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LANGUAGE LEARNING METHODS AND APPROACHES

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ABSTRACT:
Research in the last three decades on second and foreign language learning strategies has witnessed prolific and vigorous growth. Numerous studies around the world have contributed to both theory and teaching by showing fruitful results supporting the significant role of language learning strategies for effective and successful language learning. Factors related to language learning strategy use range from cultures and educational contexts to individual learner variables, such as gender, motivation, learning styles, years of learning, proficiency, and achievement. The majority of investigations have focused on young adult and adult learners, with fewer studies exploring learning strategy use by children at the elementary school level.
This study aimed to investigate the point of intersection of teachers' and learners' perceptions regarding language learning strategies. Using an original questionnaire developed in a classroom situation and based on student input, this study examined reported frequency of strategy use by international students and teacher perceptions regarding the importance of strategy use.

KEY WORDS: *Learning Methods, Language Learning Methods, Understanding of Language Learning Methods, learning autonomy, language learning cultural background, Learning Language Concepts,*

Language Learning Methods and Approaches:
There are a number of language learning methods one can employ to speed up the process of learning a new language. The success of a particular method is based on a number of factors, including age, personality, budget, and the amount of time one has to spare. What works for one person might not work for another, and therefore it is worth considering each of the three methods set out below to determine the method best suited to your circumstances.

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The Direct Method

The Direct Method allows students to perceive meaning directly through the language because no translation is allowed. Visual aids and pantomime are used to clarify the meaning of vocabulary items and concepts. Students speak a great deal in the target language and communicate as if in real situations. Reading and writing are taught from the beginning, though speaking and listening skills are emphasized. Grammar is learned inductively.

In this method the teaching is done entirely in the target language. The learner is not allowed to use his or her mother tongue. Grammar rules are avoided and there is emphasis on good pronunciation.

Questions are answered in the target language. Grammar is taught inductively--rules are generalized from the practice and experience with the target language. Verbs are used first and systematically conjugated only much later after some oral mastery of the target language. Advanced students read literature for comprehension and pleasure.

Grammar-translation Method

Learning is largely by translation to and from the target language. Grammar rules are to be memorized and long lists of vocabulary learned by heart. There is little or no emphasis placed on developing oral ability.

The Grammar-Translation Method focuses on developing students' appreciation of the target language's literature as well a teaching the language. Students are presented with target-language reading passages and answer questions that follow. Other activities include translating literary passages from one language into the other, memorizing grammar rules, and memorizing native-language equivalents of target language vocabulary. Class work is highly structured, with the teacher controlling all activities.

Classes are taught in the students' mother tongue, with little active use of the target language. Vocabulary is taught in the form of isolated word lists. Elaborate explanations of grammar are always provided. Grammar instruction provides the rules for putting words together; instruction often focuses on the form and inflection of words. Reading of difficult texts is begun early in the course of study. Little attention is paid to the content of texts, which are treated as exercises in grammatical analysis. Often the only drills are exercises in translating disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue, and vice versa. Little or no attention is given to pronunciation.

The Reading Approach

The priority in studying the target language is first, reading ability and second, current and/or historical knowledge of the country where the target language is spoken.Only the grammar necessary for reading comprehension and fluency is taught. Minimal attention is paid to pronunciation or gaining conversational skills in the target language.The approach is for people who do not travel abroad for whom reading is the one usable skill in a foreign language.

Audio-lingual

The theory behind this method is that learning a language means acquiring habits. There is much practice of dialogues of every situation. New language is first heard and extensively drilled before being seen in its written form.

The Audio-Lingual Method is based on the behaviorist belief that language learning is the acquisition of a set of correct language habits. The learner repeats patterns until able to produce them spontaneously. Once a given pattern – for example, subject-verb-prepositional phrase – is learned, the speaker can substitute words to make novel sentences. The teacher directs and controls students' behavior, provides a model, and reinforces correct responses.

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Skills are sequenced: Listening, speaking, reading and writing are developed in order.Vocabulary is strictly limited and learned in context. Teaching points are determined by contrastive analysis between L1 and L2. There is abundant use of language laboratories, tapes and visual aids. There is an extended pre-reading period at the beginning of the course.

The structural approach

Based on beliefs about the structure of language and descriptive or contrastive linguistics. Involves isolation of grammatical and syntactic elements of L2 taught either deductively or inductively in a predetermined sequence. Often involves much meta-linguistic content or "learning about the language" in order to learn the language.

