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**Using History to Understand the Present and Speculate about the Future of Teaching
Methods by Akbar Solati**

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Teaching Methods**

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Author's Profile

Akbar Solati received his PhD in English for Specific Purposes from USM (University of Sains Malaysia) and is currently associate professor in the University of Medical Science. His research interests include English for Specific Purposes, Applied Linguistic, Psycholinguistics, and Foreign Language Acquisition. He has published and presented many articles on these topics in different international conferences and journals. His most recent articles are *Psycholinguistic Sources of English Spelling Errors* (International Journal of English and Education, 2014) and *Word-formation: A Systematic Way to Enrich Word Power of Medical Students* (Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods, 2014).

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Abstract

Language teaching methods are the main issues of curriculum development, and they are also a significant step of instructional design. A reasonable way to understand the present status of the language teaching methods, and to meditate upon their future, is to study their past. Then, it seems helpful to study the origin, development, advantages, and disadvantages of different methods of language teaching through their history. This type of historical survey will help us to comprehend that what we have today is the result of many endeavors in the past. There are many studies on methodology each of which has its own way of looking at the history of the methods. Some of them have treated methods based on the chronological order of their appearance. Others have discussed methods from the theoretical perspective. Most of us have read and learnt the rules and principles of the methods as isolated pieces of information without making a logical connection among them. It looks as if it is not an effective way for understanding the fundamentals of the methods. One should consider the methods in connection to one another. Therefore, this study attempts to establish an interconnection within the network of the principles of the language teaching methods and provide a brief history of them that have been established, developed, and faded away. In other words, the methods are presented in an integrated and interrelated manner. According to this study, we may conclude that changes in language teachings methods throughout history involve the recognition of changes in focusing on certain language skills, the goals of study, and the changes in theories of the nature of language and of language learning.

Key Words: Historical Review; Teaching Methods; Language Learning; Language Teaching.



1. Introduction

Language teaching methods are the main issues of curriculum development, and they are also a significant step of instructional design. In spite of the complexities of a language system, language teachers attempt to help learners to learn. In order to fulfill the human desire to learn a second or foreign language various methods were developed. Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) in classical times, in the middle ages and in the Renaissance shows in its methods aspects that can also be found in later methods. But a real sense of methods could only develop when the demand for FLT became great.

In the history of language teaching methods, there was a change from methods that concentrate on writing and reading to the methods that focus on speaking and listening. A reasonable way to understand the present status of the language teaching methods, and to meditate upon their future, is to study their past. Then, it seems helpful to study the origin, development, advantages, and disadvantages of different methods of language teaching through their history. This type of historical survey will help us to comprehend that what we have today is the result of many endeavors in the past. There are many books on methodology each of which has its own way of looking at the history of the methods. Some of them have treated methods based on the chronological order of their appearance. Others have discussed methods from the theoretical perspective. For instance, Richards and Rodgers in their book *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (2007), Thornbury in his book *How to Teach Grammar* (2000), and Diane Larsen-Freeman in her book *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching* (2000) basically arrange the approaches and methods chronologically. On the other hand, Bessie Dendrinos, in her book *The EFL Textbook and Ideology* (1992), at first deals with the role of the textbook in education and then examines the educational value systems in respect to foreign language teaching: these value systems are Classical Humanism, Reconstructionism and Progressivism.

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effective way for understanding the fundamentals of the methods. One should consider the methods in connection to one another. Therefore, this study attempts to establish an interconnection within the network of the principles of the language teaching methods and provide a brief history of them that have been established, developed, and faded away. In other words, the methods are presented in an integrated and interrelated manner.

2. Traditional Methods

In ancient times, education was not public and was exclusive to nobles and wealthy families. Most of the content of the educational materials was based on religious topics. In fact, education was under the dominance of the church in Europe and priests were the teacher, The Holy Bible was the text and some special people could go there and study. With the intention of religious expansion, there was a great need to convey religious issues to the speakers whose language was different from the language of the religious books. Therefore, language education in general, and language teaching in particular became important to people.

