

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The study of language has always been of great importance from the very first stages in the history of the human race. And of particular importance is the study of different languages as a means of establishing communication with the people of divergent cultures. More than three thousand languages are spoken in the world nowadays. In Nigeria, for instance, there coexist two hundred different languages and some seventy in our European context. Besides, all the efforts to create a common artificial language have failed since the first attempt in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

The problem arises when we realise that we don't know how a language is acquired: "First, language is learned, that is, every normal child can learn any natural language as a first language, under the appropriate conditions. Second, no theory can explain this fact. That is, we have no model which can show how language is learned under the appropriate circumstances" (Campbell, 1978). Summarising the whole idea we could say that the psychological field is gaining an important place in the learning of a second language.

But perhaps, the best advice on methodology must come from experienced teachers rather than from theoreticians, and it is the experience that tells us that there are not universal and magic solutions but just methods that will only work with our students in our schools and in our environments. Each pupil and moreover each classroom is a world in itself. As the title of the topic implies, the English language teaching tradition has been subjected to a tremendous change, especially throughout the twentieth century. Perhaps more than any other discipline, this tradition has been practiced, in various adaptations, in language classrooms all around the world for centuries. While the teaching of Maths or Physics, that is, the methodology of teaching Maths or Physics, has, to a greater or lesser extent, remained the same, this is hardly the case with English or language teaching in general, as we will discuss later on.

## 2. PRIMITIVE TEACHING METHODS

There is no single *best* way of teaching foreign languages. The successful language teacher will not limit himself to one method only, excluding all others. A method which is appropriate with one class on one occasion will not necessarily suit the same class at another time. For most of us, our method is *personal* -an ensemble of our techniques, tricks of the trade, ways of presenting materials, ways in which we analyse and structure the content, etc.

History of language teaching shows it swinging like a pendulum between extremes of method as teachers have searched for different solutions. Tempting to view language teaching methodology as a continuous upward progress through history, not yet perfect but moving towards perfection. But closer analysis of older books on language teaching reveals surprising similarities with present- day methodology.

Methodologies are as much a product of their times as educational systems, and rooted in the ideas of their time. Ideas have a habit of coming into and going out of fashion. Many new approaches are rediscoveries of old methods neglected but re-illuminated.

Throughout the Middle Ages, Latin was the lingua franca of Europe. Before the 13th century no languages other than Latin and Greek were formally taught. Latin was an essential vocational subject for any youth aspiring to further education or to work in the public service - it was the key to the world of scholarship.

Through 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, there was a gradual decline of Latin as accepted lingua franca. The rise of the vernaculars and their diffusion through the new technology of printing led to a gradual separation of functions. Latin was still the key to literature and thought, but the vernacular took over its social role as a language of everyday communication.

The court of Charles II in the 17th century brought in the French language, which was to become the diplomatic language of the time. Towards the close of the 18th century the French Revolution provided England with scores of first class French scholars, exiled aristocrats -all resorted to giving private lessons as a living.

Most famous language methodologist of 17th century was J.A. Comenius (1592-1670). Languages at this time were being taught by oral methods for communicative purposes. The works of Comenius stress the importance of the senses rather than the mind, the importance of physical activity in the classroom. He is best known for his use of pictures in language teaching. Much in

Comenius is surprisingly modern. "The exemplar should always come first, the precept should always follow".

At the same time the philosopher, John Locke, was also laying emphasis on oral skills: "French should be talked into the child ... Grammar is only for those who have the language already".

Yet by the end of his life Comenius had done a complete volte-face - renounced his earlier ideas and was proposing the learning of a language from pre-set rules of grammar. The Age of Reason had arrived. Renaissance man was a doer, but 17th and 18th century man was a thinker. Language for the man of reason was governed by logic. The basic rules of language were embedded in grammar and the art of translation was central to language learning. The *Grammar/Translation method* was born, which was to continue in Britain well into the 19th century - reflecting an educational system which was geared to logical thinking and to teaching an elite of cultivated minds.

