Second Language Teaching: An Overview of Methods

by Anna Uhl Chamot and Denise McKeon

Various methodologies for second language teaching have been popular at different times. During the 1960s the Audiolingual Approach (where students memorize set dialogues then manipulate sentences modeled by teachers in drills) was the accepted approach. With the emergence of new linguistic and psychological research in the 1970s, the popularity of the Audiolingual Approach diminished.

Since then approaches that employ the selection of methods and techniques matched to the individual needs of the students have evolved. Emphasis has been placed on all four language skills--listening, reading, speaking, and writing--rather than just on oral skills. Linguistic accuracy has been de-emphasized, and communication of meaning has been encouraged. Learner-centered activities have replaced teacher-directed drilling of correct sentence patterns. In curriculum planning, language is now often classified by the function it serves and the notion it expresses rather than solely by its grammatical structure.

Most methodologies have been developed for adult second language learners. The adaptability of these methodologies to younger second language learners, with the exception of Total Physical Response and Natural Approach methodologies, has not been demonstrated. With increasing research evidence in various learning styles, it is probable that no particular method will be equally effective with all students.

Here are brief descriptions of some of the second language learning methodologies that have gained recognition since the early 1970s.

Confluent Language Education

Beverly Galyean describes Confluent Language Education as an approach originating in humanistic psychology. Cognitive, affective, and interactive teaching/learning objectives are interwoven so that whole-person learning is achieved. Four components form the basis of this approach: (1) "here and now teaching," where instructors focus on the interests, preferences, activities, and plans of individual students in developing language exercises; (2) student-generated output, which is used as class content for additional language practice; (3) interpersonal sharing, where students communicate their interests and feelings to each other on a one-to-one basis or in group discussions; and (4) the use of language as a tool to help students increase self-awareness and to promote personal growth.

Counseling-Learning or Community Language Learning

Counseling-Learning or Community Language Learning was developed by Charles Curran as a humanistic approach involving the learner's whole person through the use of counseling psychology techniques. In this approach teachers are the facilitators and the classroom emphasis is on shared, task-oriented activities where students and teachers cooperate in aiding each other. In the beginning, students sit in a circle and communicate freely with each other in their native languages. Teachers (or knowers) remain outside the circle and translate the conversation into the target language which the students repeat. Periods of silence and an unpressured atmosphere give students time to think about the target language they are hearing. A tape of the session may be made and played at the end of the class; if students wish, teachers write all or part of the target language conversation and briefly explain its structure.

Security and acceptance are emphasized in the classroom and are exemplified

through the students' mutual support system, the teachers' sensibilities and counseling skills, and the use of the native language and translation in the early stages of instruction.

The Silent Way

The Silent Way is a humanistic approach to second language instruction first introduced by its developer Caleb Gattegno in 1963. However, this approach was not widely known until the mid-1970s. The theory behind the Silent Way is based on several general principles: (1) teaching is subordinate to learning; (2) students learn by listening to each other rather than teachers; and (3) greater progress is made

---

Denise McKeon is Senior Trainer/Coordinator of Support Services for the Georgetown University Bilingual Education Service Center in Washington, D.C. She has taught in ESL Bilingual Education programs for students in grades K-8 and adult basic education. Her previous publications include: "The Four Phases of Teaching and Learning a Second Language" (with Joanna Scully-Escobar) in *The Adult Basic Education/TESOL Handbook,* and *Testing and Teaching Communicatively Handicapped Hispanic Children* (co-edited with Heidi Dulay and Marina Burt).

---

through self-evaluation than through teacher-evaluation. A unique feature of this methodology is the use of wall charts and colored rods to establish the reference to meaning in the beginning levels of instruction.

Silence is used by both teachers and students to provide time for contemplating the sound and structure of the target language. Teachers point to a wall chart of symbols, which stand for syllables of spoken language and are color-coded to indicate similar sound patterns represented by the symbols. Students initially pronounce the syllables in the target language in a chorus, then individually. As students

master the sound patterns of the target language, greater emphasis is placed on vocabulary development achieved through the use of specific visual aids.

Suggestopedy, Suggestopedia, and Suggestology

Suggestopedy, Suggestopedia, and Suggestology are labels attached to the methodology developed by Bulgarian psychiatrist Georgi Lozanov. This approach is based on three principles: (1) students should enjoy rather than struggle against what they are doing; (2) students' conscious and unconscious reactions are inseparable; and (3) students' "reserve powers" must be mobilized leading to newer, faster, and a more permanent kind of learning.