Considering the future mission of the learners as religious leaders, they had to be able to read The Bible. This implies that the primary goal of language instruction in that era was to enable the learners to read the text. However, since the text was a religious one, it was too difficult for the beginners to read. Therefore, the teacher had to use the mother tongue of the learners to get them start learning. This means that the language of instruction had to be the native language of the learners, not the language of the text. When the learners started to read the text, they had to understand the meanings of the religious messages and transmit them to the speakers of their language. This means that they had to learn to translate the text from the original language into the language of the community in which they had to convey the religious principles. In order to translate, they had to meet certain qualifications and requirements. The first requirement was to have a reasonable command of the words in the target language. Therefore, the learners started to learn as many words as possible with their equivalents in their mother tongue. This sometimes led to memorizing the meanings of the words from the wordlists with their meanings in their mother tongue. Another requirement was the grammar of both



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languages. In order to teach grammar, the teacher had to explain grammar in the language of the learners. It is highly emphasized that grammar has not be used for communication but to be utilized at the service of translation.

2.1 Grammar Translation Method

Above-mentioned procedures and activities were the bases for a type of methodology which some hundred years later came to be known as Grammar Translation Method (GTM). This method was mainly advocated by the German scholars Johann Seidenstücker, Karl Plötz, H. S. Ollendorf and Johann Meidinger became known in the USA as Prussian Method first (Richards and Rodgers, 2007: 5). It was also called the classical method since it was first used in the teaching of the classical language, Latin and Greek (Chastain, 1988). GTM was the predominant language teaching method from the 1840's to the 1940's and a modified form of this method continues to be widely used in some parts of the world, even today (Richards and Rodgers, 2007; Dendrinos, 1992).

According to Richards and Rodgers (2001) and Larsen-Freeman (2000), GTM stresses upon two main objectives. One is to develop students' reading ability to read and understand foreign language literature. The other is to develop students' general mental discipline. In fact, in this method focus was on grammatical rules, memorization of vocabulary and of various declensions and conjugations, translation of texts, and doing written exercises (Brown, 1994). According to Prator and Celce-Murcia (1979: 3), we can come up with the following principles of GTM:

1. Reading, writing and translating a text from one language to another are the major focus; little or no attention is paid to speaking or listening.
2. The text to be read is often religious or literary.
3. Learning language through detailed analysis of grammar rules.
4. The student's native language is the medium of instruction.
5. The sentence is the basic unit of teaching and language practice.
6. Words are taught and learned through dictionary study, memorization and bilingual word lists.



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7. Grammar rules are taught deductively.

In terms of the four language skills, as Richards & Rodgers, (2007) states, the main focus was on writing and reading, whereas little attention was paid to speaking or listening. This resulted in, as Richards and Rodgers (1986: 3-4) put it, "grammar-translation courses remembered with distaste by thousands of school learners, for whom foreign language learning meant a tedious experience of memorizing endless lists of unusable grammar rules and vocabulary and attempting to produce perfect translations of stilted or literary prose".

With the expansion of communication and interaction among different nations, and the need for oral communication due to some social, political and geographical developments, the use of this method went under question. That is, all activities, which proved useful for the GTM, were banned, and instead, activities that would help language learners develop their oral skills were emphasized. The outcome of such modification was the emergence of a new method referred to as the "Direct Method" (DM).

2.2 Direct Method

Direct Method (DM) developed initially as a reaction to the GTM. Since the GTM was not very effective in preparing students to use the target language communicatively, the DM became popular. At first this method was advocated by French and German educators, and then introduced to American commercial language schools by Berlitz at the end of nineteenth century. The supporters of this movement maintained that language could be taught without translation or the use of the learner's mother tongue if demonstration and action was used to convey meaning. They claimed that in the GTM, the mother tongue of the learner stood in the way of communication between the teacher and the learners. This implies that there is neither a need nor a role for the learners' mother tongue to be used in class. They insisted that the mother tongue should be removed from the classroom context. In other words, the target language has to be transmitted from the teacher to the learners quite directly. Thus, this method was called the direct method.



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As Stern (1983: 456) states, DM is characterized by "...the use of the target language as a means of instruction and communication in the language classroom, and by the avoidance of the first language and translation as a technique". In fact, the DM represents a shift from literary language to the spoken everyday language as the object of early instruction. Objectives include teaching the students how to use the language spontaneously and orally, linking meaning with the target language through the use of realia, pictures or pantomime (Larsen-Freeman, 1986: 24). The DM was well received by the practitioners at the time for the following reasons (Farhady and Delshad, 2011: 89):

1. It was an innovation in language teaching and usually new trends are welcomed.
2. The DM fulfilled the needs of the learners, i.e. to communicate orally, at that time more satisfactory than the previously practiced GTM.

