



Learner-Centred Approach In English Language Teaching: A Reading

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Introduction

Most of the ESL/EFL theories/ approaches/methods which are being practiced in the classrooms today by language teachers have been reviewed in this section. This chapter will also highlight both the appropriateness and the inappropriateness of some theories and approaches which are either feasible or not feasible for teaching development of communicative competence in the Sultanate of Oman. It must be noted that all the theories/ approaches/methods included in this study have been incorporated with the prototype reading course on communicative competence and the course was taught to the target group through learner-centred approach.

The concept of communicative competence is both comprehensive and complex. Serious attempts have been undertaken recently by many teachers around the globe to develop the level of communicative competence in their learners, by adopting various language acquisition theories /approaches/methods. New theories and approaches keep emerging and are being practised by ESL/EFL teachers, for developing different aspects of communicative competence such as grammatical, or linguistic, sociolinguistic, strategic and discourse. In order to transform the language classroom into a classroom for the development of communicative competence, the teachers need to adopt specific ESL/EFL methods or approaches which normally support a holistic development of communicative competence in the learners.

Theory-building

Hakuta (2001), states that “the game of language acquisition research can be described as the search for an appropriate level of description for the learner’s system of rules”. Rutherford says that “we wish to know what it is that is acquired, how it is acquired and when it is acquired. But, were we to have the answers even to these questions, we would still want to know why”(Hakuta, 2001). Thus theory building comprises of explanation and description. According to Long (2003), there are two approaches to theory building:

- a. The theory- then-research approach, and
- b. The research-then- theory approach

According to Long, the theory-then-research approach includes five stages. They are:

1. Develop an explicit theory;
2. Derive a testable prediction from theory;
3. Conduct research to test the prediction
4. Modify the theory if the prediction is disconfirmed, and
5. Test a new prediction if the first prediction is confirmed.

Similarly, Long also speaks about the four stages of the research-then-theory approach. They are:

1. Select a phenomenon for investigation;
2. Measure its characteristics;
3. Collect data and look for systematic patterns, and
4. Formalize significant patterns as rules describing natural event (Long, 1983).

Though both these approaches are commonly in practice today in ESL/EFL research, in the present context (teaching for the development of communicative competence), the theory-then-research approach seems to be more feasible. Hence, a few ESL/EFL theories/ approaches/methods which have been used and incorporated for teaching and practising the prototype reading course on communicative competence, have been reviewed here in detail.

The Natural Approach

This is one of the most recent and a popular approach found in the ESL/EFL arena. It, in fact, is a term for a number of language teaching methods which were developed in the 19th century as a reaction to the Grammar-Translation method. Stephen Krashen who formulated this approach says that “Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill” (Stephen Krashen, 2006). He says that real language acquisition develops slowly, and speaking skills emerge significantly later than listening skill, even when conditions are perfect” (Stephen Krashen, 2006). Hence, the teachers who adopt this method in language classrooms, need to realize that the learners, in order to develop their communication competence should be given chances to listen first the target language before asking them to use that language in their interactions. So, it is the responsibility of the teachers to adopt for their communicative competence lessons, only feasible approaches which support supplying the all-important ‘comprehensible-input’ to the learners in ‘low anxiety situations, containing messages that the learners really want to hear. Krashen implies that these approaches normally do not want to insist upon early production in the target language (L2), but are flexible to learners and encourage them to produce the products only when they are ready.

Another very interesting feature of this Natural Approach is that unlike many other approaches, it is strongly in support of the view that adults can still acquire second language and the ability to learn languages does not disappear at puberty. The Natural Approach stresses that an adult learner can acquire all except the phonological aspect by using his/her Language Acquisition Device (LAD). According to Krashen an adult learner goes through two processes-acquisition and learning but a child has only one process-

acquisition. While talking about L2 acquisition, Stephen Krashen has brought forth five key hypotheses. They are:

- a. The Acquisition- Learning Distinction
- b. The Natural Order Hypothesis
- c. The Monitor Hypothesis
- d. The Input Hypothesis, and
- e. The Affective Hypothesis

A brief evaluation of these hypotheses will unfold many interesting facts about adult learners. So, let's see one by one.

The Acquisition- Learning Distinction

The Acquisition –Learning Distinction Hypothesis shows two ways to the adult learner to develop competence in L2. They are language acquisition and language learning. Language acquisition takes place unconsciously and the acquirer (the adult learner) is normally not aware of the grammatical rules of the language. But, they 'feel' the error and go for correction. However, language learning is a conscious process and the adult learner is aware of the rules and so, is able to talk about them.

The Natural Order Hypothesis

This hypothesis stresses that "the acquisition of grammatical structure proceeds in a predictable order". Accordingly, some grammatical structures of a given language are learnt early but some others late. But, that doesn't mean that grammar should be taught in this order of acquisition.

2:1:1: c. The Monitor Hypothesis

The Monitor Hypothesis states that the language a learner has subconsciously acquired "initiates our utterances in a second language and is responsible for our fluency" (Stephen Krashen, 2006). However, the language that has been consciously learnt, takes the role of an editor. This editor has enough time to edit, has the focus on form and is aware of the rules to correct, for example, the grammar test or a written product. This editor is called the Monitor. But, this monitor is often wrongly used by the individuals. Monitor over-users, try to use their monitors every now and then and they end of with a serious concern on their frequency. The monitor under-users, however, choose not to use their conscious knowledge of the language. They correct errors based on a 'feel' for correctness.

