

I. Problems

Crisis in Language Instruction and the Imperative Need for a New Approach

Is language research convoluted? Over the decades, the language learning and linguistics research community plays tug-of-war between opposing ideas and methods. The desire to place one's stamp on something – as well as one's foot – would seem often to be a good description of what happens in the journals.

The following terms exemplify the nature of this rendering of ideas and concepts:

student-centered	teacher-centered
communicative	structuralist
reality-based	text-based
real-life situation	artificial
egalitarian	hierarchical
stories	concepts
metaphors	facts
meaning	utility
individualistic	conformist
remember by meaningful usage	remember by rote
communicative activity	grammar activity
natural approach (Terrell)	structural approach
student-reliant	teacher-reliant
inclusive	exclusive
common	elitist
free-floating	regulated
expressive	stoic, staid, stifled
power with	power over
process-oriented	product-oriented
silent way	audiolingual methods
musical way, bellow way	memorization by rote drill
cooperative learning via discussion groups or emotional therapy sessions	programmed learning
listening/speaking	reading/writing/translation
notional/functional	semantic/grammatical/lexical
holistic, humanistic	discrete, analytical sequences of information
multiple intelligence theory	unilateral (single intelligence) theory
face-to-face	face-to-book, face-to-screen
teacher-assisted	computer-assisted
peer-involvement	no peer involvement
guide	tell
individual guidelines	lock-step control
self-paced	teacher-paced, curriculum-paced, ministry-paced
functionalism	formalism

empiricism	mentalism
l-language (internal)	e-language (external)

The pendulum continues to sway from side to side, generating an ever-new array of neologisms of the linguistic field: *interactional competence*, *brain-centered learning*, *experiential learning*, *conversation theory*, etc. Slight glimmers of light are shed on minute areas, encouraging all pundits to continue this probe into the mechanisms and the unknown depths of language learning. A small amount of research, however, impacts the classroom. **For the most part**, we can say that *established models are to a large extent not practiced in the classroom*.

Admittedly, inroads have been made into the processes by which languages are learned. Yet it is lamentable that modern day linguistics fails not only to impact classroom practice, but also to provide any rationale or explanation derived from EFL/ESL theory for prevailing practices.

With the exception of the “extremists” or “purists” who advocate entirely separate settings and classrooms with specially trained teachers (i.e. Silent Way, Suggestopedia, TPR), and, apart from a few books that offer collections of activities that relate or exemplify or support certain research findings (but rarely mention which ones), methodologists and **textbook writers for the most part do not offer much that is dramatically new, innovative, or substantial. There is a lack of impact, rationale, and relevance for language learning.**

Moreover, some of the approaches that have been used were not even originally or primarily designed for use in a language classroom. They lack, therefore, the necessary focus and practicality specific to language instruction. As Dubin (1986) indicates:

The roles of teaching/learning as articulated by ESL/EFL specialists have not been expanded, altered or modified beyond what they would be for any other subject matter in a general, humanistically-oriented curriculum. The interesting examples are CLL (Community Language Learning) and Suggestopedia : both were initially developed and used for any and all subjects – not necessarily language instruction.

Consider, for instance, the Communicative Language Approach, which despite its many contributions to language learning, has serious deficiencies. *Grammar analysis* was thrown out and replaced by *communicative activities*, *immersion*, and other *whole language* approaches that left (and still leave) the student alone to subconsciously and unwittingly perceive, detect, and learn the major structures of the language. But these measures went too far. The communicative approach can be meaningful and interesting, inspiring and practical, but *it demonstrates and gives to students no systematic understanding of language, and usually provides no clearly ordered sequence of methods or content for teaching the language.*

Dubin (1986) has similar sentiments about the new methods¹:

Recently, methods seem to have exploded in all directions, to such an extent that the term name-methods, like name-brands, can be used to describe them. ... These psychologically-based name-methods [Silent Way, TPR, Suggestopedia, Natural Approach] tend not to address themselves in a serious way to questions about language content or the vital *what* of the syllabus. Nor are they very much concerned with the socio-cultural setting of language teaching and learning.

Dubin continues to criticize the name-methods for their lack of connection from theory to materials, to their often guru-like delivery, and also to the lack of attention they give to non-native speaking English teachers – who far outnumber of native speaking English teachers.

Any valuable or useful teaching method must provide students with helpful guidelines and concrete instruction on how to proceed as well as fruitful situations and opportunities where learning can occur. Students should not simply be thrown into situations where they have to rely totally on their own resources without preparation or prior training.