Students' insecurity and resistance to the new language are diminished through the planned use of nonverbal techniques, classical music, and comfortable, aesthetic surroundings. "Infantilization," or a child-like trust in the system is fostered in students. Both "passive" and "active" sessions are conducted. In passive sessions students listen to long dialogues explained by teachers and presented in dramatic readings accompanied by music selected to lower the mental barriers students have toward new linguistic systems. In active sessions students use materials from the dialogues to interact with each other in the new language.

The Natural Approach

The Natural Approach, based on the work of Tracy Terrell and Stephen Krashen, proposes instructional techniques that facilitate the natural acquisition of a language. This approach, which encourages language acquisition by developing proficiency without direct or conscious recourse to the formal rules of the language, is based on two principles: (1) speech is not taught directly but rather acquired by understanding what is being communicated (comprehensible input) in low-anxiety environments; and (2) speech emerges in natural stages.

This approach focuses on successful expression of meaning rather than on correctness of form. An initial silent period, where students develop speech, is a prerequisite to actual speech production by students. Teachers accept all attempts by students to communicate, regardless of the accuracy of form or language of expression. Expansions, not translations, of incorrect or incomplete communication by the students are provided by teachers as is natural in two-way communication. Thus, conversation skills in the target language emerge but are not specifically taught.

Total Physical Response (TPR)

Total Physical Response was developed by psychologist James Asher as a method for second language teaching that parallels

---

Anna Uhl Chamot is Manager of Research Information Services at the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education. She has taught in both university and inservice ESL and bilingual teacher-education programs for elementary and secondary education. She is an ESL textbook author whose writing has also been published in various journals and books on ESL. Currently, she is project director for a study funded by the U.S. Department of Education to survey the literature on ESL in public education.

---

first language acquisition sequences. This approach is based on three key ideas: (1) understanding the spoken language precedes speaking; (2) understanding is developed through students' body movements; and (3) speech should not be forced as students naturally reach a "readiness" point when speech becomes spontaneous.

During instruction commmands are given in the second language and acted out first by teachers then by the students, allowing them to perceive the meaning of the commands while hearing the language. As the commands become more complex, visual aids are used to enrich the students' vocabulary. Students begin speaking when they are

ready, and communication is uninterrupted by corrections. During a one-hour lesson between 12 and 36 new lexical items may be introduced. Students are permitted to ask questions in their native languages only at the end of the class. The total physical response method has been used to teach a variety of languages and has been the subject of experimental studies showing impressive language gain, including retention and transfer of oral skills to reading and writing.

Edited by Jane Swartzloff, National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education

Reprinted with permission from NCBE Memo.

References

Asher, James J. 1979. *Learning another language through actions: the complete teacher's guidebook.* Los Gatos, Calif.: Sky Oak Productions.

Blair, Robert W., ed. 1982. *Innovative approaches to language teaching.* Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House Publishers, Inc.

Curran, Charles A. 1976. *Counseling-learning in second languages.* Apple River, Ill.: Apple River Press.

Elenbaas, Carmen T. 1983. *Putting language acquisition theory to practice in the classroom.* ERIC ED 226587.

Galyean, Beverly. 1977. A confluent design for language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly* 2 (2): 143-156.

Gattegno, Caleb. *Teaching foreign languages in schools: the silent way* (second edition). New York, N.Y.: Educational Solutions.

Krashen, Stephen, and Tracy Terrell. 1983. *The natural approach: language acquisition in the classroom.* Oxford, England: Pergamon Press.

Lantolf, James P. 1983. *Silent way in the university setting.* ERIC ED 236942.

Lozanov, Georgi. 1978. *Suggestology and outlines for suggestopedy* (English translation). New York, N.Y.: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers.

Van Ek, J.A. 1977. *The threshold level for modern language learning in schools.* The Council of Europe. London: Longman.

Wagner, Michael J., and Germaine Tilney. 1983. *Effect of 'superlearning techniques' on the vocabulary acquisition and alpha brainwave production of language learners.* TESOL Quarterly 17 (1): 5-17.

Wolfe, David E., and Gwendolyn Jones. 1982. Integrating Total Physical Response strategy in level 1 Spanish. *Foreign Language Annals* 15 (4): 273-80.

Zuern, Guenther. 1982. From action to English: reality in the classroom. *TESL Talk* 13 (1): 92-97.