The teachers should instruct the learners to "use the Monitor only when it is appropriate and also only when it does not interfere with communication". For example, the learners should be asked to use their grammatical knowledge not in conversation, but in writing and in planned speech. Thus, this kind of "optimal monitor users" can therefore use their learned competence as a supplement to their acquired competence" (Stephen Krashen, 2006).

The Input Hypothesis

This hypothesis explains how a language acquirer develops competency over time. It also says that the comprehensible input a learner receives, should be at just beyond the level of the learner. The learner, instead of waiting for the teacher to teach, for instance, the grammatical structure at just beyond his/her current level, could easily focus on communication and this, in turn, will enable the learner to produce the language. In fact, the production ability in a learner naturally emerges and not taught directly. The example of the effectiveness of the Input Hypothesis could be found in the care taker speech (from an adult to a child) and in teacher-talk (a teacher to a language learner).

Krashen suggests that teachers, in order to help learners produce language, should provide them a 'silent period' initially. During this time, the learners usually build up acquired competence before they begin to produce it. If they don't get this 'silent period', they will try to produce the language with the help of the rules they have already acquired from their first language. This will lead to communication break downs.

The Affective Filter Hypothesis

This hypothesis explains how anxiety, self-confidence and motivation affect language acquisition. Depending upon the degree of their intensity, it raises or lowers the 'stickiness' or 'penetration' of any comprehensible input that is received.

A question is commonly asked in the ESL\ EFL arena: 'Does classroom teaching help to develop a learner's communicative competence level?' The answer is 'yes, it does'. Stephen Krashen, with the help of these five hypotheses, emphatically states that, for language learning to take place in a learner, 'comprehensible input' is very much essential and as the learners do not have access to 'real world' language speakers to obtain this 'comprehensible input', alternatively the language classrooms will supply that. The 'comprehensible input' that the learners get from language classrooms, ranges from the rules on grammatical structures (grammatical competence), societal expectations, speech acts and speech events (sociolinguistic competence), error correction- self, peer or the teacher, repairing communicative break downs (strategic competence) and also how to organise words, phrases and sentences into long conversations and also into well organised speeches (discourse competence). In the Omani context also, these hypotheses will work effectively in the communicative competence classrooms and hence, could adopt them in classrooms.

Task-based Language Learning (TBLL)

This approach was the brain child of N. Raghu. Task-based Language Learning or Task-based Instruction (TBI) centres around meaningful tasks. It focuses on the use of authentic language and on asking the learners to do useful tasks using the target language. For example, the tasks in Task-based Language Learning include tasks such as "using telephone to obtain information, drawing maps based on oral instructions, performing actions based on commands given in the target language, giving orders and instructions to others etc." (The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, 1993). Task-based Language Learning stresses that it is a more effective way to develop communicative competence, as "it provides a purpose for the use and learning

of a language other than simply learning language items for their own sake” (The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, 2010).

Jane Willis (2007) states that the Task-based Language Learning, comprises of the ‘pre-tasks, the task cycle and the language focus’. According to her, the components of a ‘task’ are:

1. Goals and objectives,
2. Input,
3. Activities,
4. Teacher Role
5. Learner role, and
6. Settings.

During the ‘pre-task phase, the teacher will explain what the learners are expected to do and some times, the teacher will also provide the learners with key vocabulary or grammatical constructs to complete the tasks successfully. The teacher also present a model of the task either by doing it himself/herself or by presenting pictures, audio tracks or video clips demonstrating the task.

During the ‘task phase’, the learners perform the task. They usually do it in small groups. The teacher’s role is limited to one of a facilitator or counsellor and so the Task-based Language Learning comes strictly within the purview of student-centred methodology. Once the task is completed, the learners prepare an oral or written report and present it to the class. The teacher gives feedback. He also reviews the language forms that the learners were using during the ‘task phase’, the problems they encountered and also the ‘forms’ that need to be covered. The final stage of learning is the practice stage. The learners are provided with a lot of opportunities to practise the task for fluency. The teacher also ensures at this stage that the teaching material is covered in full and required key-language features are emphasized.

This is a very effective method for the development of communicative competence. It is a student-centred approach and it often ‘provides for practical extra-linguistic skill building’. The pre-task phase, for example, allows the learners a free hand to use the grammatical structures and the vocabulary that they want. In Task-based Language Learning, the learners get the opportunity use all the language they know and or learning, rather than just the ‘target language features’ of the lesson. This is a good way to develop the learners’ grammatical competence level, and the tasks like ‘visiting the doctor’ and giving commands and instructions, will help the learners to develop their sociolinguistic and strategic competence. The learners’ oral or written presentation during the ‘task phase’ will help them develop their discourse competence. In the Omani context too, as this approach doesn’t interfere in the cultural practices of the Omani learners, it may thus be concluded that Task-based Language learning will work effectively in developing the level of communicative competence in the advanced level learners of Higher College of Technology in the Sultanate of Oman.

