Importance of English and Different Methods of Teaching English

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ABSTRACT
Today’s world considers English as a global language. The present article explains how the teaching of English started with Grammar-Translation Method and secured a strong hold in the field of teaching English, though its basic assumptions were questionable. It also examines the principles of Direct Method and its insistence on establishing a bond between the experience and expression. In an effort to meet the needs of the Indian students of English, we learn that Michael West proposed the Reading Method and suggested how learning English can be quick and effective through reading. Finally, it studies about the classroom practices followed by the bilingual teacher and learnt how the teacher borrows the different aspects of this method from different earlier methods of teaching English.

INTRODUCTION
Today’s world considers English as a global language because there has never been a language so widely spread or spoken by so many people as English. It makes news daily in many countries and is adopted by many countries. It has a special role to play in the countries where it has been accepted as the official language and is being used as a medium of communication. The statistics collected by David Crystal (1997: 61) shows that nearly 670 million people use English with fluency and competency. This figure is steadily growing ever since 1990. English now holds a dominant position in all the developments in the world. It has reached the present day status primarily because of two main factors the expansion of British Empire in the 19th century and the emergence of the United States as the leading economic power of the 20th century.

Growing demand for English in the context of modern day development
The demand for English has been sweeping almost all the fields of national life like politics, international relations, and media, Communication, travel and education. Most of the earlier scientific innovations were made in Britain and are now continued in America. The advancements in Science and Technology and their use of new terminology have been showing an immediate impact on the language, adding tens of thousands of words to the English lexicon. As these innovations come down from the English-speaking countries, those who wish to update their knowledge and learn about new inventions need to learn English well. This need has resulted in a dramatic increase of the expository material in the English language. Besides all the dictionaries, encyclopedias and books of knowledge are written and printed in English. Hence, the access to new knowledge is only through the English language. The English language has been an important medium of the press for nearly 400 years. Right from the Weekly News (1622) and the London Gazette (1666), there has been a continuous rise of newspapers and Journals in English. With the introduction of new printing technology and new methods of mass production and transportation, by the end of 19th century, there were nearly 2000 newspapers in the English language According to the data compiled y the Encyclopedia Britannica (1994), about a third of the world’s newspapers are being published in the countries where the English language has a special status. A review of the influence of the individual newspapers (as reported in the Book of Lists, 1977) says that the top five papers are in English: the first is New York Times, followed by The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, and the two British papers, The Times and The Sunday Times.

The importance of the English language in educational field is clear from the fact that many countries have made English as an official language. Consequently, the English language teaching (ELT) has become one of the major growth industries around the world in the recent years. For instance, by 1998, the British Council had a network of offices in 109 countries promoting cultural, educational and technical cooperation. In 1995-96, over 4, 00,000 candidates worldwide took English language examination administered by the Council. There are thousands of students learning English and other skills through the medium of English in the teaching centers of the Council.
Another widely quoted statistics is: about 80 percent of the world’s electronically stored information is currently in English. This includes two kinds of data: information stored by the individual firms, organizations and libraries etc., and the information made available through the internet. This is so because the first protocols devised to carry data on the Net were developed from the English alphabet. It is an accepted truth that if one wants to take a full advantage of the internet and World Wide Web, it is possible only by learning English; because most of the browsers are still unable to handle multilingual data presentation. Thus, the English language provides the chief means of access to high-tech communication and information. This makes us conclude that English will retain its role as the dominant language in the modern world. Further, it continues to remain as the world’s language for international communication as the whole world is heading towards the formation of a global village.

Different methods of teaching English
It is observed that different approaches have come into existence in reaction to the inadequacies of the earlier approaches. Some approaches have focused on using the language to speak and to understand it while others have focused on analyzing it with grammatical rules. Following the evolution of different approaches, different methods have come into existence during the long history of teaching English in India. Let us now examine the principles and practices of the four popular methods of teaching English. These methods are practiced in India with approximate historical sequence:

• Grammar Translation Method
• Direct Method
• West’s New Method and
• Bilingual Method

Each of these four methods was shaped in relation to the social, political needs and trends in Psychology, Linguistics and Sociology. Let us now analyze these methods of teaching English.

Grammar Translation Method
The Grammar Translation Method dominated the European method of foreign language teaching from 1840s to 1940s and in a modified form it continues to be widely used even today. It is a way of learning a language through a detailed study of its grammar and translation of sentences and passages into the target language. The proponents of the method assumed that learning a foreign language was to learn it in order to read its literature and benefit from the mental discipline that resulted from the study of that language.

Therefore, reading and writing are given more importance than speaking and listening. The teacher is believed to be the authority in the classroom; therefore the students are hardly given a chance to participate in the class. Deductive application of an explicit grammar rule is used as a pedagogical technique. In short, it believes that a foreign language is best learnt through grammar.

Features
The proponents of the method believe that the following principles of the method make the learning of a foreign language effective.

• Foreign phraseology is to be interpreted through translation.
• The foreign phraseology is assimilated in the process of interpretation
• The structure of a foreign language is best learnt when compared and contrasted with the mother tongue.

Advantages
The Grammar Translation Method is widely practiced even today because of the following merits.

• It is an easy method to teach because of its limited objectives i.e., understanding the written language (reading) and producing some basic writing.
• The students acquire vocabulary in an easy and effective way.
• As the target language is associated with the native language, understanding, interpreting, assimilating and retaining is very easy.
• Procedures are quite effective for reading and translation skills.

