother tongue and errors (mistakes) can be seen in the table below.

Similarities among Community Language Learning, The Silent way and Suggestopedia: These three methods are all belonging to the Humanistic teaching methods. The three approaches all lay emphasis on the individual and on personal learning strategies, They all endeavor to involve the whole person of students. All view the learning of a second language as quite different from the learning of the first. All three are inductive in the initial stage of the language learning process. All three approaches advocate that there should be no correction of the learners' errors and they should be given enough time to work on their own. All three methods do not have extensive practicability.

Table 1. Similarities among Nine Teaching Methods

Same teaching objectives	DM AM CM CA (communicative competence)	
Same attitude towards skills	CM(four skills are equal) CA(four skills should be learned at first) The silent way (four skills taught at the first)	
Same theory of language	DM AM TPR The silent way(Structural Linguistics)	
Same theory of learning	DM AM (Behavioristic Psychology)	
Teacher-dominated methods	GTM AM TPR	
Student-centered methods	CA CM	
Same attitude towards mother tongue	Useful	GTM CM CA
	Deny	AM DM TPR The silent way
Same attitude towards errors/mistakes	Avoidable	AM GTM DM
	Tolerant	CM CA TPR CLL Suggestopedia The silent way

4. Differences between Some Pairs of Foreign Language Teaching Methods

4.1. Differences between the Grammatical-Translation Method and the Direct Method

GTM is the oldest teaching method ,DM is the first scientific theory of language teaching and learning. GTM uses the deductive method to teach grammar; DM use the inductive method to teach grammar.

Table 2. Differences between the Grammatical-translation Method and the Direct Method

	GTM	DM
Background	Culture	Economical
Place of origin	Europe	Europe
Advocator	Karl Plotz	Berlitz
Theory of language	Mechanical linguistics	Structural linguistics
Theory of learning	Faculty Psychology	Behaviorist Psychology
Focus	Memorization of sentence patterns, grammar rules and vocabulary	Oral languages
Attitude towards skill	Reading and writing are emphasized,little attention is paid to speaking and listening	Regarding listening and speaking as the basis of reading and writing
Attitude towards mother tongue	Main medium of instruction	Forbidden
Attitude towards mistakes/errors	Avoidable	Unavoidable
Attitude towards fluency/accuracy	Accuracy is emphasized	Focus on pronunciation and the fluency will be achieve gradually
Teaching activity	Transition; grammar study;	Speaking ; listening; body language
Teacher roles	Leading role	Partners
Students role	Passive role	More active than GTM

In GTM Teachers almost control all the activities in classrooms and mother tongue is used with little active use of the target language. Its primary focus is on memorization of sentence patterns, grammar rules. and vocabulary. For example,vocabulary is taught in the form of isolated glossary. Elaborate explanations of grammar are always provided. Grammar

instruction provides the rules for putting words together: instruction often focuses on the form and inflection of words. Reading of difficult texts is begun early over the course of study. Little attention is paid to the content of texts. Application of this knowledge was directed on translation of literary texts--focusing on developing students' appreciation of the target language's literature as well as teaching the language.

In DM, students should cooperate with teacher, listening and speaking as the basis of reading and writing. Four skills are emphasized and due attention is paid to the balance. Lessons usually begin with a dialogue using a modern conversational style in the target language. Learning material is first presented orally with actions or pictures. The mother tongue is strictly controlled. There is no translation. The preferred type of exercise is a series of questions in the target language based on the dialogue or an anecdotal story. Advanced students read literature for comprehension and pleasure. Literary texts are not analyzed grammatically. The culture associated with the target language is also taught inductively. Culture is considered an important aspect of learning the target language.

More differences can be seen in the table 2:

4.2. Differences between the Audiolingual Method and the Cognitive Method

Table 3. Differences between the Audiolingual Method and the Cognitive Method

	AM	CM
Background	World War II ;The Pearl Harbour incident; Oral training for the soldiers (military)	In the 1960s;The quick development in science
Place of origin	America	America
Advocator	Charles Fries; Lado	J.B.Carrol; Piaget; Brunner
Theory of language	Structural linguistics	Transformational generative grammar;
Theory of learning	Behaviourist psychology	Genetic epistemology
Focus	Focus on basic words used by native speakers, emphasize pronunciation	Intelligence of the learners; understanding of language rules;cultivating the practical ;overall language competence.
Attitude towards skills	Listening and speaking are more important than writing and reading.(four skills are developed)	The importance of four skills are equal,cultivate at the same time
Attitude towards mother tongue	Deny	Make use of native language
Attitude towards mistakes/errors	Correct the error at the every beginning of learning	Unavoidable
Attitude towards fluency/accuracy	unclear	unclear
Teaching activity	Repetition;Transformation; Replacement ,etc	Discovery
Teacher roles	Central role;active role	Guide role
Student roles	Passive role	Student-centered

The AM is the first method to have a theory. The CM is opposed to AM in some cases.