This method sees language as a complex of grammatical rules which are to be learned one at a time in a set order. So for example the verb "to be" is introduced and practised before the present continuous tense which uses "to be" as an auxiliary.

Suggestopedia

The theory underlying this method is that a language can be acquired only when the learner is receptive and has no mental blocks. By various methods it is suggested to the student that the language is easy - and in this way the mental blocks to learning are removed. Lozanov's method seeks to help learners eliminate psychological barriers to learning. The learning environment is relaxed and subdued, with low lighting and soft music in the background. Students choose a name and character in the target language and culture, and imagine that person. Dialogs are presented to the accompaniment of music. Students just relax and listen to them being read and later playfully practice the language during an "activation" phase.

Total Physical Response (TPR)

TPR works by having the learner respond to simple commands such as "Stand up", "Close your book", "Go to the window and open it." The method stresses the importance of aural comprehension.

Asher's approach begins by placing primary importance on listening comprehension, emulating the early stages of mother tongue acquisition, and then moving to speaking, reading, and writing. Students demonstrate their comprehension by acting out commands issued by the teacher; teachers provide novel and often humorous variations of the commands. Activities are designed to be fun and to allow students to assume active learning roles. Activities eventually include games and skits.

Understanding the spoken language before developing the skills of speaking. Imperatives are the main structures to transfer or communicate information. The student is not forced to speak, but is allowed an individual readiness period and allowed to spontaneously begin to speak when the student feels comfortable and confident in understanding and producing the utterances.

TECHNIQUES

Step I The teacher says the commands as he himself performs the action.
Step 2 The teacher says the command as both the teacher and the students then perform the action.
Step 3 The teacher says the command but only students perform the action
Step 4 The teacher tells one student at a time to do commands
Step 5 The roles of teacher and student are reversed. Students give commands to teacher and to other students.
Step 6 The teacher and student allow for command expansion or produces new sentences.

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Communicative language teaching (CLT)

The focus of this method is to enable the learner to communicate effectively and appropriately in the various situations she would be likely to find herself in. The content of CLT courses are functions such as inviting, suggesting, complaining or notions such as the expression of time, quantity, location.

The Communicative Approach stresses the need to teach communicative competence as opposed to linguistic competence; thus, functions are emphasized over forms. Students usually work with authentic materials in small groups on communicative activities, during which they receive practice in negotiating meaning.

Stages of language acquisition in the communicative approach

1. Comprehension or pre-production
2. Early speech production
3. Speech emerges

The Silent Way

This is so called because the aim of the teacher is to say as little as possible in order that the learner can be in control of what he wants to say. No use is made of the mother tongue.

The theoretical basis of Gattegno's Silent Way is the idea that teaching must be subordinated to learning and thus students must develop their own inner criteria for correctness. All four skills – reading, writing, speaking, and listening – are taught from the beginning. Students' errors are expected as a normal part of learning: the teacher's silence helps foster self-reliance and student initiative. The teacher is active in setting up situations, while the students do most of the talking and interacting.

To provide the support of perception and action to the intellectual guess of what the noises mean, thus bring in the arsenal of the usual criteria of experience already developed and automatic in one's use of the mother tongue. To provide a duration of spontaneous speech upon which the teacher and the students can work to obtain a similarity of melody to the one heard, thus providing melodic integrative schemata from the start.

Community Language Learning

In Curren's method, teachers consider students as "whole persons," with intellect, feelings, instincts, physical responses, and desire to learn. Teachers also recognize that learning can be threatening. By understanding and accepting students' fears, teachers help students feel secure and overcome their fears, and thus help them harness positive energy for learning. The syllabus used is learner-generated, in that students choose what they want to learn in the target language.

Based on theories of language acquisition, often referred to as the "natural" approach, and on the use of language for communication. Encompasses multiple aspects of the communicative act, with language structures selected according to their utility in achieving a communicative purpose. Instruction is concerned with the input students receive, comprehension of the "message" of language and student involvement at the students' level of competence.

In this method attempts are made to build strong personal links between the teacher and student so that there are no blocks to learning. There is much talk in the mother tongue which is translated by the teacher for repetition by the student.

