



# On the Understated and Avant-garde Language Teaching Methods and Theories

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## ABSTRACT

Language teachers have always been concerned about the paucity of efficient methods of language instruction in education systems. Consequently, the language teaching pendulum is swinging from methods to post-method era. Post-method is not a new language approach; rather, it is a theory pursuing reforms in language teaching praxis. The aim of the present paper is twofold: to present some of the emerging language teaching methods and techniques plus reviewing some of the less attended language teaching approaches and theories. The paper is drawn to a close by the discussion of Principled Eclecticism, which is considered to be at the heart of Post-methods debate.

**Key words:** Language Teaching; Teaching Methods; New Approaches; Teaching Techniques

## INTRODUCTION

Owing to rapid globalization processes, the need to master foreign languages is growing exponentially. English is the most used language for communicative, political, scientific and cultural purposes around the globe, so being proficient in English language is sought actively more than ever (Chen & Goh, 2011). Correspondingly, the globalized world requires educators who are braced to respond to many diverse contextual realities and key concepts in language teacher training programs are flexibility, adaptability and contextual awareness (Andrews, 2008; Johnson, 2006 Varghese et al., 2005).

The advocates of post-method era (e.g., Akbari, 2007; Kumaravadivelu, 2001; Jian-min, 2006; Wu & Zhang, 2011) assert that the method-era is over and superseded by a post-method era in which language teachers should not be trained in the principles and techniques of an all-out alternative method but on an alternative to method (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). Nonetheless, language teacher education programs need to make future teachers cognizant of the fact that post-method argument does not underplay the significant role of existing methodological approaches (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Accordingly, it is claimed that the principles and theories underlying them and their formats is an invaluable source of knowledge which would make language teachers consciously aware of their own beliefs and instruction principles and provide them with a sound initial footing (Akbari, 2007; Bell, 2008).

There are two widely accepted sources for introduction and description of language teaching theories, methods, approaches and techniques. The leading one is Richards and Rodgers` (2001) book entitled *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* with more than 6000 academic citations as of 2014 based on Google Scholar academic database. The other highly cited book is Larsen-Freeman and Anderson`s book *Techniques and Principles in language Teaching* with more than 2000 academic citations as of 2014. These books are invaluable sources for language teachers and practitioners, specifically the novice ones; however, some of the popular and highly cited language teaching methods have been subject to negligence in them. Furthermore, some other new approaches, methods and techniques in language teaching have just started to gather momentum (e.g., Mother tongue mirroring or Dogme language teaching) and need further visibility for exploring their efficiency. Ergo, the purpose of this paper is twofold: giving an overview of several language teaching methods, techniques and theories which have been forsaken in the aforesaid books; and introducing some less discussed newer ones.

### Theories and Approaches

#### Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) which integrates the instruction of languages with the teaching of academic subject matter has become more and more popular all over the world (Marsh et al., 2012). CLIL is "an umbrella term covering teaching contexts in which subject content is taught through another language" (Bentley, 2009, p. 9). Coined initially by David Marsh in 1994, CLIL has its roots in language immersion programs. Coyle et al. (2010) consider CLIL as an educational approach in which various language-supportive methodologies are utilized to reach a dual focused form of instruction, where attention is given both to the language and the content. Graddol (2006) asserts that this approach is distinctive from a simple English medium instruction in that it is definitely a tool for teaching curriculum subjects through the medium of a language still being learned, ensuing the necessary language support along with the subject specialism. CLIL can also be regarded the other way around: as a means of teaching English through study of specialist content.

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Proponents of CLIL argue that “a collaboration of the subject specialist with the language tutor while teaching self-contained courses is supposed to be ideal for students’ progress” (Gibbons, 2003, p. 251).

The most widely cited merit of such educational model is that considerable contact time with a target language is provided (Mohan & Becket, 2003). The other advantages of CLIL instruction stated in the literature are (Bentley, 2009; Gibbons, 2003; Marsh & Frigols-Martín, 2012):

- In CLIL it is necessary to use language for meaningfully educational and professional purposes, and this leads language knowledge to practically be transformed to language skills.
- It increases motivation since language is used to the meaningful and purposeful ends.
- It prepares learners for further exploring and work because mastery of a language along with subjects and culture in L2 can increase the learners’ opportunities in life.