The principles of the DM can be summed-up in the following list (Richards and Rodgers 2007; Celce-Murcia, 2001):

1. The purpose of language teaching is to enable the learners to communicate in the target language.
2. All teaching is done in the target language.
3. No translation between first and foreign languages is allowed.
4. Grammar is taught inductively.
5. Vocabulary is dealt within the context of communication.
6. The focus is on speaking and listening.
7. Only useful 'everyday' language is taught.

Considering the goals and principles set by the DM, one can easily conclude that the skills and abilities related to the improvement of the oral skill should receive the greatest emphasis. Furthermore, extensive vocabulary lost its main concern in the DM, and only every day vocabulary and sentences are taught. In addition, the reading skill was thought to fulfill the needs of the learners in the materials that they would most likely face in real-life situations.



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In spite of the popularity and relative success of the DM at its time, it suffered from certain deficiencies. First, it emphasized the oral language at the cost of written language. Second, too few foreign language teachers were fluent speakers of the language they taught, and as such they could not cope with this necessary requirement of the DM. Third, it was difficult to use, mainly because of the constraints of budget, time, and classroom size (Farhady and Delshad 2011; Richards and Rodgers, 2007; Brown, 1994). Fourth, this method was also criticized for not allowing any attempt to make students aware of and/or explain major structural differences between the target language and their own native language (Morgan and Neil, 2001). Such deficiencies along with a greater demand for reading at the time forced the practitioners to shift away from the DM and resort to a method that emphasized the reading skills of the learners. This method was called the Reading Method.

2.3 Reading Method

The Reading Method (RM) was used in the late 1930's and early 1940's when the Second World War broke out. The principles of the RM, which were rooted in both the GTM and the DM, centered upon the reading skills. In other words, all the activities are to serve the major purpose of the method, i.e. improving the reading ability. In this method students were trained to read the target language with direct comprehension of meaning, without trying to translate the reading material (Farhady and Delshad, 2011; Ziahosseiny, 2009).

The followers of RM claimed that grammar and vocabulary were necessary as long as they served the enhancement of the reading skills of the learners. Accordingly, language learners following this method would not study grammar for the sake of grammar, but for the sake of reading comprehension. Celce-Murcia (2001: 6) summarizes the principles of RM as follows:

1. Reading comprehension is the only language skill emphasized.
2. Only the grammar useful for reading comprehension is taught.
3. Vocabulary is controlled at first and then expanded.
4. Translation is once more a respectable classroom procedure.



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5. The teacher does not need to have good oral proficiency in the target language.

Of course, it should be mentioned that although the RM implemented most of the requirements of both the GTM and the DM, it still lacked the theoretical principles that could be supported scientifically. Furthermore, with the expansion of technology, which has facilitated communication among nations, and the need for training near-native speakers of the second and foreign language of the time to cope with the rapidly growing international communication forced both theoreticians and practitioners in the field of language education to seek alternatives.

3. Modern Methods

After the Second World War, the US took the lead for research and investigation in the field of language teaching and learning. Since the traditional methods could not fulfill the needs of the learners, new developments and changes in language pedagogy were in order. Major sources of these movements were the influences and contribution from linguistics and psychology that resulted in the formation of new methods.

The theoreticians resorted to linguistics in order to understand the nature and structure of the language to be taught. They believed that linguistics is the scientific study of language and if the language was to be explained scientifically, the aim had to be accomplished through linguistics. They further contended that in order to help learners learn the language with a reasonable speed and accuracy, an understanding of the nature and process of learning was necessary. This would only be possible through psychology, because one of its fundamental topics is learning.

3.1 Audio-lingual Method

Richards and Rodgers (2001) state that the emergence of the Audio-lingual Method (ALM) resulted from the increased attention given to foreign language teaching in the United States toward the end of the 1950s. In fact, it was a reaction to the traditional methods because they failed to meet the new objectives set for language education. In other words, none of the existing



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methods of the time was satisfactory in training fluent speakers of the foreign languages being taught.

ALM had theoretical support from both linguistics and psychology and one of its main premises was the scientific descriptive analysis of a wide assortment of languages. It was based on structural linguistics of the 1940's and 1950's which claimed to be a scientific descriptive analysis of languages. At the same time, behavioral psychology advocated conditioning and habit-formation models of learning. Thus, the advocates of ALM believed that learning a foreign language require developing new language habits (Ziahosseiny, 2009: 50).

