

Presentation of the suggested language learning method TellMeAStory project

While studying the long evolution of the language teaching method from grammar translation to lexical approach, it is easy to find different theories supporting such methodologies from behaviourism to social or cognitive constructivism. In order to make clear the “mosaic method” I have suggested in Siena, let me remember few concepts regarding the main well-know language teaching methods:

grammar-translation: language is taught deductively through translation exercises. Teachers focus on reading and writing as they think that accuracy is the most important criterion to assess the student language level. This structural method comes close to the “Universal grammar” concept (Chomsky, 1965)

Audio-lingual: language is taught inductively through drills and imitations within a done context. It is a teacher centred method, students are recipients to fulfil with the teacher's knowledge using drills. This structural method is supported by the behaviourism theory (Skinner, 1953)

Direct method: sometimes named “natural method”; this interactive method does not use the mother tongue in the learning process, it is a direct immersion within the target language which is taught inductively through oral communication (Krause, 1916). Teachers focus on listening and speaking as they think that fluency is the most important criterion to assess the student language level.

Presentation, Practice, and Production (PPP): The teacher present the topic in a conceptual way within a “realistic” situation. Once the students have understood the topic, the teacher provides a linguistic model and with this model in mind the students practice under “controlled” activities until he feels confident enough to move into some productive activities. (Byrne, 1986)

Total Physical Response (TPR): More a strategy than a method, it includes an interesting concept “understanding before using” (Asher, 1969). Even if it looks simple and may only suit beginners level, it respects the “silent period” (Krashen, 1982, p.26) and uses the kinaesthetic sensory system.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): Here the language is taught through functional grammar concept (Halliday, 2004) to develop communicative skills through authentic and meaningful text (contextualization), learners are involved in a constructive spiral where they use their previous knowledge to build new ones including trials and errors in the process (Richard & Rodger, 2001). This approach lies on radical constructivism very close to the cognitive constructivist Jean Piaget.

Task-based learning (TBL): Often considered the “deep end” version of the PPP, the first stage include the pre-teaching of the necessary linguistic elements to fulfil the tasks used to reach the productive level which is the second stage. Then, in a third stage, students reflect on language in order to make them aware of how the language works. As the tasks are collaborative and the students learn from their previous knowledge, this method relies on social constructivism according to Vygotsky (1972) and Kukla (2000).

Lexical approach: Language is taught through chunks, the words are not the “units” of the vocabulary which is acquired through meaningful associations (Lewis, 1997). The process is centred on students and fits with the cognitive constructivism Piagetian individual development which is reached through personal experiences.

It is possible to find in each method excellent statements to improve language learning and I consider that an effective method should rely on what has already proved its worth and has been supported by theoretical justifications. This is the reason why I qualified my suggested method with the word “mosaic”, I name this it “SIGMA” as it lies on cognitive constructivist approach and it I the acronym of “Stimulate, Input, Give examples, Master, Act”. This framework creates lessons focused on communicative purposes, it uses learner centred strategies guiding the students from input to output into means of acquiring the target language through motivation and discovery. Five stages are set in the learning process:

Stimulate: This word has been chosen in analogy to the behaviourism, good stimuli will generate good reactions. This is used in most of the newspapers to grab the reader attention. In language teaching, once teachers know their audience interest, they can provide good stimuli. In the “TellMeAStory” project, the audience is made of professionals in tourism, hence “short stories” or legends linked with a tourist place should catch their attention and rise their interests.

Input: The input includes natural examples of the taught topics within a meaningful context, not in a behaviouristic way but rather in a communicative one according the functional grammar concept in order to start a cognitive process which lead to language acquisition. It appeals the learners' receptive skills, hence it has to be just one step further than the readers' previous knowledge, according to Krashen (1982), it is a *sine qua non* condition to reach language acquisition. This input is not necessary an authentic document but it has to be as realistic as possible taking place in a context of the readers' interest. In the TellMeAStory project, the readers need to develop communicative competences (Hymes, 1966) what the short stories cannot offer regarding their “telling” linguistic characteristics. Therefore, the “created” document linked with the short story will fulfil the readers' expectations and keep a feeling of continuity to maintain the readers' interests.

Give examples: This stage refers to the specific point the teacher wants to focus on. The examples are “models” coming from the “input” document in order to provide them a meaningful context and avoid breaking the continuity in the process. Here, the lexical approach helps the learners to understand and record the exposed “chunks” as an available reference in their mind. It must be not limited to vocabulary but extended to “situational grammar” in other words the “grammar-in-use” in different situations, for instance : “...out of order...” (vocabulary chunk) and “...I like it...” (situational chunk). As in the Total physical Response, they must be fully understood before being used. According to Krashen (1982) in his “input hypothesis”, these models have to be simple and progressive based on the previous acquired knowledge as they build the bridge between the mother tongue and the target language.

Master: Once the learners have understood the “models”, they are able to deal with “controlled activities” which aim to ease the learning process until the concept acquisition. This stage needs lots of attention as it makes the difference between “knowing” and “being able to use”. On one hand, the teacher must provide rich activities which encourages the readers to explore and build their own knowledge and schemas through experiences that foster assimilation and accommodation. On the other hand, the activities must be challenging but “doable” to rise the learners' confidence in their own capacities and in the method before reaching autonomy through the last stage. This way the

teacher lowers the learners' "affective-filter" and predispose them to acquire new communicative skills in the target language (Krashen, 1982).

Act: On the road of autonomy, all the suggested activities in this stage aim to develop the learners' autonomy. After the "master" step, they know how to do and they should be confident enough to produce. The tasks are less controlled and provide evidences to the learners that they can do it. The main objective of this stage is to convince the learners to change their "new knowledge" in "previous knowledge" since they need more and more "material" to forge ahead.

To complete the method is important to follow a logical sequence in presenting new knowledge, checking what is needed for its understanding. At a macro-level, each lesson plan is part of a previously designed syllabus according to the course objective and the selected logical sequence.

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