ESP Classroom Interaction and the Language Teaching Approaches

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ABSTRACT:

Teaching methods or approaches refer generally to the general theories and principles, pedagogy and management strategies used for classroom instruction. Teachers often resort to use different teaching philosophy and approaches that would determine the type of classroom interaction they tend to employ. Some teachers encourage the students' native language in order to teach English through what is known the grammar translation method. Though most teachers do not strictly follow one method or strategy to create one effective classroom interaction, it is commonly believed that students will not learn to produce a language without being exposed to both grammar and vocabulary of the target language. A number of studies have dealt with the issue of interaction in EFL classroom, yet few authors have devoted time to tackle the aspect of interaction in the ESP classroom. Various facts may intervene in boosting ESP class interaction .Some of these facts are related to the teacher and learner as well and some are relevant to the contextual learning as whole. The current paper sheds light on how the different language teaching approaches and methods overlap and can be integrated in the ESP classroom.

Keywords : Approaches   ESP classroom Interaction   Language Methods

1- INTRODUCTION

The Grammar Translation Method, the   Audio-Lingual Method , the Communicative Approach , the Silent Method and the Interactionists' Theory and their relation to language classroom interaction   are major teaching methods that are to be reviewed in the forthcoming sections .By all means these are some methods among other universal aspects teaching theories and methods that deserve to be investigated as well , yet more emphasis was on the theories and approaches that have already dealt with in the EFL Algerian teaching context and that have close relationship with language classroom interaction. Being a branch of the tree of English Language Teaching (ELT), few studies

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have been devoted to uncover the issue on interaction in ESP classroom .In ESP classroom, more care is given to the learners' needs.Howver , along with the study of such learners' needs , more focus should be on the approach the would develop the ESP learner's language skills. In this regard , it would be beneficial to examine the role of most language teaching approaches and how the overlap to develop the ESP learner interactive skills.

2-Definition of Major Language Teaching Approaches and Methods

As it is believed to happen in classroom learning context, language learning is systematic and its mastery by the learners should follow well-determined methods and approaches . As a human attribute, learners having different learning styles are likely to learn a language through different ways and under different theories. However, language learning theories need to be put into practice through explicit methods and strategies that would help learners to learn the target language following clear applicable procedures .

Before shedding light on the main language teaching approaches and methods, these three concepts, approach, method and technique need to be reviewed and clarified. Edward Anthony (1965 as quoted in Miliani 2003 , p.20-24) defined these terms as follows:

> "**Approach** is a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language teaching and learning. An approach is axiomatic. It describes the nature of the subject matter to be taught ....

> "**Method** is an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material, no part of which contradicts, and all of which is based upon, the selected approach. An approach is axiomatic, a method is procedural. Within one approach, there can be many methods.... ".

> "**Technique** is implementational - that which actually takes place in a classroom.... ".

3-The Grammar Translation Method

Also called alternatively the Classical Method to language teaching, the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) advocates more the knowledge of grammatical rules, the memorisation of vocabulary and the translation of texts. Being adopted as the chief method for teaching foreign languages in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the GTM gave little emphasis to the oral side of learning and gave more importance to the practice of written exercises and to the development of the students' reading proficiency in the target language. The GTM was founded on major characteristics that Richards and Rodgers (1986) summarised as follows :

1) - More focus should be on reading and writing; little or no attention should be given to speaking and listening.

2) - Little or no attention is paid to pronunciation.

3)-The target language should be actively used in the language class.

4)-The vocabularies are learnt in the form of isolated lists via the reading texts.

5)-Little importance is given to the content of texts: more focus should be on the understanding of the grammar of the language. Celce Murcia (1979 :3)

According to Richards and Rodgers (1986), this method does not allow for a real enhancement of the students communicative skills' development. The teachers who use the Grammar Translation Method seem to perform the traditional authoritative role who know everything. The students are exposed to grammar rules and examples deductively , memorise them and use them eventually in examples of their own. The GTM seems to be a teacher-centered method where little importance is given to classroom interaction .In fact, most of the classroom interaction in the GTM approach is from the teacher to the students with little student initiation and student-student interaction. The students are also tolerated to use their mother tongue as a means to translate the grammatical rules and the vocabulary of the target language.

With regard to the target study ESP teaching and learning situation(Class of political

Sciences students), teacher of English of both undergraduate and postgraduate students' level seem to apply much of the GTM characteristics in their language classroom teaching process. The teachers tend to devote time to the grammar and political vocabulary with the use of the students' mother tongue sometimes (Arabic). Teachers ~~also~~ often set out reading comprehension questions to political texts where students are asked to find either antonyms or synonyms to a set of words. Moreover, Students are exposed to grammar lessons where rules are presented with examples then they are asked to apply the assimilated rules to some other different examples. Eventually, along with reading comprehension texts, the students are given short passages with missing words and asked to fill in the blanks with new vocabulary or grammar items. Such selected tasks are all teaching activities that are closely related to GTM method.