According to the behavioral psychology, language was a behavior and learning could be accomplished through making a change in behavior. The behavioral psychologists made the following assumption about language learning, based on their findings:

1. Language is an observable behavior.
2. Learning is a change in behavior.
3. Change in behavior can be accomplished through imitation, repetition and memorization, i.e. habit formation.

On the other hand, the linguists claimed that language is what people use in their real-life situations. They believed that the most common manifestation of language is the oral form because there were so many languages that had no written forms at all. Thus, the linguists assumed that language is primarily oral. Investigating the oral form of language led to the assumption that the unit of language is "structure" because in the oral communication context people would not use language beyond the sentence. Based on their observations, they made the following assumption about the nature of language:

1. Language is primarily in spoken form, i.e. speech.
2. Language is a set of patterns and structures.
3. Languages are different.



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Moulton's (1961: 63) slogans compile the descriptive and methodological features of the ALM as follows:

1. Language is speech, not writing.
2. A language is what its native speaker's say, not what someone thinks they ought to say.
3. Languages are different.
4. A language is a set of habits.
5. Teach the language, not about the language.

The ALM became so popular and successful that it turned out to be international method and ruled the field of language teaching for over a quarter of a century. The ALM has been practiced almost in all countries, though with some alterations. Nevertheless, as is the case with other methods, it was criticized because students could not transfer the skills learned in class to communicative in real life situations; moreover, the techniques of memorization and drilling were boring, tedious, and unsatisfying, especially on the part of the students. Another critique to ALM was its considerable demands upon the teacher. An audio-lingual teacher should have, at least, a native or native-like fluency in language (Richards and Rodgers 2007; Brown, 1994; Prator and Celce-Murcia, 1979). The shortcoming of the ALM along with the new developments in linguistics, psychology, and pedagogy paved the way for another shift in methodology and pushed the cognitive method to the forefront.

3.2 Cognitive Method

Cognitive Method (CM) is based on Chomsky's generative-transformational theory (1965, 1966) in linguistics and the cognitive theory (Neisser, 1967) in psychology. According to Chomsky (1965, 1966), language is ruled-based creativity. In his theory, grammar rules were based on universal principles. In other words, language is a set of finite rules through which one can understand and make an infinite number of sentences. He maintained that language is a productive system whose properties derive from innate aspects of the mind and from how

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humans possess experience through language. Chomsky's treatment of language is known as the generative transformational linguistics.

On the other hand, new trends in psychology rejected the behaviorist treatment of human learning and claimed that human learning in general, and language learning in particular, is a mental process that is accomplished through human cognition. In fact in cognitive theory, there is a shift from a connectivist view of learning, which is, establishing connections between stimulus and response, to an information processing view, that is, a view that stimuli are processed by the human nervous system. In other words, cognitive theory maintains that mind organizes the input into meaningful chunks which it relates to information already contained in learner's cognitive network. According to Ausubel (1968), learning must involve active mental processes in order to be meaningful. Based on the principles of generative transformational linguistics and cognitive psychology, new trend was developed in the field of language teaching with the following principles:

1. Language is a set of rules.
2. Some of these rules are generative, i.e. they generate the basic sentences in a language.
3. Some others are transformational, i.e. they change the forms of the generated sentences.
4. Learning is a mental process.
5. This mental process operates through human cognition.

CM shared almost all the principles and activities of all other methods with some modifications. All skills and components were important but not overemphasized. The natural order of acquisition, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing, had to be followed through comprehension first and production next (Farhadi and Delshad, 2011; Birjandi, Mosallanejad & Bagheridoust, 2006).



4. Innovative Methods

According to what has been mentioned so far, it can be concluded that there has been a constant movement from one method to another and each method naturally shares certain principles of the previous one. Thanks to the effect of several variables on the outcome of language teaching and learning, both theoreticians and practitioners endeavored to design methods that would take the effect of these variables into account. Nonetheless, the previous methods were so comprehensive that it would be incredible to design a new method without paying attention to the principles of these methods. Thus, new trends began to grow, each with reference to one or more than one of the pre-established methods. A cover term used to include the newly-developed methods was innovative methods. They are not very much different in principles, but have some shades of variety in the activities and procedures. According to Farhady & Delshad (2011: 139), what the innovative methods are trying to rectify in language learning and teaching are the following:

1. Learning has failed to be meaningful to learners.
2. Motivation levels are poor in many academic settings.
3. Most learners fail to develop functional language skills.

