



TRENDS IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (L2) IN NIGERIA

BY

Okafor, Stella Amaka (PhD)
Okaforstella2967@gmail.com
08135944778

Department of Igbo, Federal University of Education, Zaria, Kaduna State

&

Nmadumelu, Obi
Obicash@gmail.com
08039317325

Department of English, Federal University of Education, Zaria, Kaduna state

Abstract

A look at the language teaching methods over the years has revealed that there have been changes from one method to another. These changes in the teaching methods (Teacher-Student Connect with Web, Learner-Centered Approach, and Technology Assisted Learning etc) have been described as a “swing of the pendulum” in the history of language teaching. This paper therefore, x-rays the fact that no one method of language teaching holds the answer for all the purposes and situations. The authors stress the importance of these methods to the teaching of English as a world language. Hence, linguists maintains that the use of these methods in the teaching of English as a second language would pave way for a speedy understanding on the parts of the learners.

Introduction

The teaching of second language in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. As such, in this twenty-first century, it has been taught with many methods approaches or tends to cater for a variety of those who are interested in the language. The interested learners range from monolingual, bilingual and multi-lingual speakers of other languages. This necessitates the emergence of many different programmes targeted at equipping speakers of other language with much needed skills in the learning of this prestigious language.

Among the popular programmes are: Teaching English as a second languages (TESL), Teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL), Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), Teaching English Language (TEL), Teaching English to Young Learners (TEYL) etc. Before the emergence of these programmes and the current trends used in the teaching of English in Nigeria, there was the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) (in which the teacher explained grammatical rules and students performed translations). From 1980 to 1990 there has, according to Modi (2012), a tremendous shift from the former methods to one directed at enhancing the communicative competence of the learner. The focus of this shift takes cognizance of the need for students’ practical participation in meaningful and contextualized discourse.

For the purpose of attaining the set learning goals, the teaching of English in Nigeria has adopted series of strategies for giving the learner what he needs to become an accomplished speaker of the English language as the second Language. It is in the light of the above, that the authors deemed it fit to review the current trends used for the teaching of English as second language in Nigeria. Some of the current trends are:



Learner-Centered Approach

This is one of the most recently utilized techniques used in the teaching of English as a second language with emphasis on the rigorous development of learner in communicative competence. It is used in the bid to ensure that the learner is not only trained in the use of the language, but also to give him autonomy in proper use of the language in both classroom and other social contexts. The method embodies two crucial concepts. The first one deals with making the learner independent to enable him manage his own learning tasks and the second, making the teacher of English as a second language to serve as a facilitator who guides the learner in many respects, other than playing the traditional role of a “fountain” of knowledge. The technique encourages the learner to be highly motivated, self-confident, knowledgeable of his needs and the role of the language, creative in thinking and being open minded among the participants for self assessment and improvements.

Technology Assisted Learning

This is a modern breakthrough in the teaching of English as a second language in Nigeria. It has been stated that technology, through the Information Communication Technology ICT has a lot of potentials to provide to both the language teacher and the learner, though, some teachers seem reluctant to provide computers in their language classrooms. It is imperative to note that learning with technology is different from learning about technology. Competent language teachers integrate technology into their classes to build the learners confidence in meaningful ways. Modi (2012) identified the following as features and uses of technology into the classrooms in England today:

- Word processor
- Digital camera
- Digital video
- Internet
- Web page
- Email
- Video confessing
- Computer games and
- Presentation software

In the 21st century, teachers in England integrate technology into their classrooms to build the confidence of learners on how to use technology in meaningful ways. As laptop computers, interactive whiteboards and broad band internet became cheaper and more available in U.K, teachers now begin to introduce them into classrooms.

Teacher-Student Connect with Web

This approach stems from the fact that language teaching and learning is no longer restricted by the four angles of the classroom. Now in Nigeria, language learning among second learners of English is not in any way a herculean task, (which involves ‘sweat and pains’ between teachers and learners). The social software, such as the Virtual Reality (VR) environments, the second life, and face-book, students and teachers open up new opportunities of interaction and collaboration between them. The totality of learners say, classmates have found the process a very interesting language learning strategy since they can relate and interact among themselves on the web.

This method is used by the teachers and students to discuss language vocabulary, structures, current methodology, language habit, varieties of the English language outside Nigeria and other countries, assignments, proposals and topics for individual student’s progress and development. All these take place without the two that is, (the teacher and the learner) coming together to discuss eyeball-to-



eyeball. Learners can watch a film or clip from a network, comment on it in the target language (English) in a blog thereby start discussing with his peers or even beyond the classroom context.

Using Real Texts and Real Situation

Recently, teachers of English as a second language in Nigeria have confirmed that using real texts produced by students has achieved real communicative competence. According to Modi (2012) working with what students produce rather than creating situations to provoke desired language competence will be more participatory than teacher led. Grammar is seen as a process than a 'thing' out there to be learnt. Learning is made to be emergent and facilitated rather than prescribed and taught to students.