#### 1) THE CLASSICAL METHOD

In the Western world back in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, foreign language learning was associated with the learning of Latin and Greek, both supposed to promote their speakers' intellectuality. At the time, it was of vital importance to focus on grammatical rules, syntactic structures, along with rote memorisation of vocabulary and translation of literary texts. There was no provision for the oral use of the languages under study; after all, both Latin and Greek were not being taught for oral communication but for the sake of their speakers' becoming 'scholarly' or creating an illusion of 'erudition'. Late in the nineteenth century, the Classical Method came to be known as the GRAMMAR TRANSLATION METHOD, which offered very little beyond an insight into the grammatical rules attending the process of translating from the second to the native language.

It is widely recognised that the Grammar Translation Method is still one of the most popular and favourite models of language teaching, which has been rather stalwart and impervious to educational reforms, remaining a standard and sine qua non methodology. With hindsight, we could say that its contribution to language learning has been lamentably limited, since it has shifted the focus from the real language to a 'dissected body' of nouns, adjectives, and prepositions, doing nothing to enhance a student's communicative ability in the foreign language.

#### 2) DIRECT or NATURAL METHOD

The *Direct Method* is:

A method of teaching a foreign language, through conversation, discussion, and reading in the language itself without use of the pupil's language, without translation, and without the study of formal grammar. The first words are taught by pointing to objects or pictures, or by performing actions.

(Webster International Dictionary).

The last two decades of the nineteenth century ushered in a new age. In his *The Art of Learning and Studying Foreign Languages* (1880), Francois Gouin described his 'harrowing' experiences of learning German, which helped him gain insights into the intricacies of language teaching and learning. Living in Hamburg for one year, he attempted to master the German language by dint of memorising a German grammar book and a list of the 248 irregular German verbs, instead of conversing with the natives. Exulting in the security that the grounding in German grammar offered him, he hastened to go to the University to test his knowledge but he could not understand a word! After his failure, he decided to memorise the German roots, but with no success. He went so far as to memorise books, translate Goethe and Schiller, and learn by heart 30,000 words in a dictionary, only to meet with failure. Upon returning to France, Gouin discovered that his three-year-old nephew had managed to become a chatterbox of French - a fact that made him think that the child held the secret to learning a language. Thus, he began observing his nephew and came to the conclusion (arrived at by another researcher a century before him!) that language learning is a matter of transforming perceptions into conceptions and then using language to represent these conceptions. Equipped with this knowledge, he devised a teaching method premised upon these insights. It was against this background that the *Series Method* was created, which taught learners directly a 'series' of connected sentences that are easy to understand. For instance:

*I stretch out my arm. I take hold of the handle. I turn the handle. I open the door. I pull the door*

Nevertheless, this approach to language learning was short-lived and, only a generation later, gave place to the Direct Method, posited by Charles Berlitz. The basic tenet of Berlitz's method was that second language learning is similar to first language learning. In this light, there should be lots of oral interaction, spontaneous use of the language, no translation, and little if any analysis of

grammatical rules and syntactic structures. In short, the principles of the Direct Method were as follows:

- Classroom instruction was conducted in the target language
- There was an inductive approach to grammar
- Only everyday vocabulary was taught
- Concrete vocabulary was taught through pictures and objects, while abstract vocabulary was taught by association of ideas

Disadvantages of Direct Method:

- Major fallacy of Direct Method was belief that second language should be learned in way in which first language was acquired - by total immersion technique. But obviously far less time and opportunity in schools, compared with small child learning his mother tongue.
- Is first language learning process really applicable to second foreign language learning at later stages?

The Direct Method enjoyed great popularity at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth but it was difficult to use, mainly because of the constraints of budget, time, and classroom size. Yet, after a period of decline, this method has been revived, leading to the emergence of the *Audiolingual Method*.

### 3. TWENTIETH CENTURY CHANGES

One of the most important innovations introduced was an attempt to present grammar as a natural sequence instead of in a schematic way. Besides, more current texts were handed for translation (no more Shakespeare for beginners) and, what is more important, *conversation* was finally introduced in teaching.