Caleb Gattegno’s Theory of Gestures (The Silent Way)

The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (2010) explains The Silent Way as “a method of foreign language teaching developed by Caleb Gattegno which makes use of gesture, mime, visual aids, wall charts and in particular Cusinie’s rods (wooden sticks of different lengths and colours) that the teacher uses to help the learners to talk” (The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, 1993). The Silent Way method was introduced in the early 1970s. It is based on Caleb Gattegno’s principle that the teacher should be as much silent as possible so that, it was assumed, the learners will produce as much language as possible. The Silent Way follows a structural approach and the target language is taught through a series of sentences based on grammatical complexity. The teacher presents the target language and the learners inductively learn the appropriate grammatical rules. New items are introduced sparingly by the teacher and the learners take them as far as they can in their communication and once the need for a new language item arises, the teacher provides this and models it just once very clearly. The learners take it again as far as they can in their communication till they need a new language item. The teacher has only a minimalist role to play. Some critics say that the teachers who adopt the Silent Way are ‘aloof’. Earl W. Stevick describes the role of the teacher in Silent Way as “Teach, test, get out of the way” (Earl W. Stevick, 2008).

The learning hypotheses underlying Caleb Gattegno’s the Silent Way are mentioned as follows:

- a. Learning is facilitated if the learner discovers or creates rather than remembers and repeats what is to be learned.
- b. Learning is facilitated by accompanying physical objects, and
- c. Learning is facilitated by problem-solving involving the material to be learned.

These hypotheses remind us of a comment made by a famous modern psychologist, Jerome Bruner. According to Bruner, in the first hypothetical mode, the teacher and the learner are in a co-operative position. “The student is not a bench-bound listener, but is taking part in the play ‘the principal role’ in it” (Jerome Bruner 2006:83). He views language learning as a ‘problem- solving, creative, and a discovering ability in which the learner is a principal actor rather than a bench-bound listener. ‘The discovering ability’ that Bruner mentions, involves:

- a. the increase in intellectual potency,
- b. the shift from extrinsic to intrinsic rewards,
- c. the learning of heuristics by discovering, and
- d. the aid to conserving memory (Bruner 2006:83).

Like Bruner, Caleb Gattegno also claims similar benefits for the learners. He says that in the Silent Way, “the teacher’s strict avoidance of repetition forces alertness and concentration on the part of the learners” (Gattegno 1972:80). While commenting on the Silent Way method, Selman also has stated that “the learner’s grappling with the problem of forming an appropriate and meaningful utterance in a new language leads the learner to realization of the language, through his/her own perpetual and analytical powers” (Selman,2007).

It is not surprising to see why the Silent Way method encourages the use of simulated experience by using tokens and picture charts as central elements. This is because Gattegno views language as a 'substitute for experience, so experience is what gives meaning to language' (Gattegno 2002:8).

The Silent Way, as mentioned before, takes a structural approach to the organisation of language to be taught. The Silent Way views language as groups of sounds associated with meanings and or organised into sentences by grammatical rules. So, while teaching the target language, the lexical and structural material is broken into small elements with one element presented at a time. Gattegno considers vocabulary teaching as crucial in the Silent Way method. He identifies a few classes of vocabulary items. The 'semi-luxury vocabulary' consists of common daily life expressions of the target language culture such as food, clothing, travel, family life etc. 'Luxury vocabulary' is used to communicate special ideas on political and philosophical views and the 'functional vocabulary' which is key for the learner, deals with the functional and versatile words of the language. This vocabulary provides a key to understand the 'spirit' of the language.

Gattegno says that 'to speak a learner requires the descent of the will in to the voluntary speech organs and a clear grasp by one's linguistic self of what one is to do to produce definite sounds in definite ways. Only the self of the utterer can intervene to make objective what it holds in itself. According to Scott, our self consists of two systems- a learning system and a retaining system. To keep the learning system up-to-date, the "learner must constantly test his powers to abstract, analyse, synthesize and integrate" (Scott and Page 2002: 273).

Silence is considered as the best tool for learning because in silence the learners concentrate on the task to be accomplished and the potential means to its accomplishment. So, silence is considered as an appropriate aid to alertness, concentration and mental organisation. To make it brief, the Silent Way, according to Gattegno, is not just a language teaching method but it is a recovery of innocence-"a return to our full powers and potentials" (Gattegno 1972: 84). It is not just second language teaching that Gattegno has aimed at (with his Silent Way), but a complete mastery of linguistic skills or to put it in other words, a complete development of communicative competence in learners.

A careful analysis on the various features of the Silent Way reveals that its primary goal set for language learning is near-native fluency in the target language, and correct pronunciation and mastery of the prosodic elements of the target language which are basic essential elements to develop communicative competence. With the Silent Way, the learners can learn new language items regularly and as and when they require them to use for communication. The required vocabulary and grammatical items are supplied by the teacher instantly and so, the chances of communication breakdowns become slim. This will further boost the learners' discourse and strategic competence level. The Silent Way requires the learners to use the language items in communication on topics on their daily needs and experiences, and thus, provides opportunities to the learners to understand the social and cultural settings of the society. So, their sociolinguistic competence, thus, could be developed. The Silent Way is an appropriate method to adopt

in the language classrooms in Oman especially for teaching the ways and means to develop communicative competence. The learners there, will make use of the 'silence' available in the classrooms, and will learn to develop their communicative competence level.