The CLIL has been criticized on several aspects. The most obvious shortcoming of CLIL is that language teachers may lack adequate knowledge on the subjects whereas subject teachers have inadequate knowledge of foreign languages (Haley & Austin, 2013). Another serious drawback is the dearth of materials to teach CLIL (Zielonka, 2008). The issue of assessment is suggested to be another pitfall of CLIL due to the fact that teachers may not be fully aware of what should be evaluated and what the assessment process should be like (Ball, 2008).

### **Focal Skills Approach**

The Focal Skills approach was originally developed during 1987 and 1988 at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee by Ashley Hastings. He holds that it is neither a theory nor a specific instructional methodology; rather, it is a general approach for designing a language education curriculum (Hastings, 1995). It is characterized by a series of modules in which learners get intensive, focused instruction in listening, reading, and writing, leading to a final integrated immersion module (Hastings, 1990).

As the designer notes “all modules emphasize comprehensible input and topic-centered communicative interaction, employing methods that stress the progressive, functional integration of developing skills with other relevant skills already possessed by the students” (Hastings, 1990, p. 1), Another pillar of the program design is that skill-specific proficiency tests are administered to assess learners’ progress and to check readiness for advancement to the next module. Learners can either skip unnecessary modules or retake a module, as determined by the proficiency test.

Listening skills are regarded vital to the acquisition of the other skills, so they constitute the first module. Videos are the main assets for listening and are used vastly. The sounds of English phonemes, words, phrases, and statements are associated to the video which serves as an anchor (Hastings, 1995). Reading is the focus of the second module, since reading helps to develop vocabulary and substantial progress towards understanding of the structure of the language (Koda, 2005). Time is allocated for both group reading and personal reading.

The writing module ensues, and typically includes exercises such as personal writing tasks, writing projects, and intensive rewrites (Hastings, 1990). The ultimate module is immersion. It is described as a “low stress seminar in which students study together and work on both individual and cooperative work group projects” (Hastings, 1995, p.34). In this module, skills developed in each of the preceding modules are embarked on. As a whole, the Focal Skills approach is specified by acquisition and integration of skills based upon prescribed principles of second language acquisition; instruction is intensive and occurs in skill-focus-modules; acquisition process is progressive; and learners proceed at their convenient pace. Assessment happens every four weeks. The program advocates argue that measurable benefits that are gained within a short period of time produce a sense of accomplishment and motivation in learners. Finally, as Hastings (1992) simply puts it, “the principles upon which the Focal Skills approach is based are not new—in many ways they are similar to what has been referred to variously elsewhere, e.g., “whole language development” (Riggs, 1991) and “natural language approach” (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

### **Relational Frame Theory (RFT)**

Relational Frame Theory (RFT), is has its roots in the philosophical contextualism of behavior analysis. Nonetheless, RFT goes beyond the direct-contingency account of human language and cognition developed by Skinner. Relational frame theory is inherently developmental-oriented. From a RFT view, both language and cognition are offshoots of an axiomatic behavioral process called arbitrarily applicable relational responding (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2002). Relating means to respond to one event in terms of another. Most living organisms provided the appropriate training, are capable of responding to non-arbitrary relations among the physical properties of two or more stimuli. When relational responding itself is abstracted and controlled by contextual factors other than only the formal properties of the stimuli, the behavior is defined as arbitrarily applicable relational responding (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2002). Such responses may strongly influence any stimuli encountered in the appropriate relational context.

For the behavior of relating to be abstracted, the organism must be trained to distinguish between the relevant characteristics of the task and the irrelevant aspects. The explicit training of symmetrical relations between words and their referents seen in early language training is a good example. For a young child learning to name objects, early language training embodies numerous name-object and object-name interactions across a wide gamut of objects and names. Reinforcement for such bidirectional transactions is productive in a naturally occurring language training span. This type of symmetrical responding takes place solely in specific contexts, and a variety of cues indicate the task at hand. Accordingly, the main

claim in RFT is that if name-object relations properly predict object-name relations in certain contexts, this extensive training history can be used to provide a basis of generalized symmetrical responding. Subsequently, explicit training in a new name-object relation can lead to a derived object-name relation (Hayes, 2004).

Some studies have tested RFT ideas. Supportive data exists in the areas needed to indicate that an action is operant such as the importance of multiple examples in training derived relational responding, the role of context, and the importance of consequences (Barnes-Holmes et al., 2004; Barnes-Holmes et al., 2002; Hayes, 2004).

