METHODS OF TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Increasing globalization has created a large need for people in the workforce who can communicate in multiple languages. The uses of common languages are in areas such as trade, tourism, international relations, technology, media, and science. Many countries such as Japan (Kubota, 1998) and China (Kirkpatrick & Zhichang, 2002) frame education policies to teach at least one foreign language at the primary and secondary school levels. However, some countries such as India, Singapore, Malaysia, Pakistan, and the Philippines use a second official language in their governments. According to GAO (2010), China has recently been putting enormous importance on foreign language learning, especially the English Language.

Although the need to learn foreign languages is almost as old as human history itself, the origins of modern language education are in the study and teaching of Latin in the 17th century. Latin had for many centuries been the dominant language of education, commerce, religion, and government in much of the Western world, but it was displaced by French, Italian, and English by the end of the 16th century.

Innovation in foreign language teaching began in the 19th century and became very rapid in the 20th century. It led to a number of different and sometimes conflicting methods, each trying to be a major improvement over the previous or contemporary extreme form, language learning is seen as basically the same as any other learning in any other species, human language being essentially the same as communication behaviors seen in other species.

Language education may take place as a general school subject or in a specialized language school. There are many methods of teaching languages. Some have fallen into relative obscurity and others are widely used; still others have a small following, but offer useful insights.

A method is a plan for presenting the language material to be learned and should be based upon a selected approach. In order for an approach to be translated into a method, an instructional system must be designed considering the objectives of the teaching/learning, how the content is to be selected and organized, the types of tasks to be performed, the roles of students and the roles of teachers. A technique is a very specific, concrete stratagem or trick designed to accomplish an immediate objective. Such are derived from the controlling method, and less-directly, with the approach [4, p.45].

Blended learning combines face-to-face teaching with distance education, frequently electronic, either computer-based or web-based. It has been a major growth point in the ELT (English Language Teaching) industry over the last ten years.

When talking about language skills, the four basic ones are: listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, other, more socially-based skills have been identified more recently such as summarizing, describing, narrating etc. In addition, more general learning skills such as study skills and knowing how one learns have been applied to language classrooms.

Mother tongue mirroring is the adaptation of the time-honored technique of literal translation or word-for word translation for pedagogical purposes. The aim is to make foreign constructions salient and transparent to learners and, in many cases, spare them the technical jargon of grammatical analysis. It differs from literal translation and interlinear text as used in the past since it takes the progress learners have made into account and only focuses upon a specific structure at a time. As a didactic device, it can only be used to the extent that it remains intelligible to the learner, unless it is combined with a normal idiomatic translation.

288

Back-chaining is a technique used in teaching oral language skills, especially with polysyllabicor difficult words. The teacher pronounces the last syllable, the student repeats, and then the teacher continues, working backwards from the end of the word to the beginning [2, p.89].

There is also an account of the main different methods of foreign language teaching (FLT) that are in use today. A knowledge of the different methods gives foreign language teachers a good background reference to their own stand on pedagogical matters and classroom practice, and in addition helps them understand the process that FLT has undergone, particularly through this century. To consider FLT as a process means that teaching is not static but changing to respond to new needs and demands as teachers, applied linguists and educationists can prove. Now it seems appropriate to mention the three major language learning issues that language pedagogy and ELT have dealt with through this century and that always concern researchers and the teaching profession. Stern labels them as follows:

1. The first language and second language connection, that is, the disparity in the learner's mind between the inevitable dominance of the mother tongue and the weaknesses of the second language knowledge.

2. The code-communication dilemma has become a major issue recently. It refers to the problems that learners have to cope with when learning a new language, as they have to pay attention on the one hand to linguistic forms (the code) and on the other to real communication.

Communicative approaches make use of a variety of materials which are selected and viewed as a way of improving classroom interaction and a communicative use of the language.

The Information transfer principle which refers to the ability to understand and produce language making transferences from one medium of the language to another. Activities based on the Information transfer can be: write some purposeful notes from a listening comprehension, write sentences from diagrams, give a personal opinion about some pictures. The most important changes and innovations in education refer to [1, p. 28-29]:

1) views of language (considered above when dealing with the communicative approach);

2) views of teaching methodology, which recognize the necessary balance between planning objectives and content with close attention to the development of classroom implementation;

3) views of learners' contributions, which consider the process of classroom interaction and context the basis for learning, not the content of a lesson;

4) views of planning, which assume that the teaching-learning process, activities and roles are the significant substance of lessons for those who participate in them, instead of the content of lessons.

We have considered the main approaches and methods of FLT as models or paradigms of theory, research and school practice. Some of them may be considered absolute from a scientific point of view, some others seem to be more current, but in fact all of them have introduced innovations at a given moment, superimposing on the former ones in an eclectic way. However, all methods have at least two things in common: 1) their belief to be the best one, and 2) a set of prescriptions that teachers have to follow necessarily.

1. Alcaraz Varo,. Tres Paradigmas de la Investigador.Linguistica. Alcoy:Marfil. E.2000,
2. ” Backchaining”. Teaching English. Retrieved April 4, 2009 , p 89.
3. Holden Susan, Mickey Rodgers. English language teaching.2008, p 56-57.
4. Jack C.Richards, Theodore S. Rodgers.2009, p 45.