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ESL 5313

November 1, 2010

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Richards, J. C. & Rodgers, R. (2010). *Approaches and methods in language teaching.*
     Cambridge: CUP

Ch. 3: Oral Approach and Situational Language Learning

Key Words

1. <u>selection</u> – systematic procedures for choosing lexical and grammatical context; part of the Oral Approach's methodology

2. <u>gradation</u> – systematic principles for determining the organization and sequencing of content; part of the Oral Approach's methodology

3. <u>presentation</u> – systematic techniques used for presenting and practicing items in a course; part of the Oral Approach's methodology

4. <u>behaviorism</u> – belief that humans respond to stimuli and that altering the stimuli and response behavior can create learning habits

5. <u>situation</u> – in this context, the manner of presenting and practicing sentence patterns

Questions

1. Does teaching language using a behaviorist approach really work? What makes this approach different than forcing students to do rote memorization of words and phrases?

2. How can the teacher monitor each student's progress and give helpful feedback if most of the classroom practice is oral?

3. Does "situational" in this context mean something different than the way it's normally used, which means "scenario"?

4. What exactly distinguishes the Oral Approach from Situational Language Teaching? What makes one stand out from the other?

5. Have there been studies showing success with either approach in a secondary school?

6. If so many teachers in language and other classes use the "P-P-P" lesson model, why isn't the influence of SLT "not necessarily widely acknowledged" like the authors claim?

Observations

The Situational Approach has several key points that I agree with, but I have some reservations as to how effective it is in a contemporary classroom. I believe that the target language should be used as much as possible, but how can that approach be successful with beginning language students? Likewise, I agree that starting with oral language is probably better than focusing on spelling and written language, but some people (like myself) are visual learners and need to see what they're learning in addition to just hearing it. I'm not convinced that using the Situational Approach is the best way to help students learn English.

I agree with the approach's basic theory of language: Speech is the basis of language, and structure is the basis of speaking ability. But I'm not sure an inductive approach is the best way to teach all students. I believe in differentiation of instruction, and I know from personal teaching experience that not all students are able to learn inductively, which this approach believes is the best way for students to learn. I also have doubts about using behaviorist methods in the classroom. Sometimes students need to know why they are learning something rather than just learning it by repetition in an attempt for form a linguistic habit.

Finally, I agree with the Situational Approach's use of concrete objects and realia in teaching a foreign language. These objects can help visual and tactile learners connect with the language they are trying to learn. However, relying on mostly oral practice is not an effective way of monitoring student progress. They need practice writing and using the language in a written format in order to build literacy in the new language.

Evaluation

The authors explain that the Oral Approach developed from a desire to apply a systematic methodology to the earlier Direct Method (39), but they do not clearly explain how the Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching are different. Is SLT simply what the Oral Approach is referred to today, or is it a distinct way of teaching? The authors offer a sample procedure used in a Situational Language Teaching classroom on pages 44-46. This made it easier to understand how this approach works. However, the use of "situation" to describe this

methodology is misleading because the students are not placed in situations (scenarios) where they have to use certain words and phrases. I know this use of the word is not the authors' fault. The procedure described was more like a show-and-tell lesson where the teacher had students identify objects. In my mind, that's not what a "situation" is.

The authors mention that these are behaviorist methods of teaching (40-41), but they don't explain what "behaviorist" means until the next chapter. Since this is the first time they describe a method as behaviorist, this is where they should have given their explanation. Also on page 41, they briefly say that these theories try to help students with the "four basic skills of language," but they do not elaborate on what those skills are. They probably assumed that all their readers are familiar with linguistics, but many of us are still novices. Overall, this chapter was not as clear at describing theories as later chapters. They did not make an obvious distinction between the Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching.

Ch. 4: Audiolingual Method

Key Words

1. <u>audiolingualism</u> – term coined by Nelson Brooks in 1964 to describe the Audiolingual Method's marriage of aural-oral procedures and structural linguistics.
2. <u>phonemic</u> – refers to the sounds of a language
3. <u>morphological</u> – refers to the way words are formed in a language (stems, affixes, etc.)
4. <u>syntactic</u> – refers to the phrases, clauses, sentence types, etc., of a language
5. <u>induction</u> – using what you know about a part of something to define the whole thing
6. <u>deduction</u> – forming a conclusion based on the premises presented so the conclusion cannot be false if the premises are true
7. <u>aural</u> – relating to listening and hearing
8. <u>oral</u> – relating to speech and spoken words

Questions

1. How is the Audiolingual Method different than old-fashioned rote memorization?
2. What made the army's method work but the Audiolingual Method fail? Is this because of student motivation or changes in methodology?
3. As a linguistic method, how does the Audiolingual Method present grammar since the goal is for students to become speakers first and readers/writers later?
4. How do teachers keep students in an ALM classroom motivated? What keeps students from becoming frustrated early on while repeating things they do not understand?

