

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF METHODS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Ismoilov Alisher Po'latjon ugli
Teacher of Kukand University Andijan Branch

Abstract: This article mainly covers detailed overview of language teaching methods

Key words: method, grammar, language, audio – lingual, communication, communication, pronunciation.

Language acquisition is an essential part of education, and throughout history, various teaching methods have evolved to facilitate the process. Foreign language teaching methods have been shaped by changing pedagogical theories, cultural shifts, and advancements in linguistic research. From the traditional Grammar-Translation Method to modern approaches that emphasize communication and technology, the evolution of language teaching has been diverse and dynamic. This article explores the historical development of foreign language teaching methods, outlining key milestones and shifts in approach over time.

1. The Grammar-Translation Method (18th Century - Early 20th Century)

The Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) dominated foreign language education from the 18th century through the early 20th century. Rooted in classical education, this method was primarily used to teach Latin and Greek and later applied to modern foreign languages. GTM emphasized the translation of texts, rote memorization of vocabulary, and the memorization of complex grammatical rules.

Key Features:

- Focus on written language rather than spoken language.
- Translation exercises between the native language and the target language.
- Grammar rules were explicitly taught, often with little to no focus on pronunciation or conversational skills.

While it helped learners build a strong grammatical foundation, the method was criticized for its lack of focus on practical communication and its failure to develop speaking and listening skills.

2. The Direct Method (Late 19th Century - Early 20th Century)

In reaction to the limitations of the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method emerged in the late 19th century. This approach aimed to teach languages in a way that mimicked the natural language acquisition process. The Direct Method was popularized by language educators like Maximilian Berlitz and placed emphasis on speaking and listening.

Key Features:

- Language instruction occurred entirely in the target language (no translation).
- Grammar was learned inductively, meaning that learners inferred rules through exposure to the language in context.
- Oral communication was prioritized over written language, and vocabulary was introduced through real-life contexts and activities.

The Direct Method was successful in improving oral fluency and communication, though it was still criticized for neglecting reading and writing skills, as well as for its heavy reliance on immersion.

3. The Audio-Lingual Method (1940s - 1960s)

The Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) emerged in the United States during the 1940s and was influenced by behaviorist psychology and structuralist linguistics. It was especially popular in military and academic settings. ALM was designed to create fluent speakers through repetitive drills and pattern practice, focusing on oral skills and correct pronunciation.

Key Features:

- Repetitive drills, including substitution and transformation exercises, aimed to build language habits.
- Emphasis on listening and speaking, with little attention paid to reading and writing.
- Grammar was taught implicitly through repetitive practice rather than through explicit rules.

The Audio-Lingual Method was effective for building basic conversational skills and for training learners to use language correctly in controlled situations. However, it was criticized for being overly mechanical and failing to foster creative language use and communicative competence.

4. Communicative Language Teaching (1970s - Present)

The 1970s saw a shift toward a more student-centered, functional approach to language teaching with the development of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). CLT emphasized language as a tool for communication rather than as a system of rules to be learned. Influenced by the work of linguists like Dell Hymes and his concept of communicative competence, CLT sought to make language learning more practical and relevant to real-world communication.

Key Features:

- Focus on communication in real-life contexts, using tasks such as role-playing, group discussions, and problem-solving activities.
- Grammar and vocabulary are taught in context, with an emphasis on fluency rather than perfection.
- Learners are encouraged to use the language creatively and express themselves in meaningful ways.

While CLT helped students develop functional language skills, some critics argued that it neglected grammar instruction and could lead to inaccuracies in language use.

5. Task-Based Language Teaching (1980s - Present)

Building on the principles of CLT, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emerged in the 1980s and focused on learning through completing tasks that require authentic language use. TBLT emphasizes the completion of real-world tasks—such as writing an email, making a phone call, or conducting a survey—in the target language.

Key Features:

- Language is learned through the completion of tasks rather than explicit grammar instruction.
- Tasks are designed to reflect real-world situations and encourage students to use language in a meaningful way.
- Teachers facilitate communication, allowing students to focus on fluency and practical language use.

TBLT has proven effective in promoting communication skills and real-life language use, but its critics contend that it might not provide enough focus on grammar or vocabulary development.

6. Content-Based Instruction (1990s - Present)

Content-Based Instruction (CBI) emerged in the 1990s, blending language learning with the teaching of subject matter content. CBI has been particularly popular in bilingual education and for teaching English as a second language (ESL) in academic contexts. The goal is for students to learn both language and subject matter content simultaneously, such as studying history or science in the target language.

Key Features:

- The curriculum integrates language learning with content from subjects like history, science, and literature.
- Language is learned through engaging with academic material, encouraging students to develop both subject knowledge and language proficiency.
- CBI is typically used in immersion settings or for learners with a certain level of language proficiency.

This method has been praised for its ability to engage students with authentic material and for developing academic language skills. However, it may be challenging for beginners due to its reliance on complex subject matter content.

7. The Lexical Approach (1990s - Present)

In the 1990s, Michael Lewis introduced the Lexical Approach, which emphasized the importance of teaching language in chunks or collocations rather than focusing solely on grammar rules and vocabulary. According to this approach, fluency and natural language use depend on acquiring groups of words that typically occur together.

Key Features:

- Focus on learning "chunks" of language—fixed phrases, collocations, and idiomatic expressions—rather than individual words.
- Language is learned through exposure to authentic, contextual language use.
- Grammar is taught implicitly through the study of how words and phrases are typically combined.

The Lexical Approach has been particularly influential in helping learners achieve fluency and natural communication. However, some have argued that it downplays the importance of understanding grammar rules in detail.

8. Blended Learning and Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (2000s - Present)

With the advent of digital technology, language teaching has increasingly incorporated online platforms, apps, and other technological resources. Blended learning, which combines traditional face-to-face instruction with online learning, and technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) have gained popularity in recent years.

Key Features:

- Learners use digital tools and platforms (e.g., apps, online courses, and video lessons) to supplement traditional classroom instruction.
- The focus is on providing flexible, personalized learning opportunities that accommodate different learning styles.
- Technology supports communication, collaboration, and access to a wide range of language resources.

Blended and technology-enhanced learning offer flexibility and access to diverse resources. However, some educators worry that it may lead to decreased face-to-face interaction, which is crucial for developing conversational skills.

The methods of foreign language teaching have evolved significantly over the years, from rigid grammar-based approaches to more communicative and learner-centered methods. As our understanding of language acquisition and learning theories continues to evolve, so too do the methods and tools used in language teaching. Today, the best practices often combine aspects from different approaches, reflecting the diverse needs of learners and the importance of context, communication, and technology in the language learning process. The future of language teaching is likely to see even more integration of digital resources and a continued focus on communicative competence, making language learning more accessible and engaging than ever before.

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