The Lexical Approach

The Lexical Approach was introduced to the ESL/EFL classrooms in the 1990s by Michael Lewis. The basic concept on which the Lexical Approach rests, is the idea that an important part of learning a language consists of "being able to understand and produce lexical phrases as chunks" (The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, 2010). In Lexical Approach, the instruction focuses mainly on fixed expressions that occur usually in dialogues which Lewis claims, forms a larger part of discourse than unique phrases and sentences. Lexical Approach treats vocabulary more than grammar and this is one of the underlying principles, why teaching of chunks and set phrases has become common in ESL/EFL classrooms.

Presently, a vast majority of researchers and teachers have unanimously accepted the inclusion of vocabulary teaching in the syllabus. They say that vocabulary should be taught systematically and on a regular basis in the ESL/EFL classrooms so as to help the learner learn the language easily. Lewis (1986), states very clearly that vocabulary should be at the centre of language teaching because "language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalizes grammar" (M.Lewis, 2006).

One of the important aspects of vocabulary teaching, especially at the advanced level, is to consistently maintain learner-autonomy in the language classrooms. This will encourage the learners to deal with new lexis and expand their vocabulary. This can be further encouraged by means of guided discovery, contextual guess work and also by the use of dictionary. Lewis views vocabulary as the basis for communication. He also states that "language consists not of traditional grammar and vocabulary, but often of multi-word prefabricated chunks" (Lewis, 2006). Chunks like collocations, fixed and semi-fixed expressions and idioms play a very important role in facilitating language production because Lewis sees this as a key to fluency. So, the language teachers should make the learners aware of chunks, provide them opportunities to identify, to organise and to record these in their memory.

The Lexical Approach insists upon teaching the learners to know the word and to know to use the word efficiently. Lewis (1993) states that "being able to use a word involves, mastering its collocational range and restrictions on that range" (Lewis, 1993). So, the language teachers, instead of giving importance to teaching isolated words, should involve in recognizing and teaching multi-word chunks.

The Lexical Approach recommends clear ways for organising and recording vocabulary. Lewis says that "language should be recorded together which characteristically occurs together" (Lewis, 1993). He suggests recording language in collocation tables, mind maps, word trees etc. He also suggests recording of whole sentences to help contextualization, but the items stored in a learner's memory depends upon his/her needs.

It is interesting to learn that both the Lexical Approach and the Task-based Language Learning Approach share a common platform on certain aspects. They both believe that 'comprehensible input' is essential for language acquisition. They both also boast that 'successful communication' is more important than production of a few grammatically correct sentences. So, the language teachers too who adopt these methods in their classrooms, must make these aspects as their primary teaching goals.

Community Language Learning

Community Language Learning is an ESL/EFL teaching method developed by Charles A. Curran. "It is an application of 'counselling learning' to second and foreign language teaching and learning. The method makes use of group learning in small or large groups. These groups are the community," (The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, 1993). The Community Language Learning method emphasizes on the learners' personal feelings and their reactions to language learning. Learners say things which they want to talk about, in their native language. The teacher plays the role of a counsellor and he translates the learners' sentences into the foreign language, and each learner then repeats these sentences to other members of the group.

The Community Language Learning Approach treats the teacher and the student as the 'knower' and the 'learner' respectively. Sometimes their roles change from a 'knower' to a 'counsellor' and a 'learner' to a 'client'. According to Curran a counsellor is a person who helps the client understand his/her own problems better by "capturing the essence of the client's concern and relating the client's affect to cognition" in effect, understanding the client and responding in a detached yet considerate manner (Charles A. Curran, 2006).

The general tasks allotted to the learners, as per the Community Language Learning Approach include the following:

- a. to apprehend the sound system of the language
- b. to assign fundamental meanings to individual lexical units, and
- c. to construct a basic grammar.

To help the learners complete these tasks successfully, the teacher adopts the following techniques in the language classrooms:

- building relationships among learners;
- explain the procedure to complete the task successfully;
- set the time limit;
- provides language for communication
- works as a human computer
 - a. teacher stands behind the learners,
 - b. teacher repeats, doesn't correct,
 - c. interaction among learners
- Native language translation
- reflect on experience, talk about feelings,
- teacher plays the role of a counsellor, understands, listens,
- one task at a time,

- cooperation, no competition.
- teacher- learner centred: both are decision-makers,
- syllabus designed by the learners at the beginning
- creative thinking and self-evaluation
- integrative test; paragraph writing or oral interview.

Presently, the social networking technologies and internet have helped a large group of people try Communicative Language Learning Approach, by means of information sharing and collaboration tools. The users can mutually help each other to learn the target language by direct communication or mutual correction of language exercises.

Theory of Suggestology

Suggestopaedia derived from the theory of suggestology, is a popular foreign language teaching method that 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 Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics, 2010). Georgi Lozanou, the person who formulated Suggestopaedia, states that “it is a system for liberation; liberation from the preliminary negative concept regarding the difficulties in the process of learning that is established throughout the learners’ life in the society” (Georgi Lozanou,2002). It is believed that Suggestopaedia is a pedagogical application of suggestology, the influence of suggestion on human behaviour.

Suggestopaedia emphasizes a completely different classroom atmosphere for learning the target language. It is important to have a good classroom, and the physical surroundings atmosphere of the classrooms are vital to help the learners feel comfortable and relaxed.

A Suggestopaedia lesson normally consists of three phases. They are:

- a. deciphering
- b. concert session (memorization Se’ance), and
- c. elaboration.