For instance, you do not give a basketball to someone who wants to learn how to do a jump shot, and then just tell them to go to the court and try it. You teach them how to hold the ball, how to place the fingers, how to stand and position the arms. You demonstrate what should be done, how it should be done, and the sequence in which it should be done. You watch them try it. You advise them or praise their performance. They, in turn, practice until their actions become automatic, fluid, and second-nature. They then incorporate what they learn into an entire repertoire of skilled actions and movements. Over time, they learn the skilled actions and movements, and can then use them as the need arises. **Repetition and familiarity are essential to eventual success.**

All martial arts, Olympic sports, and all skill-related activities (even playing jazz) rely on focused attention, repeated action, and then the integral incorporation of separate actions into a holistic performance. These proven features of success, in countless skill-related activities down the centuries, apply obviously to success in language instruction also, but the communicative language approach minimizes, derides, and utterly ignores these manifest factors of success in language learning.

Present language theory and practice also fails terribly in the other important areas of language instruction. Thus, present theory and practice tells us precious little about imparting reading and writing skills to students. As a consequence, we now have a generation of youth that knows a lot about plots of movies and PC games, but still has difficulty in reading and writing at a semi-proficient level. Beaugrande (1989) calls these types of students *naïve respondents*, and claims that the undergraduates at the University of Florida are specimen examples of this problem. The students themselves report having little contact with literary works in their prior schooling and even less

¹ See Appendix for links to all known learning theories.

outside the schools. Reportedly, any contact they do have usually involves a non-creative orchestrated type of response.

Thus, the present methods of teaching reading and writing are grossly inefficient and impractical and clearly outmoded. Writing, for instance, is often taught using the part of speech/phrase/clause/sentence/paragraph//essay model. While this has some benefits and parts of it should be retained in an inclusive future approach, it is clearly inadequate and insufficient for the current crisis. What is presented to the English students is a complex mountain that they must climb, and they are clearly not climbing it. How doubly difficult must be the climb up that mountain for the EFL/ESL student!

Geoffrey Sampson at the University of Sussex realized that the process of learning to write among young people merited close attention, closer attention by far than it has received. He and some colleagues, therefore, embarked on the Lucy Project which aims *“to create a body of machine-readable data that will enable researchers to examine how the grammatical resources of the English language are actually used by people writing English in Britain at the turn of the millennium, and to compare written usage with usage in spontaneous speech”* (Sampson 2001).

But regarding what is known about the knowledge of structure in written English, Sampson confesses:

We do not at present know very much about the native-speaker's trajectory from being a fluent speaker of English to being, additionally, a skilled writer. Does this development mainly involve just learning to edit out aspects of usage which are conventionally excluded from written prose, and adopting some limited 'tricks' characteristic of the written medium? Or is the route less direct? We have little hard evidence; some of the statements made in the academic literature (apparently on an impressionistic basis) are demonstrably incorrect.

In short, the models of language learning that we now possess are not telling us a great deal that we need to know, and they are not demonstrating that they are helpful or relevant to classroom instruction. **Clearly, there is a crisis in language instruction, and there is an imperative need for a new Approach.**

According to Beaugrande (1994),

we are now seeking a convergence and consensus for theories and models which are genuinely and unabashedly functional from start to finish...

Where is that convergence and consensus? The Two Hands Approach is a system that summarizes the essentials of the English language in an unforgettable way, shows us the road signs, and gives us clear and adequate guidance using real-world examples. It intends to equip students with basic principles and practices (within 40 to 60 hours of classroom instruction) that will give them the practical knowledge and skill to understand and use the English language with ease, correctness, and constantly increasing competence.

Once the students have tried this approach, they do not need to cling to it in an inflexible and unimaginative manner. They can discard and forget what they no

longer need as they continuously develop their ability and skill to listen, speak, think, write, and read the English language – with power and precision. The system and method advocated here are basically foundational, but a foundation only – of the mighty and beautiful tree of language. Language is organic, emerging from the simple and basic level to the rich, variegated, and manifold fullness of its final form.

It is with language as it is with life. Childhood experiences are the foundation of our lives. We may forget whole portions of our childhood, but childhood experiences will subconsciously and permanently affect everything we do. It is the same with language. If the foundations are strong, the tree will grow, the human being will develop, the language flourish and bear fruit.

Finally, the most glaring deficiency of all the present approaches to learning is their almost total neglect of metaphors, images, and analogies in this visual age. It is surprising – even amazing - that no images or metaphors have been adopted for any of the linguistic models offered over the past thirty years. Admittedly, unique buzzwords abound: *suggestopedia* (*suggestion* + *encyclopedia*), the *Silent Way* [very alarming image: *silent* students? a *silent* classroom? How strange a notion! This can't be an English class!]

We evidently need a new Approach that will employ metaphors, images, and analogies with great effectiveness. Today's educators hear about learning theories and practices, read about them, but end up taking back little with them into the classroom. We need something more than catchwords that temporarily capture our attention, briefly excite our imaginations, but then merely get tossed about and then tossed out, novel icons of historical discovery that never prove useful. Such clever phrases have short lifespans. We need a new paradigm that uses metaphors, images, and analogies effectively. We require a new Approach with real beacons to guide us.