### **Intercultural Language Teaching**

The intercultural movement in language teaching aims to train learners as intercultural speakers or mediators who are able to deal with unexpected complexities and multiple identities and to avoid the stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity (Byra & Fleming, 1998). It is based on perceiving the interlocutor as an individual whose characteristics are to be discovered, rather than as a representative of an externally ascribed identity (Lo Bianco et al., 1999). Language teaching within an intercultural framework continues to help learners to master the linguistic competence needed to communicate in speaking or writing, to formulate what they want to say/ appropriately and it also develops their intercultural competence i.e. their ability to ensure a mutual understanding by people of different social identities, and their capability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality (Liddicoat et al., 2003).

The learner may not be viewed as a defective native speaker anymore, but rather must now be regarded as a user of language drawing upon the resources available to them (Byra & Fleming, 1998). The language learner uses his/her growing competency in the foreign/second language creatively in order to achieve successful communication. Ergo, language cannot be deemed just to be a set of merely linguistic skills. The views of language embedded in an intercultural framework have prominent implications for language teaching. The 'language' which language teachers teach must take into account the complexity of language and transcend the traditional conceptualizations of language within linguistics (Lantolf & Lantolf, 2000). The complexity of language is not recognized by adding new modules, such as pragmatics, discourse, etc., to the code, but rather by identifying that the linguistic code itself is embedded practice as well as an artefact (Liddicoat et al., 2003; Lo Bianco et al., 1999). When language is conceptualized as more than the linguistic code and the association between language and culture is seen as synthetic, complex and organic, implications for the language teaching is emerge (Byra & Fleming, 1998). In other words, language teaching cannot be confined to teaching the code, viewed as an objective, detached artefact, but must tacitly bring with it practice and values which are consolidated and subjective (Norton, 2000).

It is argued that access to language in an intercultural perspective is empowering (Lantolf & Lantolf, 2000). Empowerment is realized by understanding language as practice and understanding the cultural context in which the practice is unfolded. In intercultural language teaching, the teacher is accountable for providing opportunities for language learners to enhance their own intermediary place between their own culture and that of the target language community (Byra & Fleming, 1998). Teaching approaches, methods, techniques and materials can either enhance or stifle the development of the intermediary place, by including or excluding opportunities to dwell on the cultures involved in language learning (Liddicoat et al., 2003).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Dogme Language Teaching**

Dogme is a teaching philosophy which has been put forth by Scott Thornbury. It transcends the common pedagogical methodologies that are commonly debated. Dogme is regarded both a methodology and a movement (Thornbury, 2005). Dogme methodology has its roots in both Communicative Language Learning and Task-Based Language Learning (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009).

The underlying premise of Dogme is that pupils learn when they feel involved, interested and immersed in the subject (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009). It is argued that the language learners do not grasp and retain any material unless the material are pertinent and germane to their thinking, learning style, worldview and appeal (Thornbury, 2005). Dogme considers the problem of language learning to be existence of abundant irrelevant materials which are utilized in language teaching (Butzkamm, 2003).

Viewing Dogme from a more radical perspective, it suggests the removal of all the preplanned instructional material (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009). Textbooks have no place in Dogme. Dogme advocates believe that language classes must not be overwhelmed with lesson plans, textbooks, homework, recordings, flashcards, cuisenaire rods, and other such contrivances that jeopardizes the chances for learners to be foci of attention (Thornbury, 2005). The main tenets of Dogme are that (Akca, 2012; Banegas, 2012; Meddings & Thornbury, 2009):

- Resources and content must be decided by the learners. If they prefer to have a textbook, then their desired textbook should be proffered.
- All listening material must be learner-produced.
- The teacher should always accommodate to the level of learners.
- All the content should be authentic language and impart meaningful communicative purpose.
- Grammatical and structural points should emerge naturally and should be taught incidentally.
- Learners should not be placed into different level groups.