During the phase of deciphering, the grammar and lexis of the content are introduced by the teacher. The concert session consists two phases- active and passive. In the active phase of the concert session, the teacher reads the text at a normal speed sometimes intoning some words and the learners follow. During the passive phase of the concert session, the pre-classical music is played background and the learners relax and listen to the teacher reading the text calmly. In the elaboration session, the learners finish off what they have learned with dramas, songs and games. Then the elaboration session has developed into more phases as lot of language learning experiments were done in the classroom. The four phases of elaboration are:

- a. Introduction
- b. Concert Session
- c. elaboration, and
- d. production.

The teacher teaches the material in a 'playful' manner. In the active phase of the concert session, the music is played and the teacher reads with intoning. Sometimes, the learners read the text with the teacher, but mostly listen to the music. The teacher pauses in particular moments. The passive phase of the concert session passes off quietly. During the elaboration session, the learners sing classical songs and play games and the teacher plays the role of a 'consultant'. During the production session, the learners spontaneously speak and interact in the target language without any interference and correction.

In Suggestopaedia, the teacher plays an interesting and interesting role. Though, it is a teacher-controlled teaching method, the teacher acts here as a partner to the learners. The teacher of Suggestopaedia needs special qualities to make it effective and successful. A few such qualities include, "communication in the spirit of love, respect for man as human being, the specific humanitarian way of applying these techniques etc. So, before adopting this method in the classroom, the teacher should understand the theory and should equip themselves for really challenging teaching sessions. Lozonov suggests a few important factors for the teachers to possess. They are:

- a. covering a huge amount of learning material,
- b. organising the material in the suggestopaedic way;
- c. be reliable and credible,
- d. be sure about positive results, and
- e. should be emotionally attached with the learners and should teach them with personal participation.

Researchers and academicians all around the world recommend this method, as they think that it is a very effective method to teach foreign language. Lozonov claims that "the effect of the method is not only in language learning, but also in producing favourable side-effects on health, social and psychological relations, and the subsequent success in other subjects" (Lozonov, 2003). The United Nations' educational wing, the UNESCO, had conducted a detailed research on the feasibility of this method and had strongly recommended it as an effective method for teaching not only foreign language but also many subjects. The UNESCO's final report on Suggestopaedia concludes as this: "... There is a consensus that Suggestopaedia is a generally superior teaching method for many subjects and for many types of students, compared with traditional methods. We have arrived at this consensus following a study of the research literature, listening to the testimony of international experts, observing films, portraying Suggestopaedia instruction and visiting classes in which Suggestopaedia is practised. The films were prepared and the classroom variations were impressive" (Official documentation issued by UNESCO about Suggestopaedia, 2002).

Despite this universal approval, Suggestopaedia experiences a few brickbats too. A few teachers think that Suggestopaedia can't be adopted easily in the language classrooms. They cite many reasons for that. For example, they say that traditional course books cannot be used in Suggestopaedia, because these books cannot present the content and grammar following the function of the human brain. In order to use these books, they have to be organised in the suggestopaedic way. Baur complains that in Suggestopaedia, "learners only receive input by listening, reading and musical-emotional backing, while

other important factors of language acquisition are being neglected” (Baur, R.S.2004). Lukesh, another researcher, states that “Suggestopaedia lacks in scientific backing, and is criticized by psychologists as being based on pseudoscience” (Journal of Educational Psychology, 14, 59-62).

Suggestopaedia is an effective method for communicative competence classrooms which have different levels of learners. With Suggestopaedia, even the slow learners will get opportunities to develop their level of communicative competence. A close evaluation of this method will reveal that Suggestopaedia will be effective to teach develop all the four important areas of communicative competence- grammatical, sociolinguistic, strategic and discourse. Quite interestingly, this method teaches not only accuracy but also fluency. So, the learners get chances to develop their strategic and discourse competence. As Suggestopaedia generally teaches content and grammar, the learners can improve their grammatical and sociolinguistic competence level too. T

The Communicative Approach

Communicative Approach, also called ‘Communicative Approach to the Teaching of Foreign Language, is an approach which emphasizes that the goal of language learning is communicative competence. This approach, developed by the British Applied Linguists, result of an angry reaction against the then existing grammar-based approaches. Interaction in the target language is the key objective of this approach and in this approach, the teaching materials are generally used to teach,

- a. the language needed to express and understand different kinds of functions, such as requesting, describing, expressing likes and dislikes, etc.;
- b. a notional syllabus or some other communicatively organised syllabus;
- c. the processes of communication, such as using language appropriately in different types of situations, to perform different kinds of tasks, e.g. to solve puzzles, to get information etc, also to use language for social interaction with other people.

The Communicative Approach emerged in the 1970s as a result of an inadequate language teaching method called The Audio-lingual method. In the Audio-lingual method, lessons were organised by grammatical structure and presented through short dialogues. The learners listened to the dialogues and mimicked pronunciation and the grammatical structures in these dialogues. Critics of the Audio-lingual method noticed that this over-emphasis on repetition and accuracy did not help the learners achieve communicative competence in the target language. Noam Chomsky also opposed this approach and argued that ‘Language is not a habit of structure’. He also stated that “ordinary linguistic behaviours characteristically involve innovation, formation of new sentences and patterns in accordance with rules of great abstractness and intricacy” (Noam Chomsky, 2002). So, the critics who were opposing the Audio-lingual method, formulated a notional-functional syllabus as an alternative method and eventually, it gave way to the present Communicative Approach.