THE AUDIO-LINGUAL METHOD

Based on Skinner's behaviourist theory, the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) came as an aftermath of the success of what is known as 'the Army Metho''; as set of intensive language courses which were provided to the US army after World War Two. The ALM which was adopted as a new methodology in the 1950's is an oral based approach the enhancement of the students' speaking and listening skills using dialogues and oral drills. (your source)

According to Miliani (ibid , p.13) , this approach attempted to answer two questions:

"What is language?" And, how do people learn languages?" Richards and Rodgers (ibid.) summed the characteristics of the Audio-Lingual approach by saying first that grammar rules which are often taught in inductive method have little amount of explanation .However, mimicry and memorisation of phrases is favoured and more importance is given to pronunciation.With regard to the communication enhancement , this can be achieved by small classes of usually 10 persons with much use of tapes, language laboratories, and visual aids.Most importantly , dialogue form is the basis of new material presentation and little attention to vocabulary which is learnt in context. Finally, speaking the target language goes first and students are encouraged to produce error-free sentences;

The Audi-Lingual approach is considered to be ultimately teacher –centered when the teacher assumes the role of the teaching process director and the first model of language instruction. Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 62-3) sums up some of the main roles to be performed by the teacher in the Audio-Lingual approach in the following:

1)- He manages (introduces and directs) the four skills : listening, speaking, reading and writing;

2)-corrects his students' mistakes and elicit correct responses; 3)-uses a variety of drills and exercises to keep the flow of learning.

On the other hand, seen as *"organisms that can be directed by skilled training techniques to produce correct responses"* (Richards and Rodgers , 2001, p.62), the students are drilled to repeat what the teacher says to learn the accurate structure (most often without understanding its meaning) and not allowed to initiate interaction; a fact that hinders learning. (is this a paragraph? Too short!!)

Although grammar received little effort and time and speaking gained more areas of practice and importance in the Audio-Lingual approach; classroom interaction was hindered by the automised drills and memorised sentences that students were ultimately drilled on in the Audio-Lingual method. (this is not a paragraph!!)

5- COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING METHOD

Compared to the previously mentioned methods and approaches, the communicative method seems to have more "fans" among nowadays language teachers. According to Richards (2006)*, "...the majority of language teachers today, when asked to identify the methodology they employ in their classrooms,*

mention "communicative" as the methodology of choice». However, the word "communicative" would have different meanings in the teacher's actual classroom language teaching practice . Hence, Richards (Ibid.) wonders about the varied explanations to the word "communicative" given by those teachers , *"Does communicative language teaching, or CLT, mean teaching conversation, an absence of grammar in a course, or an emphasis on open-ended discussion activities as the main features of a course? What do you understand by communicative language teaching?"*

The approach came as a result of the criticism made to the Structuralists whose views left the learner unable to communicate adequately. Hence, the approach advocators are more concerned with the learner's linguistic development. Indeed , the learners under this approach are asked to communicate effectively through language and go beyond the language grammar and vocabulary learning. According to Wilkins (1976, p.19) ,

> *"The advantage of the notional syllabus is that it takes the communicative facts of language into account from the beginning without losing sight of grammatical and situational factors. It is potentially superior to the grammatical syllabus because it will produce a communicative competence and because its evident concern with the use of the language will sustain the motivation of the learner".*

Communicative Language Teaching was coined around the term *communicative approach* as opposed to the concept of *grammatical competence* .Richards (ibid.) defines the grammatical competence as the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences in a language .This includes the knowledge of building *block of sentences* (parts of speech, tenses, phrases, clauses, sentence patterns).According to Richards (ibid.) , Although the grammatical competence is an important requirement for language learning , it does not allow the learners a successful and meaningful language communication ; a language dimension that was understood by the communicative competence that entails a range of language knowledge purposes and functions.This involves first the ability to use the language according to the setting and the participants (e.g., knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication).Being able to produce and understand different types of texts such as narratives , reports , interviews and conversations is another language purpose that learners need to achieve under communicative approach.Finally, the learner need to know how to overcome the limitations of the language knowledge using different communication. (Richard , ibid)

With regard to classroom interaction, the CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) viewed learning ultimately as the result of interaction between learner and the users of language who collaborate through purposeful interaction and create meaning through appropriate language use (Richards, ibid.).The CLT advocates believe that language learning is best facilitated through classroom activities such as role plays, pair and group work activities and project work. Nevertheless, after attending some of the English lessons with the political class students, I have noticed that they still stick to traditional formats that focus more on the mastery of different grammar items through controlled activities and practice.