This methodology created by Charles Curran is not based on the usual methods by which languages are taught. Rather the approach is patterned upon counseling techniques and adapted to the peculiar anxiety and threat as well as the personal and language problems a person encounters in the learning of foreign languages.

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Cognitive:

Based on theories of learning applied specifically to second language learning. Focus is on the learning strategies that are compatible with the learners own style. L2 content is selected according to concepts and techniques that facilitate generalizations about the language, memorization and "competence" leading to "performance".

Affective/Interpersonal:

Focuses on the psychological and affective pre-dispositions of the learner that enhance or inhibit learning. Emphasizes interaction among and between teacher and students and the atmosphere of the learning situation as well as students' motivation for learning. Based on concepts adapted from counseling and social psychology.

Total Immersion Technique:

This generalized technique in foreign language pedagogy "immerses" or "submerges" the student directly and immediately into the target language from the first opening day or hour of class. There are basically two (2) types of total immersion approaches: (a) *effective* and (b) *ineffective*. An *effective total immersion* environment begins in hour one wherein the teacher speaks the foreign language slowly, clearly, and uses easily understandable and comprehensible cognates, at least to the best of his or her ability as a foreign language professional educator. These closely and oftentimes immediately recognizable related words may differ only slightly in pronunciation or spelling from the student's native language. Hand gesticulation, appropriate modeling, various *realia* (such as picture files or photos), and sometimes TPR can facilitate such effectiveness. An *ineffective total immersion* approach occurs when the teacher opens class by speaking rapidly at native speed as if the students were residing within the target culture, as if they were inputting the attempted language on an hourly, daily basis. In essence, the student is being treated as if they were living in the country where the foreign language is predominant. Thus, the intended language "goes over the heads" of the students from the very first day of class, thus creating a distancing and ultimate loss of the student's attention and cognitive awareness of just what is being communicated in class. Either type of immersion oftentimes overlaps any or all of the above-mentioned methods in second-language (L2) acquisition.

Task-based language learning

The focus of the teaching is on the completion of a task which in itself is interesting to the learners. Learners use the language they already have to complete the task and there is little correction of errors.

(This is the predominant method in middle school ESL teaching at Frankfurt International School. The tasks are subsumed in a major topic that is studied for a number of weeks. In the topic of ecology, for example, students are engaged in a number of tasks culminating in a poster presentation to the rest of the class. The tasks include reading, searching the internet, listening to taped material, selecting important vocabulary to teach other students etc.)

The Natural Approach

This approach, propounded by Professor S. Krashen, stresses the similarities between learning the first and second languages. There is no correction of mistakes. Learning takes place by the students being exposed to language that is comprehensible or made comprehensible to them.

The Natural Approach and the Communicative Approach share a common theoretical and philosophical base.The Natural Approach to L2 teaching is based on the following hypotheses:
1. The acquisition-learning distinction hypothesis

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2. The natural order of acquisition hypothesis
3. The monitor hypothesis
4. The input hypothesis
5. The affective hypothesis
6. The filter hypothesis
7. The aptitude hypothesis
8. The first language hypothesis
9. The textuality hypothesis
10. The expectancy hypothesis

The Lexical Syllabus

This approach is based on a computer analysis of language which identifies the most common (and hence most useful) words in the language and their various uses. The syllabus teaches these words in broadly the order of their frequency, and great emphasis is placed on the use of authentic materials.

CONCLUSION:

Even if the theory presented here is totally correct, and my suggestions for application are in fact the appropriate ones, there are some serious problems that need to be mentioned before concluding. These have to do with the acceptance, by teachers and students, of language acquisition as primary, and comprehensible input as the means of encouraging language acquisition. These problems are caused by the fact that acquisition differs from learning in two major ways: acquisition is slow and subtle, while learning is fast and, for some people, obvious.... I think that I have presented a conservative view of language acquisition theory and its applications, conservative in the sense that it attempts to be consistent with all empirical data that are known to me. It is consistent with the way thousands of people have acquired second languages throughout history, and in many cases acquired them very well. They acquired second languages while they were focused on something else, while they were gaining interesting or needed information, or interacting with people they liked to be with."

This paper has talked about general concepts of language learning methods. In order to better define the nature of the relationship between learning methods, the factors that affect their usage, and their possible benefits for language learning, further research is needed. One of the issues is that the variables affecting the strategy choices of groups from different cultural backgrounds were discussed in the last section.

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