Thornbury and Luke Meddings have compiled handbook for Dogme entitled Teaching Unplugged. Teaching Unplugged revolves around the three, so-called, unique underpinnings of the method: Being Communicative-driven, Being Material-light plus building upon emergent language. Their methodology is conversation-driven, where conversation is an 'interactive, dialogic and communicative' process in which language is scaffolded and socialization is induced (Banegas, 2012). Dogme methodology is also 'materials-light' meaning that the content must be subverted, adjusted and remixed to satisfy learners' 'real' needs. Their final argument, which dwells on Second Language Acquisition theory, is that a Dogme approach spotlights emergent language; meaning that language teaching is not a matter of foisting an external language syllabus, but of fostering the learners' inner language learning mechanisms and language acquisition agenda (Akca, 2012). Despite stressing fluency, Dogme does not underplay structural accuracy. Dogmetists hold that, in lieu of being acquired, language will emerge' (Meddings & Thornbury, 2009).

Dogme has been argued to have major pitfalls. First, its perceived decline of textbooks has been regarded to be naïve (Gill, 2000). Moreover, as Maley (2003) argues, Dogme increases the constraints on language educators. Christensen (2005) reminds that implementation of Dogme may pose serious cultural challenges in Non-western countries. Criticisms have also been leveled at the suitability and efficiency of Dogme in low resource contexts or contexts wherein learners are subject to syllabus-based summative assessments (Christensen, 2005; Maley, 2003).

### **Pimsleur language learning system**

The Pimsleur language learning system is an audio-based system that provides phrases in the target language first and subsequently in the mother tongue for translation into that language. The system is based upon four main notions: anticipation, graduated interval recall, core vocabulary, and organic learning (Pimsleur, 2013). It was developed based on research undertaken by the applied linguist Paul Pimsleur. The unique feature of Pimsleur language program is its use of "spaced repetition" (Godwin-Jones, 2010). The spaced repetition agenda is as follows: first learners listen to a foreign-language phrase, and then they are asked to repeat it. Next, they are asked to recall it and repeat the words out loud at time intervals that start out very short and then increase. After repeating several times, the learner is required to repeat a previous phrase, in addition to integrating vocabulary from the new one. More new phrases are presented, while old phrases are prompted at random. The purpose of random recall is to associate words with meaning.

Nation (2006) holds that Pimsleur's memory schedule is a valid argument. Nation (2006) states that "effective retention of vocabulary requires a certain amount of repetition over spaced intervals" (P. 63). The Pimsleur method has been criticized for its over-emphasis on only spoken language skill and vocabulary component plus its restriction on the amount of items it teaches in large amount of time (Rappoport, & Sheinman, 2005).

### **Michel Thomas Method (MTM)**

Michel Thomas was a polyglot linguist who devised a language-teaching system known as the Michel Thomas Method. He claimed his method would allow language learners to become conversationally proficient after only a few days' study, and his clients were mainly diplomats and celebrities (Solity, 2008). Basically, the way the method works is that the language instructor and two students are recorded in a live lesson. Words and sentences are provided with explanations, and within one hour learners are expected to be able to develop simple phrases. It is claimed that because actual students are involved in the recording, the speed of progress is realistic, and they almost feel as if they are in class with language teacher and other learners (Woodsmall & Woodsmall, 2008). Two features have been cited to guarantee the success of MTM: first, it builds upon an inductive manner which makes learners to understand new grammatical concepts through examples, rather than telling them explicitly. Second, it makes high use of so-called mnemonics to help learners acquire and remember effectively newly-introduced vocabulary (Solity, 2008). The MTM has been criticized for its inattention the reading and writing skills. Michel Thomas is an audio-only method, which unlike Pimsleur, does not provide any plan, practice or guideline for the development of writing and reading skills (Campbell, 2005).

### **Mother Tongue Mirroring Technique**

Mother tongue mirroring prescribes word-for word translation in language teaching. The goal is to make foreign structures spotlighted and transparent to learners and, in many cases, spare them the technical jargon of grammatical analysis (Butzkamm, 2011). It is distinctive from literal translation and interlinear text as traditionally used, because it takes the progress learners have made as the major priority and mainly stresses one specific structure at a time (Zhang & Pang, 2014). As a didactic device, it can only be used to the extent that it remains intelligible to the learner, unless it is followed by a normal translation (Butzkamm, 2011). Mirroring is has been extensively used in commercial phrasebooks and computer courses but has been paid little attention in modern course books. According to Butzkamm & Caldwell (2009) mother tongue mirroring should be re-surfaced as a key language teaching technique, especially when learners are not ready for grammatical analysis. It is analysis by analogy; it is foreign grammar in native words (Butzkamm, 2003). The proponents claim that it is needed to recognize the meaning components and where they appear in a foreign language sentence, and mirroring is the most optimal and highly time efficient way of attaining this (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2004). Mirroring can thus make odd constructions legitimate in the eyes of the learner (Chaudhuri, 2009, p.213), and the understanding that ensues can be deeply satisfying (Butzkamm, 2011).