#### 1) THE BERLITZ SCHOOL

Eventually, private institutions and academies began to recognise that the student could be more interested in learning to speak language than to read it. One of these schools was Berlitz. Founded in 1878 by Maximilian Berlitz in Rhode Island, it was immensely successful to the point that it had some two hundred schools all over the world by 1914. Its principles and procedures were:

- Classroom instructions were exclusively given in the target language.
- Only everyday vocabulary and sentences were employed.
- Oral skills were acquired through graded progression of question-and-answer exchanges.
- Grammar was taught inductively.
- New teaching points were introduced orally.
- Concrete vocabulary was taught through demonstration, while abstract vocabulary was taught through an association of ideas.
- Both speech and listening comprehension were taught.
- Correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasised.

When linguists turned from comparative historical philology to the description of modern languages, a new emphasis was given to the teaching methods. In a very short space of time the investigations, particularly those conducted among the American Indians, showed the grammatical concepts accepted for centuries did not necessarily apply rigidly to all languages but, at the same time, they discovered that all tongues had certain features in common. The study of American Indian languages presented difficulties because they had no written forms to base their studies on. The grammarians had to listen and reconstruct the grammar from the spoken language, being the balance between the written and the spoken word shifted drastically. This made a significant contribution to future language teaching methodologies.

#### ➤ Basic English

The First Edition of the English Oxford Dictionary completed in 1928 fills ten large volumes, fills 15.487 pages, and treats 240.165 *main* words. Since then, supplements have added to this number considerably. Many of these words, of course, are not in everyday use, indeed many are redundant or of purely technical use.

The following discoveries made the appearance of the Basic English method possible:

- Every language has a basic grammar that should be taught first.
- Every language has a basic vocabulary too consisting of the most frequent words (around 850 words).

This methodology intended to teach both this basic grammar and basic vocabulary. The verbs were mainly phrasal (*get in* instead of *enter*, and the nouns paraphrases (*small tree* instead of *bush*) while the adjectives were very limited (*nice* for the concepts of *pretty*, *wonderful*, *fantastic...*). Basic English eliminates all but eighteen verbs, such as *get*, *put* and operational words like *at*, *on*. It also eliminates concrete nouns and just keeps some four hundred general nouns such as *love* or *hate* and two hundred pictureable objects like *lemon*, *apple* and one hundred adjectives.

What criticism can we make of such methodology? First of all, we can say that if we added the extra sets of words allowed for scientists, economists... (jargons), we will have more than 8.000 words. Besides, for a Romance speaker, to learn *enter* would be easier than to learn *get in*. Besides, Basic English is restrictive and negative and, what is worse, it is not a real kind of English because it involves learning leaving many concepts behind. Basic is an artificial language which can only serve for very specific communicative purposes and that is not the way real languages function.

## 2) THE AUDIOLINGUAL METHOD

The outbreak of World War II heightened the need for Americans to become orally proficient in the languages of their allies and enemies alike. To this end, bits and pieces of the Direct Method were appropriated in order to form and support this new method, the 'Army Method', which came to be known in the 1950s as the *Audiolingual Method*.

The Audiolingual Method was based on linguistic and psychological theory and one of its main premises was the scientific descriptive analysis of a wide assortment of languages. On the other hand, *conditioning* and *habit-formation* models of learning put forward by behaviouristic

psychologists were married with the pattern practices of the Audiolingual Method. The following points sum up the characteristics of the method:

- Dependence on mimicry and memorisation of set phrases
- Teaching structural patterns by means of repetitive drills (??Repetitio est mater studiorum??)
- No grammatical explanation
- Learning vocabulary in context
- Use of tapes and visual aids
- Focus on pronunciation
- Immediate reinforcement of correct responses

But its popularity waned after 1964, partly because of Wilga Rivers's exposure of its shortcomings. It fell short of promoting communicative ability as it paid undue attention to memorisation and drilling, while downgrading the role of context and world knowledge in language learning. After all, it was discovered that language was not acquired through a process of habit formation and errors were not necessarily bad or pernicious.