Limitations
The weaknesses of this method are many.

• The grammatical scheme of exercises may appeal to adult learners and certainly not to the young students. Therefore the young learners find it difficult.
• Memorizing the grammar rules often does not help students to use the language. It also becomes a tedious experience.
• Speech is neglected and the advanced skills of reading and writing are stressed.
• Literal translation of the words and sentences is not always helpful.
• It fails to create a direct bond between thought and expression and hinders the development of fluency in speech and writing.
• As the method advocates the use of the mother tongue, it is unsuitable for a class with different language backgrounds.
• The emphasis on the rules leads to an unnatural use of language both by teachers and students.
**Direct Method**
At various times throughout the history of language teaching, attempts have been made to make the second language learning more like the first language learning. These natural language learning principles, which are more psychological, have provided the foundation for the Direct Method. These psychological principles speak of direct association between the forms and meanings in the target language. According to Frank, a German philosopher, a language could best be taught by using it actively in the classroom. The teachers must therefore encourage the direct and spontaneous use of the foreign language, in order that the students might imbibe the rules of grammar. The words and ideas should be well knit, so that thinking in the foreign language would begin.

**Features**
The following are the features that form the basis for the Direct Method of teaching.
- The method believes that language is primarily speech and therefore the oral communication skills are built up in a carefully graded progression around the question-and-answer exchanges.
- Classroom instruction is conducted exclusively in the target language and pictures are used to make the meanings clear. New teaching points are introduced orally through objects, demonstrations and pictures.
  - Grammar is learnt inductively.
  - *The syllabus is based on situations or topics, not usually on the linguistic structures and makes the students to think in the target language.*
  - Pronunciation is stressed right from the beginning of the language learning.
  - Vocabulary is acquired naturally and hence, memorization is avoided.
  - The teacher is expected to demonstrate and not translate or explain.
  - Classroom instruction is conducted in the target language and hence target culture is also taught indirectly.
  - Everyday vocabulary, sentences and spoken language are taught through demonstrations.

**Advantages**
There was immense motivation among the school teachers with regard to the use of the Direct Method when it was first introduced. It was quite successful because
- tile direct exposure and association between the English word and its meaning made the students speak and write in English
  - The use of audio visual aids, actions and demonstrations made learning lively and interesting
  - its psychological principles made the learning proceed from concrete objects to abstract ideas
  - the situational teaching enabled the students to use the language without any inhibitions

**Limitations**
However, everyone did not embrace it. For some linguists, though the Direct Method afforded innovation, it lacked a thorough methodological basis.
- The exclusive use of the target language failed to address many issues. Though the teacher did not make use of the mother tongue, the learner identified the new concepts with the equivalents in the mother tongue.
- It became very difficult to associate the expressions directly in the target language especially teaching abstract ideas.
- It gave excessive stress on the spoken form and neglected reading and writing to a substantial degree.
- It laid great stress on the teacher and increased her stress in as much as they had to supply the students with the language exercises on par with the native speakers of the language.
- As it ignored the explicit teaching of grammar, it failed to strengthen the language habits of the students.
- In a country like India it became very difficult to find competent teachers.

Thus, in spite of its popularity, the Direct Method of Teaching English lost its importance. In the meanwhile new approaches like the Structural Approach took shape in Britain. Besides this, the sister disciplines that influenced the language teaching posed the following questions.
- What should be the goal of language teaching?
- How would the basic nature of language affect the teaching?
- What principles of selection, organization, sequencing and presentation would facilitate learning?
- What should be the role of the native language and what teaching techniques would work best in the given circumstances?

**Reading Method**
The objective of the Reading Method is to make the students fluent readers. Michael West, who taught in India, argued that the ability to read fluently in English was more important than speaking in English; and hence developed the Reading Method. Thus, comprehension is made the main aim of this method in order to draw a strong bond between the sound and print. Oral work,
however, continues as either the teacher or the student would read from the texts in the class. The reading texts are graded in terms of vocabulary and structures and these are divided into intensive reading texts and extensive reading texts. This led to a systematic way of preparing graded readers to promote intensive and extensive reading among the students.

However, as the priorities in English language teaching is periodically changing. This method is not very much in practice today as its main aim is not reproduction but comprehension. Yet, it is practiced in the classrooms today as a part of language development strategy.

**Bilingual Method**

The Bilingual Method incorporates different aspects of the Direct Method and the Grammar-Translation Method. The use of mother tongue is allowed but strictly controlled and limited to the teacher. The student uses the mother tongue only if he is expected to be an interpreter or a translator. The syllabus is built around situations and all language skills are considered equally important. It involves imitation and interpretation of basic sentences of foreign language. The teacher gives an oral mother tongue stimulus for evoking the foreign language response of the student. The basic aim of the method is to help the student to speak and write fluently and accurately in the target language. It also prepares the student in such a manner that she can achieve true bilingualism i.e., she can jump from one language to another easily language.

Dodson, the advocate of the Bilingual Method admits that the method adopts different methods and techniques for effective teaching. It has freed the teachers from a feeling of guilt for using mother tongue, occasionally in the classroom. The experiments conducted at CIEFL, Hyderabad also proved the usefulness of this method.

**References**


