
Reviews

Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching : A Description and Analysis

Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers, Cambridge University Press, 1986. Pp. 171

Reviewed by **Ornanong Hirunburana**

Chulalongkorn University Language Institute

This book provides a detailed account of major twentieth century trends in language teaching by presenting an overview and analysis of the major and lesser contemporary approaches and methods used in second and foreign language teaching. The approaches and methods covered include Grammar Translation, the Direct Method, the Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching, Audiolingualism, Total Physical Response, the Silent Way, Community Language Learning, the Natural Approach and Suggestopedia.

The authors' aim to present an objective and comprehensive picture of the approaches and methods in question and their similarities and differences are emphasized by the adoption throughout the book of a single analytical model. Each approach and method is placed within its particular historical context and then examined in further detail although personal evaluations are avoided.

The book is divided into 11 chapters. Chapter One deals with in historical perspective a variety of teaching methods, thus providing a background for a discussion of contemporary methods, as well as some suggested issues to be referred to in the analysis of these methods.

In Chapter Two the authors tackle the two terms, "approach" and "method", which are often used interchangeably without any clear distinction being made between them. Based on Edward Anthony's scheme, the relationship between approach and method is distinguished in terms of the relationship between underlying theoretical principles and the practices derived from them. However, it is pointed out that Anthony's scheme is inadequate in terms of describing the nature of a particular method. Anthony also fails to account for the way in which an approach may be realized in terms of a given method or the way in which method and technique are related. Therefore, a revised and extended version of the Anthony's scheme is proposed in order to provide a more comprehensive model for the analysis of approaches and methods.

In the introduction on "design" and "procedure", a distinction is made between approach and method together with elaborate examples. One can be confident that the authors' revised model can serve as a useful tool to explore and describe any approach and language learning method in use today though the authors accept that methodological development does not proceed in a neat progression from approach, through design, and thence to procedure.

The authors first apply their model in Chapter Three to an analysis of the Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching. As for design, the objectives of this method are to teach a practical command of the four basic skills approached through basic structures and sentence patterns. Emphasis is put on pronunciation as well as grammar. As the name implies, the method employs a situation to present new sentence patterns and the practice techniques consist of a variety of tasks: repetition, substitution, drill, dictation, controlled orally-based reading and writing.

Chapter Four is devoted to the discussion of the Audiolingual Method, the method which resulted from the increased attention given to foreign language teaching in the United States. Audiolingualism as a theory of language is based on structural linguistics whereby language is seen primarily as speech which in turn is viewed as a system of structurally related elements (phonemes, morphemes, words, structures and sentence type). As in Situational Language Teaching, the instructional materials are teacher-oriented. Tape recorders and audiovisual equipment play a central role by having the learner listen, repeat and respond.

Chapter Five deals with Communicative Language Teaching. The discussion starts with some of the more significant features of the Communicative Approach as viewed by applied linguists and language teachers such as Howatt; his "weak" and "strong" versions of the communicative approach are described as "learning to use" a language and "using a language to learn it" respectively. As language can be seen in a much broader perspective as communication and interaction, a system for the expression of meaning, language learning is encouraged when the learner is involved in real communication, when he has to use language to carry out meaningful tasks. Since the emphasis is on the processes involved in communication, the teacher assumes the role of 'negotiator', to use Breen and Candlin's term. He also brings in to the task preconceived notions of what teaching and learning should be like. The teacher's roles are also different from those found in traditional classrooms. He facilitates the communicative processes between the learners themselves, and between the learners and the various activities and texts.

Chapter Six analyzes Total Physical Response (TPR), a language teaching method built around the coordination of speech and action. The authors outline the assumptions of the theory of language as observed in a TPR classroom, namely that language is grammar-based and the verb, particularly in the imperative, is the central linguistic motif around which language use and learning are organized. James Asher views foreign language learning as similar to language acquisition during childhood. The learner's brain and nervous system are biologically programmed to acquire language in a particular sequence--listening before speaking. The learner proceeds to language mastery through right-atmosphere motor activities in a stress-free environment.

Chapter Seven contains a study of the Silent Way, a method devised by Caleb Gattengo. This method is rather based on the first and second language learning than on the theory of language. A differentiation is made between first language acquisition and second language learning. Successful learning involves commitment of the self to language acquisition through the use of silent awareness and then active trial. Concerning design, the general objective of the Silent Way is to give beginners oral and aural facility in basic elements of the target language. The general goal set for language learning is near-native fluency, correct pronunciation and mastery of the various prosodic elements.

Chapter Eight is devoted to the description of the Community Language Learning (CLL), a humanistic approach to language teaching developed by Charles A. Curran and his associates with the use of counselling-learning. In CLL design, the general objective is specified in social terms not in explicit linguistic or communicative terms; however, it implies that the set goal is to attain near-native mastery of the target language. It is also pointed out that CLL does not use a conventional language syllabus; rather the CLL syllabus is seen to emerge from the interaction between the learner's expressed communicative intentions and the teacher's reformulations of these into suitable language utterances. This would be a posteriori approach to syllabus design.

The next chapter investigates the Natural Approach, proposed by Tracy Terrell, a teacher of Spanish and Stephen Krashen, an applied linguist. To describe the approach, some differences between the natural approach and the older Natural Method are made, for example, an emphasis on exposure, or "input rather than practice." Under design, the authors suggest that the general