#### 4. PRESENT-DAY METHODOLOGICAL TRENDS

##### 1) THE BEGINNINGS OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

It was not until the 1950s that language studies took an important step forward, thanks to the interest psychologists were taking in the analysis of the process of thought and where language could be fitted in. Coinciding with these important developments, the term *Psycholinguistics* was first employed. The 1950s also marked the beginning of the study of language in its own right and the development of theories of the acquisition of language both in the U.K. and de U.S.A.

Up to the end of the 1960s, views of language learning were derived from a theory of learning in general belonging to the dominant *Behaviourist School of Psychology*. Behaviourist psychology set out to explain behaviour by observing the responses that took place when particular stimuli were present. Different stimuli produced different responses from the learner. The association of a particular *response* with a particular stimulus constituted a *habit*, and it was this type of regular behaviour that psychologists such as Watson or Skinner set out to investigate. In the classical behaviourism of Watson, the stimulus was said to elicit the response, whereas the neo-behaviourism of Skinner offers a rather different account of how habits develop. Skinner argued that it was the behaviour that followed a response which reinforced it and this helped to strengthen the association. The learning of a habit, then, could occur through *imitation* (i.e. the learner copies the stimulus behaviour sufficiently often for it to become automatic) or through *reinforcement* (i.e. the response of the learner is rewarded or punished depending on whether it is appropriate or otherwise, until only the appropriate responses are given).

Mentalist accounts of language acquisition stand in stark opposition to behaviourist accounts. Chomsky's attack on Skinner's theory of language learning led to a reassertion of first language acquisition in place of the empiricist approach of behaviourists. Chomsky stressed the active contribution of the child and minimised the importance of imitation and reinforcement. He claims that the child's knowledge of his mother tongue was derived from what was known as *Universal Grammar* which specified the essential form that any natural language could take. For the *Acquisition Device*, which contained the Universal Grammar, to work, the learner required access to primary linguistic data (i.e. *input*). However, this served only as a trigger for activating the device and it did not shape the process of acquisition.

In 1965, Noam Chomsky's *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* emphasised the distinction between *competence* and *performance*. He defined competence as a speaker's intuitive knowledge of rules of language and *performance* as the actual message produced by applying those rules. His contributions to linguistic theory reflect the shift from a Behaviourist to a Cognitive influence in language teaching.

D. Hymes' article "On Communicative competence" (1972) introduces these two terms for the first time into Linguistics. He defines this notion not only in terms of grammatical competence, but also in terms of the knowledge of the appropriateness of the message to the context of communication. H. Widdowson's work *Teaching Language As Communication* (1978) postulated that communicative acts underlay the ability to use language for different purposes, emphasising the close relationship between linguistic systems and communicative values.

Finally, M. Canale and M. Swain's article "Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing" (1980) established that communicative competence is understood as the underlying system of knowledge and skills required for communication, laying stress on its four components: *Grammatical*, *Sociolinguistic*, *Discursive* and *Strategic* Competence.

## 2) TRANSFORMATIONAL GENERATIVE GRAMMAR

In 1957 and with the publication of Chomsky's *Syntactical Structures* there was an important shift in the study of languages due to the importance attached to the concept of *Cognition* in accounting for human language activity and this was later on developed until it became the 'so called' *Psycholinguistics*.

Chomsky's research had suggested to him that the prevailing psycholinguistic norms were insufficient if not misleading. He saw some confusion in Structural Grammar because, in his opinion, Structuralist Grammar did not describe the rules that allow speakers to create an infinite number of utterances; in other words, their *linguistic competence*. In his opinion, structuralists did not pay attention either to the deep structure of language, forgetting thus that human language is a creative activity in which a speaker is able to utter grammatically correct sentences without having ever heard them before.