6-THE SILENT METHOD

Originated by Dr.Caleb Gategno, the silent method originally viewed as a flexible way of teaching based on the belief that all human beings have cognitive capabilities for selflearning. According to Richards and Rodgers (1986), the method is summed up in the following principles:

> *"I. Learning is facilitated if the learner discovers or creates rather than remembers and repeats what is to be learned;*
>
> *2. Learning is facilitated by accompanying (mediating) physical objects;*
>
> *3. Learning is facilitated by problem solving involving the material to be learned."*

As the term can plainly refer to, the teacher should remain silent as much as possible in the Silent Method to encourage the learner to produce as much language as possible. The Silent Way adopts a teaching method based on a 'building blocks' approach where the teacher undertakes introducing the new idea then the class use of the structure until it is clearly assimilated. Yet, the teacher can intervene to add new sparingly to keep the students' communication going on in way that can enable them incorporate the added items in the existing stock of language.

Under the Silent Way, the learners' responsibility and autonomy are developed through discovery-learning procedures. The method is close to the learner-centred approach where the teacher remains silent in most of the lesson phases and assumes the role of the stimulator. Like other approaches, in the Silent Method, learning is facilitated when the learner gets involved in creative tasks rather than just repeating what to be learnt.

With regard to classroom interaction, in the Silent Method the interaction is limited to the interaction between learners themselves rather than the learners and their teacher. They are encouraged to co-operate with each other to solve language problems. One advantage in the Silent Way is that errors are tolerated and learners can experiment each time new possibilities with language.

Though little literature is depicted around Silent Way; a premise that may suggest that the Method is not of much significance in the area of foreign

language learning, the method can lead to useful techniques such as problem solving that help consult the student's understanding and his or her level of intelligence.

7- CLASSROOM INTERACTION FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Many teachers do much to improve their students' language classroom interaction with the belief of its importance in the enhancement of their learning process though some of them still pay little attention to classroom interaction in their education programmes (Walsh, 2006).Walsh (2014) confirms that the classroom interaction will only improve if teachers manage to understand the local context .This comprises the learners' learning environment, the language status , the learning objectives , and the availability of teaching materials.

The second challenge that teachers need to cope with is the one related to Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC , Walsh, 2013).Indeed, interactional competence levels vary from one teacher to teacher and from one context to another .Competent teachers are those who manage interaction in such a way that maximise learning opportunities while others are not very adept at interaction management as they might use strategies that may impede opportunities for learning (Walsh, 2002).

Walsh (2014, 31) defines CIC as "*the teachers and learners' ability to use interaction as a tool for mediating and assisting learning.*" With regard to the teachers, this can be achieved in a number of ways .First, they need to establish that language use and pedagogic goals work together to exhibit an important feature of CIC. Besides, the CIC involves the appropriate management of the extended wait time (allowing the appropriate amount time after asking each question).This needs to be assisted by the teacher's scaffolding such as introducing a new vocabulary or a new phrase when needed.

According to Walsh (ibid.), one important challenge that may face teachers in the future is the need to understand the relationship between classroom interaction and classroom methodologies.To accomplish such a task, teachers provide answers to questions such as "*does the task-type affect* interaction? What is the consequence for learning? How might more effective management of classroom result in a more engaged, more dialogic type of learning? And what do we know of the importance of interaction during feedback following a task?"

With regard to the challenges that learner might face and perhaps the most difficult one as depicted by Walsh (ibid.) is what new possible role learners need to play in the classroom discourse. In this regard, Walsh (ibid.) states that the learner needs to perform an equal role with the teacher instead of just answering questions , responding to cues , following teacher's initiative , and all other common students' interactive tasks in most content-based subjects. Hence , learners in future language classroom *need to both ask and answer questions ,*

to interrupt where appropriate , to take the initiative , seize the floor , hold a turn , and so on" (Walsh, ibid).

8- CONCLUSION

In this paper , more light was shed on important aspects related to classroom interaction for EFL students in general and with ESP learners in particular .This swept over relevant issues such as the major components of the classroom discourse (the teacher , the student , the learning context) and the IRF pattern .The discussion moved on to depict the factors that may affect the classroom interaction which covered the teacher's affective factors , the students' motivation and anxiety and contextual factors .The study ended by shedding light on the relationship between teaching methods and classroom interaction. Eventually, it was interesting to expose some of the possible challenges that both teachers and learners may face and need to cope with in the future classroom interaction context.

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