In fact, these methods can be called variations of the previous methods with focus on the variables influencing the processes of language teaching and learning. Some innovative methods were developed to indicate that learning is the main point in the process of instruction. Others concentrated on significant factors such as teacher professionalism, instructional contexts, learner needs, etc. Some of these methods include: Total Physical Response (TPR), Silent Way (SW), Suggestopedia (S), Community Language Learning (CLL), etc.

5. Communicative Methods

After all these changes, it was strongly felt that the advancements in the field of psychology and linguistics could not account for complex nature of language. The reason was that linguistics accounted for the description of the structure of language and psychology for the learning process. However, language is too complex to be treated by these two fields only because they



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could not accommodate, for example, the way language is used in society. Nor did they have much to offer for the principles of communication, which was the primary purpose of language. Therefore, a new wave of methods was presented that aimed at functional language usage and the learners' communicative competence to express their own ideas, feelings, attitudes, desires and needs. These methods called Communicative (COM).

These methods were enriched by Chomsky's theory of competence (1965) and Hymes' theory of language as communication (1964, 1972). Hymes (1972) defined communicative competence not only as an inherent grammatical competence but also as the ability to use grammatical competence in a variety of communicative situations, thus bringing the sociolinguistic perspective into Chomsky's linguistic view of competence. Namely, on the word of Hymes (1972: 13), competence is "the overall underlying knowledge and ability for language which the speaker-listener possesses".

According to many theorists (Canale, 1983; Canale and Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972), communicative competence should include components such as: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. That is to say, the concept of communicative competence involves knowledge of linguistic rules, appropriate language usage in different situations, connection of utterances in a discourse, and strategies to cope with for the use of language. In fact, the communicative methods to language teaching drew from a number of disciplines including sociolinguistics, syllabus design, psycholinguistics and general linguistics (Morgan and Neil, 2001). Some of these COM methods include: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Teaching (TBT), Cooperative Language Learning (CLL). Figure 1-1 shows the relationship of all the methods.

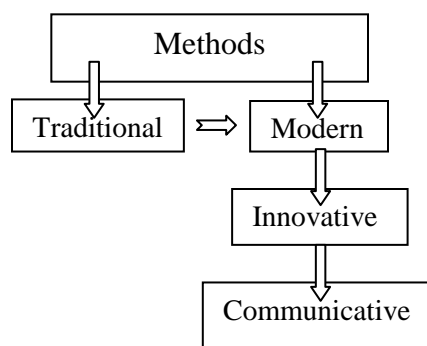


Figure 1.1 The Relationships of the Major Language Teaching Methods.

As figure 1.1 shows, the major methods of language teaching are divided in four categories. The first category included traditional methods. These methods are classified as traditional because they do not meet the criteria set for method by the scholars. It should be mentioned that classifying methods as traditional does not mean that they do not follow theoretical principles. In fact, they enjoy well-developed theories at the present time. However, at the time they were used as teaching methods, their theoretical foundation had not been identified.

The second category includes modern methods that developed clear and well-defined theoretical principles. These methods are called modern because they are used to teach modern languages in contrast to old languages such as Greek and Latin. Another reason for such a labeling might be the fact that these methods were the first to utilize modern developments and principles of different disciplines in science. In other words, when the scientific principles of linguistics and psychology were used in the field of language teaching, the modern methods appeared.

The third category includes innovative methods that are designed for teaching languages for communicative purposes. They are not very much different in principles, but have some shades of variety in the activities and procedures. Thus, innovative methods are very much local and context-dependent.



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The last category includes communicative that aimed at enabling learners to utilize their communicative competence, includes: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence, through procedures that integrate the four language skills.

6. Conclusion

In the history of language teaching methods, there was a change from methods that concentrate on writing and reading to the methods that focus on speaking and listening. Since learners have different needs, personalities, attitudes, motivations, and facilities, no single method could accommodate all the parameters of language teaching for all learners in all contexts. Therefore, the language teaching process cannot be successful if it adheres to a particular prescribed method of teaching, no matter how good it might be. Consequently, language teaching moved to an era that is referred to as the post-method era. It simply means that teaching methods should be designed based on the learner characteristics, learning facilities, learning and learner strategies, and learning purpose and context. In fact, it is the hope of the scholars and practitioners that the new millennium will be the time for the development of language teaching methods that such methods would lead to a successful as well as pleasant context for language teaching and language learning for teachers and learners, and communities. It also may be concluded that changes in language teachings methods throughout history involve the recognition of changes in focusing on certain language skills, the goals of study, and the changes in theories of the nature of language and of language learning.

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