Chomsky, however, was conscious of the difficulty of applying his method to actual language. Although he has asserted that he is not an expert on language teaching, what is important for us teachers is the fact that he is mainly concerned with the structure of language and with its

creative nature especially. Besides, modern language teaching is emphasising the importance of the pupil's creative handling of language. Therefore, Chomsky was making indirect contributions to teaching:

- There is value in offering ungrammatical examples apart from the correct ones.
- Pupils should be allowed to make errors.
- Explanations in language learning are valuable.
- Priority must be given to free expression and creativity.

### 3) CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORIES

The role of language in intellectual development has been, and continues to be, a controversial topic. Not only Mentalist but Cognitive Theories posit that, although language is part of the learner's total cognitive apparatus, it is separate from the general cognitive mechanism responsible for intellectual development. As early as 1926, PIAGET and the SCHOOL OF GENEVA argued that the source of mental activity is not to be found in language, as cognitive development still remains the basis of psychology today. Neopiagetian theories such as those put forward by Pascual-Leone (1978), sometimes referred to as Constructivist Theories offer a deeper, more precise psychology of education and it is one of the fundamental sources involved in the Basic Design of the Curriculum of the Educational Reform. It is important, therefore, that the main tenets of constructivist theory should be made clear as they influence not only the D.B.C. but also the majority of teaching learning techniques in practice today.

Basically, constructivists understand learning as a process of personal construction and not as an accumulation of knowledge. Learning implies *interaction* which involves the learners themselves; the *cultural content* of the topic or object to be learnt; the *mediators*, who may be family, teachers or friends. Learning is *not* a process of imitation. It requires a restructuring of cognition which ultimately leads to the development of the learner's personality. There are 3 stages in the process of learning: firstly, the *Assimilation* of Stimuli, information or experience which are incorporated into the existing cognitive framework; secondly, the process of *Adjustment* to the new input where by the existing behavioural norms are modified; *Balance* is the third stage in which new or incomprehensible information is lodged into place. Cognitive development depends on 3 basic factors affecting the learner: biological maturity, physical experience of the world and social influence. These factors, which are subject to the 3 stages mentioned above, should be considered as having an activating effect which modifies the learner's behaviour and cognitive framework.

### 1) THE “DESIGNER” METHODS OF THE 1970’s

The Chomskyan revolution in linguistics drew the attention of linguists and language teachers to the *deep structure* of language, while psychologists took account of the affective and interpersonal nature of learning. As a result, new methods were proposed, which attempted to capitalise on the importance of psychological factors in language learning. David Nunan (1989: 97) referred to these methods as ‘designer’ methods, on the grounds that they took a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach. Let us have a look at two of these ‘designer’ methods.

#### - SUGGESTOPEDIA

Suggestopedia promised great results if we use our brain power and inner capacities. Lozanov (1979) believed that we are capable of learning much more than we think. Drawing upon Soviet psychological research on yoga and extrasensory perception, he came up with a method for learning that used relaxation as a means of retaining new knowledge and material. It stands to reason that music played a pivotal role in his method. Lozanov and his followers tried to present vocabulary, readings, role-plays and drama with classical music in the background and students sitting in comfortable seats. In this way, students became "suggestible."

Of course, suggestopedia offered valuable insights into the ‘superlearning’ powers of our brain but it was demolished on several fronts. For instance, what happens if our classrooms are bereft of such amenities as comfortable seats and Compact Disk players? Certainly, this method is insightful and constructive and can be practised from time to time, without necessarily having to adhere to all its premises. A relaxed mind is an open mind and it can help a student to feel more confident and, in a sense, pliable.

#### - THE SILENT WAY

The Silent Way rested on cognitive rather than affective arguments, and was characterised by a problem-solving approach to learning. Gattegno (1972) held that it is in learners' best interests to develop independence and autonomy and cooperate with each other in solving language problems.

The teacher is supposed to be silent - hence the name of the method - and must disabuse himself of the tendency to explain everything to them.

The Silent Way came in for an onslaught of criticism. More specifically, it was considered very harsh, as the teacher was distant and, in general lines, the classroom environment was not conducive to learning.