### **The Sandwich Technique**

The Sandwich Technique suggests that when the learner slips in a mother tongue word or asks for a foreign language equivalent, the teacher gives it to him immediately and asks the learner to use it (Dodson, 1972). The mother tongue is a right-away solution, not a last resort. Nevertheless, learners gradually become less dependent on their mother tongue, if the sandwich technique and the give-and-go pass are used in a systematic and purposeful way. While modeling a dialogue sentence for learners to repeat, the teacher not only gives an oral mother tongue equivalent for unknown words or phrases, but repeats the foreign language phrase before students repeat it: L2 => L1 => L2 (Butzkamm, 2003). In other words a teacher can read a story in the foreign language and utilize translations along the way, allowing students to grasp new vocabulary along with the context which helps it be meaningful to the learner, so the unique feature of this method is to wrap the foreign word or phrase around its translation in the working language (Littlewood & Yu, 2011). L1 equivalents are always and immediately given in meaningful contexts, then by using the first language skillfully it is argued, eventually whole lessons in the foreign language only can be given (Butzkamm, 2003; Dodson, 1972).

### **Narrative Format Model**

The Narrative Format is a teaching method of an innovative language learning model for schools and families. Its theory is grounded in the field of developmental psycholinguistics and its practice consists in a series of artistic activities, resulting in activation of language learning processes in humans (Taeschner et al., 2013). It was developed by Taeschner et al. (2013) and its effectiveness and plausibility have not been explored. Nor have the designers provided a detailed plan or blueprint for this method. The designers describe the guidelines as follows:

- Learning a foreign language should follow exactly a similar pattern to acquiring a first language, which is learned by the child while sharing experiences (formats or shared routine experiences) with the adults around them.
- A good affective relationship between child and adult is essential to activate the acquisition of language.
- Gestures are essential in the narrative format and in learning because they are cues that help children work out the meaning of what is being done.

### **CONCLUSION**

As Larsen-Freeman (2012) notes “it is rare now that one of language methods is practiced exclusively since it is common for language teachers today to practice a principled eclecticism, which means combining techniques and principles from various methods in a carefully reasoned manner” (P. 34). It is evident that the aim of many language teachers is to prepare learners to communicate successfully in English (YAN, ZHOU & DAI, 2007). A second goal shared by many teachers is to teach their students how to learn (Larsen-Freeman, 2012). Some teachers have been scaffolding their pupils to develop strategic competence (Canale & Swain 1980), the communication strategies learners use when they are not proficient in English. Other teachers have been providing their students with a comprehensive repertoire of learning strategies that will empower their students to get benefit from instruction and to continue to self-study after the period of formal instruction discontinues (Henderson, 2005). The key practice is now believed to be most successful when students are engaged in the meaningful exchange of information, rather than parroting back a teacher's model. Learners are thus persuaded to be creative and communicative with the language, often doing so in small-group activities in which they can practice communication and learn from their peers (Larsen-Freeman, 2012). Structure is often taught inductively, sometimes without explicit grammar rules ever being introduced. With the exception of those teachers who practice the Comprehension Approach, most teachers today do what they did in the past: integrating the four skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening from the beginning of instruction (Mellow, 2002). What has changed in recently, however, is the understanding of these four skills and therefore how they are taught (Larsen-Freeman, 2012). Listening and reading are no longer deemed as passive skills and are believed to require listeners and readers to actively construct meaning from oral or written input (Celce-Murcia, 2007). It is now believed that readers/listeners selectively attend to the input and they do not see or hear every word; instead they build on inferences from what they do see or hear (Nunan, 2006).

I believe it is highly pertinent to conclude this paper by a decent quote from Kumaradivelu (2006) which maintains that “we have been awakened to the necessity of making methods-based pedagogies more sensitive to local exigencies, awakened to the opportunity afforded by post-method pedagogies to help practicing teachers develop their own theory of practice, awakened to the multiplicity of learner identities, awakened to the complexity of teacher beliefs, and awakened to the vitality of macrostructures - social, cultural, political, and historical that shape and reshape the micro- structures of our pedagogic enterprise” (p.75).

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