Observations

Audiolingualism should have worked in the classroom. It used aural, oral, and structural approaches to teach language. The method also relied on theories from psychology, trying to teach language as a type of verbal behavior. Unfortunately, treating students like organisms that can simply be trained was probably the worst way to excite students about learning. No one wants to be told what to do, so the heavy reliance on behaviorist techniques probably turned many students against the method. Students learn best when they are interested and when they can actually do something to affect their learning. Audiolingualism failed to provide students with what they needed as learners.

I would like more information about this theory, especially to see a comparison between what the army did during World War II with the way the Audiolingual Method was being taught by the 1960s. The army's method must have worked, since it trained speakers of foreign languages during wartime and influenced the development of the Audiolingual Method. Perhaps soldiers' motivation was much higher than that of students during the postwar period.

Evaluation

The authors provided a very thorough background to the development of the Audiolingual Method. I enjoyed reading how this method developed from the practical needs of the U.S. Army during World War II (50-54). As a former history teacher, this connection of linguistics and history was very interesting to me.   I also enjoyed the authors' explanations of how the study of grammar became more developed during the 1930s to 1950s as the field of structural linguistics evolved. A third strength of this chapter was the explanation of behaviorism in relation to language-learning, even though this should have been done in the previous chapter. Although I disagree with the claim that learning a language is like learning a new habit, it was helpful to finally read how many L2 teachers believe language could be taught.

Even though the authors' description of how some methods focus on grammar was interesting to read, I'm not sure it was appropriate since the Audiolingual Method's primary goal is oral proficiency with little emphasis on the study of grammar or literature (58). It's also not clearly explained why "linguistic" is the same as "structure-based" (59), especially given the oral nature of this method. The book says the ALM focuses on listening, speaking, reading and writing and practically ignores grammar and literature study. How does this make it "linguistic"? Next, the authors again assume that their readers are more experienced in the field of TESOL than many of us really are. They mention Noam Chomsky again and state his work brought about a paradigm shift regarding the ALM. The do not elaborate on this claim, expecting us to already know about Chomsky's influence. As a beginning TESOL student, however, I am not aware of any of the contributions of the field's "founding fathers." I expect books like this one to tell me things like that. Finally, the authors' conclusion (67) is too brief. They do not fully explain how the Audiolingual Method and Situational Language Teaching are different.

Ch. 7: Community Language Learning

Key Words

1. <u>counseling</u> (in this context) – one person giving advice, assistance, and support to another who has a problem or is in some way in need

2. <u>humanistic technique</u> – techniques that rely on relationships between teachers and students; they treat the student as a whole person, including emotions; holistic approach to education

3. <u>language alternation</u> – a teaching method that first gives a lesson in the native language then alternates to the use of the target language; learners gain L2 information from their knowledge of the same information in L1

4. <u>consensual validation (convalidation)</u> – mutual understanding and a positive evaluation of the other person's worth; expected relationship between teacher and student in CLL classrooms

Questions

1. How much control over lessons does the teacher really have if topics are chosen by the classroom community?

2. How does the teacher follow a standard course of study using CLL?

3. If the teacher is not fluent in both the L1 and target language, how can a teacher use CLL in the classroom?

4. What does the teacher do if some students refuse to participate or if others dominate?

5. How can the teacher maintain a proper student-teacher relationship if he/she is expected to become the students' counselor?

Observations

Teachers in a CLL classroom are put under a lot of stress. They are often not qualified to be counselors, so there is an inherent risk in taking on that role. Most schools have clearly defined policies for dealing with student issues, so a CLL teacher must be careful to follow his or her school system's procedures and to avoid blurring the lines between being the students' friend and being their teacher.

As a linguistic technique, becoming a counselor to students doesn't really explain how to teach the students a new language. What are the best practices for language instruction? How does a CLL classroom deal with a state's standard course of study? I doubt CLL is a widely used method in public schools in the United States. There is no proof that students are learning the language skills that will help them in their other courses and on state standardized tests. In addition, the role of teacher as counselor in the ESL class would likely come in conflict with the traditional teacher-student role that is expected in the students' other courses.

Another weakness is the lack of a conventional language syllabus. Since course progression is topic-based, how can a teacher plan in advance what the course will cover? I understand that it would be beneficial to students to form the class around their needs, but most students expect a class to have a clearly defined syllabus. Like many of the other teaching methods, CLL does not seem well suited to a traditional high school classroom. The role of teacher as counselor and the lack of a syllabus would make using CLL in a public school classroom very difficult.