A notional-functional syllabus is a way of organising a language curriculum. Accordingly, instructions are organised in terms of notions (context) and functions (purpose). For example, the notion ‘shopping’ requires a lot of language functions such as

asking for prices, features of a product, bargains etc. So, in this approach, the learners get opportunities to learn the language features as per their requirements.

The Communicative Approach is often defined as a list of general principles or features. David Nunan has suggested the following best five features:

- a. an emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language,
- b. the introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation,
- c. the provision of opportunities for learners to focus both on language as well as on the learning management process,
- d. an enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important, contributing elements to classroom learning, and
- e. an attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom (David Nunan, 1991).

As a result of these above principles, in the Communicative Approach classrooms, role plays, pair and group works, interviews, information gaps, games language exchanges and surveys, play a major role in helping learners develop their level of communicative competence.

Over the years, many interesting observations have been made by researchers and teachers. The following list of these observations on Communicative Approach will, help to measure its effectiveness.

- Communicative Approach focuses on (target) language as a medium of communication and it also recognises that all communication has a social purpose.
- Communicative Approach implies that communication embraces a whole spectrum of functions such as , seeking information, apologising, expressing likes and dislikes etc, and notions like apologising for being late, asking where the nearest railway station is and so on.
- In Communicative Approach, classroom activities maximise opportunities for learners to use the target language in a communicative way for meaningful activities. It is much more pupil-oriented because it is dictated by pupil's needs and interests.
- Communicative Approach gives more emphasis on active modes of learning including pair works and group works.
- Communicative Approach encourages the learners to learn and use idiomatic and everyday language, even slangs, to understand the social context.
- Grammar is taught but less systematically.

- Communicative Approach uses authentic texts to teach communicative competence. In ESL/EFL classrooms, these authentic texts serve as partial substitute for community of native speakers. Newspaper and magazine articles, poems, manuals, recipes, telephone directories, videos, news bulletins etc. are used in the classrooms effectively.

The above observations, mostly observed by the language teachers, provide a clear-cut view on the effectiveness of the Communicative Approach. Thus, it remains the most effective method, available for teaching communicative competence, today.

The Theory of Natural Language Learning (Direct Method)

Direct Method was the brain child of Charles Berlitz and was developed in the late 19th century as a reaction against the Grammar-Translation Method. The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics, (2010) has given the following list of general features which are inherent in the Direct Method.

- a. only the target language (English) should be used in class.
- b. meanings should be communicated 'directly' by associating speech forms with actions, objects, mime, gestures and situations;
- c. reading and writing should be taught only after speaking, and
- d. grammar should only be taught inductively.

The Direct Method helps to learn the target language in an appropriate setting. One basic rule of this method is that translation is not at all allowed in the classrooms in the process of learning a language. Another very interesting feature of the Direct Method is that abstract vocabulary is taught by association of ideas. This method also stresses that printed word (reading texts) should be kept away from the learner till they achieve mastery in their oral skills.

With the Direct Method, the following strategies are commonly followed in language classrooms:

- a. The teacher asks questions of any nature and the learners answer in the target language. In preparation for this activity, the teacher models extensively the use of complete answers to questions. Then the teacher expects answers in sentences.
- b. The teacher reads aloud a passage from the book three times. When it is read for the first time, the learners listen. When the teacher reads the passage the second time, it is read phrase by phrase with a long pause between phrases and the learners write down the words and phrases. The teacher reads the passage the third time in a normal speed and the learners check their work.
- c. The learners self-correct their errors with the teacher offering them a choice between what they said and the proper pronunciation.
- d. Teacher gives a blank map of a country and gives specific instructions and the learners label the map as per the teacher's instructions. Once it is completely labelled, the teacher takes the same map on an overhead and the learners give instructions.

The Direct Method was popular in the beginning of the 20th century. But, gradually it ebbed away as it was not supported by any great linguistic theories. Another drawback of this approach was that it depended too much on the teachers' ability to teach.

The Direct Method can only be used with other Communicative competence-supporting approaches. The Direct Method doesn't encourage the learners to involve in reading and writing at the early stage of their learning days. This will reduce the speed of development of their communicative competence. However, the Direct Method, at some point, encourages the learners to listen to a range of texts from variety of cultural traditions which will surely help them to increase their sociolinguistic competence level. The dictation activity will improve the learners' vocabulary and so, will gradually develop their discourse competence. The self-correction strategy of this method will improve the learners' strategic as well as the grammatical competence. As it could be seen here, the Direct Method has in itself both pros and cons, and in the Omani context, to teach communicative competence, it should be used with other relevant approaches to yield the maximum results from the classrooms.

The Zone of Proximal Development

The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development was developed by a Soviet Psychologist, Lev Vygotsky. This approach primarily brings out the difference between what a learner can do without any help, and what he/she can do with help. According to Vygotsky, the Zone of Proximal Development is 'the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers' (Lev Vygotsky, 2006).