## 5. COMMUNICATIVE APPROACHES

### 1) THE ORAL-SITUATIONAL APPROACH

The oral-situational approach was developed by British applied linguists as an alternative approach to the audio-lingual approach promoted in the United States. It resembles the audio-lingual approach in being based on a structural syllabus (i.e. a specification of the linguistic structures to be taught) but differs from it in that it emphasises the meanings realised by the different structures, not just their forms, and also the importance of situational teaching structures (i.e. identifying situational contexts for practising the structures). This approach was dominant in British-influenced teaching contexts from the sixties onwards and it still underlies many textbooks used to teach languages today.

In its original form, the oral-situational approach was based on a *behaviourist learning theory*. This viewed language learning as similar to all other types of learning, involving habit-formation. Habits were formed when learners learned the correct responses to stimuli through repeated practice. According to this theory, grammar is learned inductively; there is no need for (and no value) in explicit explanations of grammar points.

In its more recent manifestations, the oral-situational approach has drawn on *skill-building theory* (Anderson, 1993). This is based on a distinction between declarative knowledge (knowing that) and procedural knowledge (knowing how). Learning commences with declarative knowledge and then becomes procedural knowledge when it is automatised and restructured through practice. DeKeyser (1998) emphasises that this practice needs to go beyond *language-like* behaviour by including opportunities for learners to engage in activities that emphasise form-meaning mappings and that replicate the kinds of conditions of use found in everyday communication. Without such activities full automatisation cannot take place.

In accordance with skill-learning theory, later versions of the oral-situational approach incorporate explicit explanations. The methodology employed is that of present-practise-produce (PPP), where *present* refers to the provision of explicit information about a grammatical structure (directed at declarative knowledge), *practise* refers to the use of exercises that involve controlled production of the target structure and *produce* involves the performance of tasks designed to engage learners in real-life behaviour and to complete automatisation. This approach figures strongly in some of the popular handbooks used to train language teachers (e.g. Harmer, 2001; Hedge, 2000).

The later version of the oral-situational approach is sometimes referred to as *communicative* but this is misleading as it is based on a structural syllabus and involves a methodology that is accuracy rather than fluency oriented (see Brumfit, 1984).

## 2) THE NOTIONAL-FUNCTIONAL APPROACH

The notional-functional approach draws on theories and descriptions of language that emphasise the functional and social aspects of competence (e.g. Hymes' *model of communicative competence* and Halliday's *functional grammar*). These afford a clearly defined content for specifying what is to be taught, as in the notional functional syllabuses that began to appear in Britain in the seventies (see Van Ek, 1976). These syllabuses consist of a list of functions (e.g. apologising and requesting) and notions (e.g. past time and possibility) together with the linguistic exponents required to realise them in communication. The methodology employed was typically still PPP, i.e. it was accuracy based. Thus, this approach still involves what White (1988) termed a Type A approach, i.e. one where the objectives are defined in advance and that is essentially *interventionist* and *other-directed*.

The notional-functional approach differs from the oral-situational approach predominantly in terms of the content to be taught. Whereas the oral-situational approach was informed by a theory of *linguistic* competence (actually, grammatical competence), the notional-functional approach was based on a theory of *communicative* competence (Hymes, 1971) and on functional models of language (e.g. Halliday, 1973). One advantage of this is that it caters more readily to the teaching of the pragmatic aspects of language, such as the linguistic devices needed to display politeness, and also to the teaching of cultural or ceremonial topics, such as when and how to greet people.

Descriptions of the notional-functional approach have had little to say about learning theory. Richards and Rogers (1986) suggest a number of elements implicit in this approach, for example the task principle - 'activities for which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks to promote learning'. However, such principles are more obviously associated with task-based teaching rather than the notional-functional approach. Another element implicit in the underlying learning theory (not mentioned by Richards & Rogers) is that language learning involves the learning of formulaic chunks of language as much as it involves learning rules. Many of the exponents of the functions are formulaic in nature. For example, requesting can be performed by ready-made expressions such as 'Can I have a \_\_\_\_\_?' and 'I would be grateful if you would \_\_\_\_\_'. Studies have

shown that classroom learners, like naturalistic learners, store a large number of such expressions. In this respect, then, the notional-functional approach can be seen as highly compatible with how learners learn a language.