Evaluation

This chapter made Community Language Learning very easy to understand. The authors provided clear definitions and explanations of humanistic techniques and of language alternation (90, 91). It was easy to understand why CLL is used by teachers who believe in holistic teaching methods. The authors also explained how the Community Language Learning approach states that learners go through five stages of development that mirror childhood development (92). Finally, they provide a sample lesson on page 97 to illustrate how CLL is used in the classroom which helped me understand the practical application of this teaching method.

The chapter does have three weaknesses, however. First, the authors mention that language is a social process that P.G. La Forge describes in terms of six qualities or subprocesses, but these are not clearly listed or labeled in the text. I'm not sure these six things are completely relevant to CLL, but I would have preferred the authors give me an obvious list of what these six qualities are. The authors sometimes provide bulleted or numbered lists, which is helpful, but other times, like this one, they assume the reader will be able to figure out a list's items. The authors also state that teachers using CLL are encouraged to be "real" counselors but without much information about how TESOL training programs are expected to teach future

teachers how to incorporate counseling into their L2 classrooms. The authors devote a single sentence to this in the chapter's conclusion. Finally, the authors describe a CLL classroom as remaining in complete silence for minutes at a time while waiting for someone to begin conversation. Is that normal procedure for a CLL classroom? The authors do not describe how the teacher should react to this behavior or if the teacher should provide prompts to help the students begin speaking. It's unclear if this extended silence is how the originators of CLL anticipated their methods to be used.

Ch. 9: Whole Language

Key Words

1. <u>whole language</u> – a theory of language instruction that was developed to help young children learn to read that has also been extended to middle and secondary levels and to the teaching of ESL; the emphasis is on learning to read and write naturally with a focus on real communication and reading and writing for pleasure

2. <u>constructivist learning theory</u> – a theory of learning that states knowledge is socially constructed rather than received from a teacher or discovered individually; students create meaning and learn by doing by working collaboratively with other students

3. <u>authentic literature</u> – literature not written as a classroom textbook, e.g., newspapers, novels, magazine articles, etc.

4. <u>process writing</u> – writing as a process involving steps such as brainstorming, prewriting, and editing

Questions

1. Why is there so much discussion as to whether Whole Language is an approach, a method, a philosophy, or a belief? Does it really matter to teachers in "real" classrooms?

2. Does WL encourage "creative spelling"? How does WL deal with teaching spelling in ESL classes?

3. Wouldn't WL be improved if it added a more structured way of teaching grammar? Is there data showing how successful WL students are on grammar tests in comparison to students taught grammar in a more formal method?

4. How can a teacher using WL successfully use student-generated texts if the students don't know the target language?

5. Does using a WL approach in an ESL class work better if the class is paired with another class using WL to learn English?

Observations

Whole Language seems like a reasonable way to teach someone their native language. I like the use of authentic texts and literature, as well as teaching writing as a process. Using real

world materials would make it easy for students to understand the importance of language competency. How can you order at a restaurant, for example, if you don't understand the language? Unfortunately, WL doesn't specify techniques to help ESL students. WL makes sense to use in native language classes, and I've personally used some of the techniques when I was teaching English. I don't think those same techniques would translate well to use in an ESL class, though, because the students are not strong enough linguistically to "create their own meaning." That's the reason they're in the ESL class in the first place. They need more guidance in understanding English. Relying on other non-native speakers to create a socially acceptable meaning for the class will not help them improve their English language skills.

Evaluation

There were few strengths to this chapter. The authors made good use of bulleted and numbered lists (110, 111, 112), which made it easy to read about the approach's design and procedure. They also offered concise explanations of the roles of students, who are expected to be collaborators, and teachers, who are expected to be facilitators (110-111). However, the shortness of the chapter left me with many questions, which is why this article has more weaknesses than strengths. First, who cares if WL is an approach, method, philosophy, or belief (109)? The authors themselves don't differentiate between their definitions of approach and method until the final chapter of the book. They also don't elaborate on how WL as described relates to the "creative spelling" movement used in many American elementary classrooms during the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. Those classes claimed to be WL in nature, but in reality, the teachers tended to encourage to spell words any way they wanted.

Another problem of the chapter has to do with terminology. When introducing the term "authentic" in the context of WL, the authors should have initially said "non-textbook materials." They first use "authentic" on page 109 but don't fully explain what they mean until the Design section on page 110. They also could have related WL to the current educational trend of differentiation of instruction, since WL as they describe it focuses on giving students plenty of choices (110).