Vygotsky firmly believes that interaction with peers is an effective way to develop skills and strategies. When a language teacher adopts the Zone of Proximal Development concept in a language classroom and uses the cooperative learning strategy, even the less competent learners develop his/her language skills with the help from more skilful peers-within the zone of proximal development. To help a learner complete his/her language activity, all that the learner needs is a small amount of scaffolding and once the activity is completed, then the scaffolding can be removed. And the learner will, then, be able to do similar activity again without any scaffolding. Vygotsky explains that the scaffolding is nothing but the assistance that a learner gets from a more skilful peer.

'Reciprocal teaching' is another feature of the Zone of Proximal Development and as per this feature, the teacher and the learners collaborate in learning and practise four skills of language learning. They are; summarising, questioning, clarifying and predicting. These skills in turn, will help the learners to learn the target language by using these four skills. Besides, Vygotsky's instructional concepts such as 'scaffolding' and 'apprenticeship' help a low level learner, to learn the language easily. His collaborative learning is yet another effective language learning strategy. Vygotsky explains that the concept of collaborative learning will be very effective if the members of the group possess different levels of ability to provide scaffolding to the deserving learners.

Thus, the Zone of Proximal Development is the name given by Lev Vygotsky for the wide range of tasks a learner can learn independently, and those completed with the guidance and assistance of a teacher or with the scaffolding of more-skilled learners in the class. 'Scaffolding' is changing the level of support. During teaching, a skilful person (either a teacher or a skilful learner) adjusts the amount of guidance to fit the learner's zone of proximal development. Dialogue is used as an important tool to do this because in a dialogue, a learner's spontaneous concepts which are basically disorganised and unsystematic, are met with the more organised, systematic, logical and rational concept of the skilful helper.

In fact, Lev Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development is an effective concept for teaching communicative competence in the Sultanate of Oman. Concepts like scaffolding and apprenticeship, which are the by-products of Zone of Proximal Development, will help the learners to develop the level of their communicative competence. For example, the use of dialogues in classrooms will develop their discourse competence level. They can have student-student interactions as well as teacher-student interactions to do that. Another concept associated with the Zone of Proximal Development is collaborative learning and the learners can get opportunities to know more about the sociolinguistic features of the target language, and with collaborative learning they also learn to repair communication breakdowns. Moreover, with Zone of Proximal Development, as the learners are expected to follow either the teacher or another skilful learner, it is possible that the learners will become as competent either as the teacher or at least like the other skilful learner in the class. Though the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development doesn't deal with the development of independent areas of communicative competence, the teacher being a communicative competent person could instil in his/her learners all the competencies to help them become communicatively competent.

Computer-Assisted Language Learning

According to Levy, (the person who introduced this language teaching method), "Computer Assisted Language Learning is, the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning" (Levy, 2007:p1). The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics, says that "Computer Assisted Language Learning may take the form of

- a. activities with parallel learning through other media but which use the facilities of the computer ; (e.g. using the computer to present a reading text;
- b. activities which are extensions or adaptations of print-based or classroom-based activities; (e.g. computer programmes that teach writing skills by helping the learner develop a topic and thesis statement and by checking a composition for vocabulary, grammar and topic development, and
- d. activities which are unique to CALL" (The Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics, 2010).

In Computer Assisted Language Learning, a wide range of applications and approaches to learning languages are found taken from the "traditional" drill and practice programmes

and also from the recent manifestations of Computer Assisted Language Learning, such as web-based distance learning and virtual learning environment. CALL also endorses the use of corpora and concordances, interactive white-boards, computer-mediated communication, language learning in virtual worlds and mobile-assisted language learning (MALL).

The recommended CALL materials have been designed on the basis of the principles of language pedagogy and methodology which are derived from different learning theories such as behaviourist, cognitive, constructivists and Krashen's second language theory- Krashen's hypotheses etc. These materials generally have two essential features: interactive learning and individualized learning. With CALL, the teachers in the classroom can reinforce what has already been learned. CALL can also provide support to those learners who need additional support.

Vocabulary acquisition using flash cards is the basic use of Computer Assisted Language Learning. It is a very simple programme which makes use of spaced-repetitions, a technique in which the learner is presented with the vocabulary items which are expected to be in the memory of the learners for an increasingly longer intervals until a process called 'long-term retention is achieved. This programme has paved the way for a number of applications called Spaced-repetition systems (SRS). Similar programmes such as BYKI and phase 6 have been designed typically meant for foreign language learners.

Preparation of CALL software deserves a careful consideration of pedagogy. Decco says that "the designers of this software should keep in mind the appropriateness of all the relevant language teaching theories dating back to Grammar-Translation through the Direct Method, Audio-Lingualism and a variety of other approaches to the more recent Communicative Approach and Constructivism" (Decco, 2001). It is always easy to design a CALL software and produce a set of multiple-choice and gap-filling exercises. But, there is so much more. For example, Stepp-Greany says that it would be fruitful to create and manage an environment "incorporating a constructivist and whole language philosophy" (Stepp-Greany, 2002). In the constructivist theory, learners are active participants in tasks in which they 'construct' new knowledge derived from their prior experience. Constructivism also stresses that language learning moves from the whole to the part, rather than building sub-skills to lead towards higher abilities of comprehension, speaking and writing. So also, the CALL software needs to inter-relate comprehension, speaking, reading and writing skills and should reinforce each other in ways that the learners will find them comfortable to learn.