In AM, use of the mother tongue by the teacher is permitted, but discouraged among the students. Successful responses are reinforced; great care is taken to prevent learners' errors.

Focus on basic words used by native speakers. There is a tendency to focus on application of the target language and to disregard content and meaning.

In CM, the learning of grammar should be conducted in a functional way so that students may apply what they have learned to actual communicative situations. It believes that learners play a decisive role in classroom teaching. It insists that learning is based on understanding and language learning is a creative process, so meaningful learning and practice are emphasized. It attaches equal importance to all the four skills, but listening and reading should proceed speaking and writing. It holds that mistakes are unavoidable in the creative use of language.

4.3. Differences among Community Language Learning, The Silent way and Suggestopedia

Table 4. Differences among Community Language Learning ,The Silent way and Suggestopedia

	Community Language Learning	The Silent way	Suggestopedia
Advocator	Charoles Curren	Caleb Gattegno	Lozanov
Distinctive feature	Group	Sleep	Suggestion
Theory of language	Curren’s theory	Structural linguistics	Language mainly consists of vocabulary. Grammar gives service to the organization of words. It directs the student not to vocabulary memorization and acquiring habits of speech, but to acts of communication.
Theory of learning	Whole person learning	Three key words: independence; autonomy; responsibility	Psychology
Focus	---	Emphasize meaning not communication	Focus on vocabulary and grammar
Attitude towards skill	Pronunciation is emphasized	Oral ability is prior to other skills.	---
Attitude towards mother tongue	---	No translation or native language is supposed to be used	---
Attitude towards mistakes/errors	No correction of the learners’ errors	No or few error correction, students are expected to get self-corrected	Tolerate
Teacher roles	Doctor and counselor to the learner, provider of the safe environment.	to teaching: teacher to test: referee to get out of the way: helper	To create situation in which the learner is most suggestible and then to present linguistic material in a way most likely to encourage positive reception and retention by the learner.
Student roles	Patient to the teacher, counselor to other learners	Independent individual; group member; a teacher; a student; a problem solver; a self-evaluator	The learners are expected to be committed to the class and its activities.
Materials	Textbook is not considered a necessary component.	The materials consist mainly of colored rods, color-coded pronunciation and vocabulary wall charts, a pointer, and reading/writing exercises, to illustrate the relationship between sound and meaning in the target language.	Materials consist of direct support materials, primarily text and tape, and indirect support materials, including classroom fixtures and music. The textbook should have emotional force, literary quality, and interesting characters.

In Community Language Learning, learners are not considered as students but as “whole persons” and the teacher should act as a counselor. It is believed that this method works with adult learners.

In the Silent way, the teacher is active in setting up classroom settings while the students do most of the talking and interaction among themselves. All four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) are taught at the start. Student errors are expected as a normal part of learning; This method may work with advanced students who are highly independent, but not with the beginners.

In Suggestopedia the roles of teacher is to create situation in which the learner is most suggestible and then to present linguistic material in a way most likely to encourage positive reception and retention by the learner. Suggestopedia is not suitable for the students who lack of self control ability.

4.4. Differences between Total Physical Response and Communicative Approach

Table 5. Differences between Total Physical Response and Communicative Approach

	TPR	CA
Background	In the 1960s	in the 1930s; 1970s; 1980s
Place of origin	America	Western Europe
Advocator	James . Asher	A.Wilkins--British linguist; H.G. Widdowson; L.G. Alexander
Theory of language	Structural linguistics	Communicative competence Halliday’s functional linguistics
Theory of learning	Humanistic psychology	Meaningful learning
Focus	Emphasize the mastery of vocabulary and grammatical structure	Focus not only on language but also on the learning process itself
Attitude towards skill	Oral and listening ability should be developed; Speaking is the end of teaching	Four skills are exercised at the beginning of the study
Attitude towards mother tongue	Instruction is given by target language only	Mother tongue can be used to instruct the grammar rules
Attitude towards mistakes/errors	Tolerant	Unavoidable; tolerant
Learner roles	Listener and performer	Negotiator, actor, fighter, master
Teacher roles	Direct role; active role	Helper, analyst, counselor

In Total Physical Response Learner plays the roles of Listener and performer; The teacher plays an active and direct role. They are determiners. Listening comprehension should be fully developed before any active oral participation from students is expected.

In Communicative Approach, Learners are the center of all the activities. The focus is on functional language usage and the ability of learners to express their own ideas, emotions, attitudes, desires and needs.

5. Conclusion

All in all, we can see that teaching methods are closely related to Linguistics and Psychology. The nine teaching methods have their own merits and demerits, we should develop the useful and discard the useless, use the teaching methods flexible. We can choose the suitable methods according to different teaching material or student situations.

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