English as Lingua Franca in Integrating English as a Second Language (ESL) Approaches

English today as a lingua franca of non-native speakers in Nigeria has been also integrated as a new approach in the teaching of English as a second language. Lingua franca means any language which is constantly used in regions for dealings between speakers of different mother tongues.

The main purpose is to learn and understand different varieties of English, and communicate with non-native speakers from other countries. English as Lingua Franca (ELF) interactions include persons who share neither a common native language nor a common cultural system, and for whom English is the chosen foreign system of communication.

English as an international language: This is a debate that relates to almost everything for example: Who owns English? Which English do we teach? Who are the best teachers? Native or non-native speakers? Is it possible to separate language with culture? Arguments are usually accompanied by statistics that shows that non-native speakers of English and those who speak Received Pronunciation (RP) English or standard American English are greatly out-numbered by speakers of other languages. Hence, teachers of English in Britain have currently, devised many models in the teaching of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF).

Corpus Linguistics Strategy

In Nigeria today, Corpus Linguistics has taken a new dimension in the sense that it is used as an approach to investigating language structure and use through the analysis of large databases of real language teaching and learning. For example, large databases are stored on computer. Prominent issues open to corpus linguistics include the meaning of words across registers, the distribution and functions of grammatical forms and categories, the investigation of lexical grammar associations, the study of discourse characteristics, register variation and issues in language acquisition and development.

Material Development: Global and Local Publishing

There have been significant developments and innovations with content becoming less ethnocentric and more intercultural; less stereotyped and more critical in syllabus design and materials development. There has equally been an increasing tendency towards more locally relevant non-global publishing of courses and materials.

Recently, English language teachers in Nigeria have realized that instructional materials produced in one country may not be effective in other countries, unlike in the past, different countries are producing the teaching materials (textbooks and reference materials) on their own and that suit their land, culture and values. Imported language teaching materials are no longer practicable in the contexts where they are not produced keeping into consideration of the local needs.



Reflection on the Teachers Methodology

This is about teachers questioning and exploring their own practice of teaching. It is a sort of systematic curiosity about going beyond the edges of what we know and do, to find out how we could do things differently or better (Underhill, 2007). Reflecting upon our own way of teaching tremendously helps the teachers to improve the practice. The basic idea about reflection is that teacher learns about his/her teaching and how to improve it by trying to observe and understand what is happening in his/her own classroom, reflecting on it, learning from it and trying out something slightly different and so on.

Use of Bottom-up and Top-down Skills into Learning (Interactive Processing Approach)

Interactive processing

A theory of reading comprehension that sees reading as involving both the accurate and sequential understanding of text based on identification of the meanings of words and sentences in the text (i.e. bottom-up processing) as well as the experiences, background information, and predictions that the reader brings to the text (i.e. top-down processing). Both kinds of processing are involved and they modify and act on each other.

Comprehension

This is the identification of the intended meaning of written or spoken communication. Contemporary theories of comprehension emphasize that it is an active process drawing both on information contained in the message (bottom-up processing) as well as background knowledge, information from the context and from the listeners and speakers purpose or intentions (top-down processing).

Listening comprehension:

This is the process of understanding speech in a first or second language. The study of listening comprehension processes in second language learning focuses on the role of individual linguistic units (e.g. phonemes words, grammatical structures) as well as the role of the listeners' expectations, the situation and context, background knowledge and the topic. It therefore includes both Top-down processing and Bottom-up processing. While traditional approaches to language teaching tended to under-emphasize the importance of teaching listening comprehension, more recent approaches emphasize the role of listening in building up language competence and suggest that more attention should be paid to teaching listening in the initial stages of second or foreign language learning. Listening comprehension activities typically address a number of listening functions, including recognition (focusing on some aspect of the code itself), orientation (ascertaining essential facts about the text, such as participants, the situation or context, the general topic, the emotional tone, and the genre), comprehension of main ideas and understanding and recall of details.

Implications to Language Teaching

There is no single most excellent way of teaching English as a second language. A successful language teacher will not confine himself to only a single method. A method which is appropriate with one class on one occasion might not necessarily suit the same class at another time. Likewise, a method which is suitable for one language teacher while teaching a particular language item may not be applicable for other teacher in the same or similar context. There has been gradual shift from a literature based foreign language to equipping learners with communicative skills for interaction in Nigeria. Most English language teachers and more significantly most teacher-trainers adhere to communicative methodology today. A large number of articles and conference talks have been devoted to exploring precisely the communicative approach of language teaching. Nonetheless, ESL practitioners have not remained reliant on fixed prescribed and imposed practices. Instead, ESL practitioners around the globe put into practice a great deal of diverse activities to keep themselves up-to-date and enhance their practices which have been dealt above.



Conclusion

From the foregoing, we realized that to explain the reasons for the change from one method to the other, it is worth noting that times too are changing and there is need to adapt to these changes. Besides, language is now seen and emphasized for communication, thus, the need to get ourselves abreast with the trends in teaching English language becomes paramount as one method cannot claim to be the complete answer in teaching English language. The world is getting smaller by the day (Olugbodi, 2010). As such the need for changes in our trends/approaches in the teaching of language should as well change.

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