With the advent of internet in the 1990s, a significant change occurred in the use communication technology in language teaching. Teachers in classrooms could display the full text in a full page and could make comparisons with other texts in a different web site. With internet and the establishment of many new web sites, the learners could involve themselves directly in the language learning processes individually or with online support. The teacher's role remains to be a role of a felicitor.

Davies presents a list of over 500 websites where links to online exercises can be found, along with "links to online dictionaries and encyclopaedias, concordancers, translation

aids and other miscellaneous resources of interest to the language teacher and learner” (Davies, 2010). As a result, today, language teachers are using a lot of web applications to teach the target language effectively. Walker and Davies give the following list of such applications:

- * Image storage and sharing,
- * Social book-marking,
- * Discussion lists, blogs, wikis, social networking,
- * Chat rooms
- * Pod casting
- * Audio tools
- * Video sharing applications and screen capture tools, and
- * Animation tools-comic strips, movies, etc.

Besides, today, CALL, with the inclusion of corpora and concordancers, virtual worlds (computer games like colossal cave adventure), human language technologies (speech recognition and parsing (to analyse sentences), makes it into an appropriate language teaching/ learning method. However, though computers claim to have taken the place of language teachers, the exponents of language teaching methods are still sceptic about it. Can computers ever successfully take the role of teachers and perform fully like them in language classrooms? Only time will tell.

Constructivist Theory

It is a theory attributed to Jean Piaget. Constructivism is not a specific pedagogy originally meant to be used in language teaching classrooms, but it is considered as a theory of knowledge. The underlying principle of this concept is that human beings generate knowledge and meaning from an interaction between their experiences and ideas. According to Piaget, these systems of knowledge are called schemata. He explains that constructivist theory speaks about the mechanisms by which a learner’s knowledge is internalized. Piaget says that through the process of accommodation and assimilation, a learner ‘construct’ new knowledge from their experiences. With the process of assimilation, the learners incorporate the new experience into an already existing frame work. Accommodation is the process of rearranging the learner’s view point of the external world to fit new experiences. Accommodation is a mechanism by which the learners learn from their failures.

Wertsch says that Constructivism acknowledges the unique qualities of each learner and “encourages it and implies that it is an integral part of the learning process” (Wertsch, 2007). Constructivism also stresses the importance of the learner’s social interaction with knowledgeable people, so that, the learners can learn the meaning of some important symbol systems and also how to utilize them.

VonGlaserfeld says that “the responsibility of learning should reside increasingly with the learner” (VonGlaserfeld, 2003). So, with constructivism, the learners are directly involved in the learning process and the responsibility is rested on them not on the teacher. Von-Glaserfeld explains that “the learners construct their own understanding and that they do not simply mirror and reflect what they read. Learners look for meaning

and will try to find regularity and order in the events of the world even in the absence of full or complete information” (VonGlaserfeld, 2003).

Constructivism also endorses the ‘Harkness discussion learning method’. This method highlights the importance of group discussion as a learning method. The learners sit in a circle, motivating and controlling their own discussion. Mostly, the teacher will be a silent spectator except for initiating, shifting or even directing a discussion. The learners work as a team- everyone participates- but not in a competitive manner. They know the importance of how to get this discussion rolling in an interesting way. Discussion skills are very important and constructivism teaches these skills to the learners.

Bauersfeld (2003) says that the constructivist approach insists teachers to take a fresh new role-the role of facilitators. A teacher usually gives a lecture that covers the subject, whereas a facilitator helps the learner to get to his/her understanding of the subject. In a teacher-centred learning approach, the learner plays a passive role but when the teacher takes the role of a facilitator, the learner takes an active role in the learning process. Brownstein (2001) says that the teacher-turned facilitator needs to prove in the classrooms that he/she has different set of skills. Rhodes and Bellany have differentiated the responsibilities between a teacher and a facilitator. According to them, “a teacher tells, a facilitator asks; a teacher lectures from the front, a facilitator supports from the back; a teacher gives answers according to a set curriculum, a facilitator provides guidelines and creates the environment for the learner to arrive at his/her own conclusions; a teacher mostly gives a monologue, a facilitator is in continuous dialogue with the learners” (Rhodes and Bellany, 2009). Thus, a language teacher needs to assume different responsibilities to confirm successful learning.

Constructivism insists upon cooperative learning which includes reciprocal questioning, jigsaw classroom, structured controversies etc. With ‘reciprocal questioning’, the learners work together to ask and answer questions. ‘Jigsaw classroom’ wants the learners to become experts on a group project and teach it to the other learners in the group. With ‘structured controversies’, learners work together to research a particular controversy (Wool folk, 2010). The learners should also learn to discover principles, concepts and facts for themselves and these, according to Brown et al, ask for intuitive thinking in learners (Brown et al, 1989). Interactions play an important role in the Constructivist theory, as it firmly believes that learners make meanings through interactions with each other, and with the environment they live in. Mc Mohan says that learning is a social process and it takes place not only in our minds but also when individuals engage themselves in social activities (Mc Mohan, 2007). Thus learning a language is a cognitive process which takes place unconsciously.

Constructivist researchers support the concept of ‘dynamic assessment’. Accordingly, the integrative nature of learning is used for the process of assessment. The assessor enters into dialogue with the persons being assessed to find out their current level of performance on any task and shares with them possible ways in which that performance might be improved on a subsequent occasion. Thus, assessment and learning are seen as inextricably linked and not separate processes.

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