An inspection of early and late textbooks based on a notional-functional approach reveals that the underlying theory is, in fact, still skill-learning theory. *Adesso* (Danesi, 1997), for example, contains a mixture of explicit explanation of language points and practice activities (predominantly of the controlled variety). This textbook also manifests another underlying learning principle, namely that language learning is culture learning; this is reflected in explicit accounts of Italian culture, presented in English (the students' first language).

The notional-functional approach can lay greater claim to being 'communicative', in that it is meaning-centred. However, it reflects what Howatt (1984) has termed a 'weak communicative approach' in that the methodology is still accuracy rather than fluency oriented. The underlying learning theory reflects this.

### 3) THE TASK-BASED APPROACH

In contrast to the two preceding approaches, a task-based approach to language teaching makes no attempt to stipulate the language forms (and associated meanings) to be taught. Instead the content is specified holistically in terms of *tasks*. Skehan (1996) defines a task as 'an activity in which meaning is primary, there is some sort of relationship to the real world, task completion has some priority and the assessment of task performance is in terms of task outcome'. Tasks can involve listening, speaking, reading or writing or any combination of these skills. Two very common types of tasks found in task-based materials are information-gap tasks (e.g. Listen-and-Draw) and opinion-gap tasks (e.g. Balloon Debates). Tasks need to be distinguished from exercises. The latter require a primary focus on form rather than meaning and typically ask learners to manipulate language given to them rather than to attempt to communicate using their own linguistic and non-linguistic resources.

The learning principle underlying the task-based approach is that learners will learn a language best if they engage in activities that have *interactional authenticity* (Bachman, 1990), i.e. require them to use language in ways that closely resemble how language is used naturally outside the classroom. Whereas more traditional approaches to language teaching (such as the two described above) assume that learners need to be taught some language *before* they can

communicate, task-based teaching is premised on the assumption that learners best learn a language through communicating, as in first language acquisition and naturalistic L2 acquisition. Various learning principles underpin this view. Krashen (1981) proposed that learners will acquire language when they are exposed to 'comprehensible input' and are motivated to attend to the input. Long (1996) has argued that acquisition is best served when learners participate in the *negotiation of meaning* (i.e. interactional sequences that arise as a result of some communication problem). Elsewhere (Long & Robinson, 1998) he has suggested that task-based teaching affords opportunities for learners to 'focus-on-form' in the context of attempts to communicate and that this constitutes the ideal condition for acquisition to occur. Other researchers (e.g. Ellis, 2003) have suggested that task-based learning is needed to ensure the development of implicit knowledge. Thus, this approach to teaching has drawn on a variety of theoretical perspectives.

Task-based teaching constitutes what Howatt (1984) has termed a 'strong communicative approach'. This is because it aims not just to teach communication as an object (as is the case in the notional-functional approach) but to engage learners in authentic acts of communication in the classroom. It requires learners to treat the language they are learning as a tool. It gives primacy to *fluency* over accuracy but also claims that learners can achieve grammatical competence as a result of learning to communicate. Interestingly, however, it does not deny that learners need to attend to language form. For acquisition to take place, this has to occur in a context where attention to meaning is primary.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this topic we have dealt with the most important language teaching methods, and especially with the latest trends in L2 Acquisition. We notice that the manageable stockpile of research of just a few decades ago has given place to a systematic storehouse of information. Researchers the world over are meeting, talking, comparing notes, and arriving at some explanations that give the lie to past explanations. As Brown notes, “Our research miscarriages are fewer as we have collectively learned how to conceive the right questions”. Nothing is taken as gospel; nothing is thrown out of court without being put to the test. This ‘test’ may always change its mechanics, but the fact remains that the changing winds and shifting sands of time and research are turning the dessert into a longed-for oasis.

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