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Innovative methods in foreign language teaching

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1. Some introductory thoughts on language teaching methods in general

When engaging in learning a foreign language, a language learner is faced with an immense task. There are various skills and knowledges to master, such as the grammatical competence (including the phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and the vocabulary of a language), the sociolinguistic competence (what utterances are appropriate to use in a given situation and how to join the parts of speech together correctly) and the strategic competence (how to handle potential communication failures). Language teachers therefore have a great responsibility in how best they can facilitate the learning process for their learners.

When planning a language course, a teacher has to consider a variety of different factors. Being familiar with the students' background (language proficiency, goals, motivation, age, etc.) is one of the most important aspects, when deciding about the methodology. Different methods draw on different theoretical backgrounds and thus approach language learning from different angles. Language teachers are advised to be aware of the existing language teaching methods in order to make well-informed decisions about their courses.

In the present unit we are going to get acquainted with three methods that came into existence as innovative responses to two of the oldest methods (the Grammar-Translation Method and the Direct Method). Below the Audio-Lingual Method, the Total Physical Response Method and Suggestopaedia are illustrated with sample lesson fragments, are discussed in detail and a comparison is drawn.

2. The Audio-Lingual Method

Original purposes

The Audio-Lingual Method was invented in the United States of America during World War II, because there was a need for speakers of foreign languages for military purposes. The method has its roots in behavioral psychology and considers language learning to be a habit formation.



Illustration

In the following video you will see the Audio-Lingual Method at work. Please watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pz0TPDUz3FU&t=330s> from 3:05 to 21:15.

While watching, please have a sheet of paper at hand and note down the following:

- 1) From 3:05 to 6:30 the teacher introduces the following dialogue:
 - Hello.
 - Hello, madam. Would you like to have the cleanest house in town?
 - Yes, of course, I would.
 - Then, madam, you need the amazing 'hoover' vacuum cleaner.
 - No, I don't.
 - What? Why not?
 - Because my husband does the cleaning in our house.

How does the teacher introduce the dialogue?

What does the class do?

- 2) From 6:30 to 21:15 the teacher and the class work together on the dialogue.

What are the different stages that you can observe? In how many different ways is the dialogue practiced?



Summary

In the demonstration video excerpt you could observe the most typical characteristics of the Audio-Lingual Method:

- 1) New language is introduced in a natural context. The text (usually a dialogue) is presented by the teacher in the target language, the meaning of the unknown words is illustrated or explained. In the later stage of the lesson the language learners repeat the lines of the dialogue.
- 2) Grammar is not explained, it is taught through the examples that come up in the text.
- 3) The teacher tries to prevent the students from making mistakes by helping out, making the learners repeat and applying different *drilling techniques*.
- 4) One of the most important characteristics of the Audio-Lingual Method is the idea of drilling. There are different kinds of drills. Their primary aim is to model and automatize language. Familiarise yourself with the different kinds of drills from this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=19x1KrKJUuU>, to observe how noun clauses can be practiced with the help of oral drills, click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kUAXBGIvIU0>



Thinking task

- 1) Have you ever experienced any elements of the Audio-Lingual Method in your language learning career?
- 2) What elements of this method would you include in your lessons as an EFL teacher?

3. The Total Physical Response Method

Original purposes

The basic idea of the Total Physical Response Method is that language learners should acquire the target language similarly to their mother tongue. This means that just like a baby is merely exposed to language in the first months of its life without actually producing language, language learners should start out by listening to the target language first and start speaking when they feel ready to do so. In the Total Physical Response Method language learners first encounter commands uttered by the teacher. Then, they are allowed to use both their mother tongue and the target language when they respond to the teacher. The meaning of words is made clear by visual aids and context.



Thinking task

Having read the core idea of the Total Physical Response Method, how do you imagine the method at work? What age group and what proficiency level do you think this method works best with?



Illustration

As you may have guessed, the Total Physical Response Method is probably the most frequently used with less advanced learners. In the following video you can see a teacher teaching a group of young children with this method. Please watch this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Mk6RRf4kKs&t=206s> and observe how the teacher instructs the kids and how they react and learn.



Summary

As you could see, the children were listening to the teachers instructions and were responding with their bodies, without speaking. Testing also took place based on listening comprehension and indicating answers on a worksheet. At later stages of the course, the children will gradually start speaking.

- 1) In the Total Physical Response Method the meaning in the target language is often conveyed by actions and memory is activated by the learner's physical response.
- 2) Comprehension develops first, learners will only start speaking at later stages. The learners' first speech productions are instructions, just like the teacher's.



Thinking task

Think about the potential advantages and disadvantages of the method. Under what circumstances would you apply it as a teacher?

4. Suggestopaedia

Original purposes

The core idea of Suggestopaedia is that the reason why people do not learn efficiently enough is that there are psychological barriers that prevent them from efficient learning. People are afraid of failure and because of this they are unable to utilize their full mental capacity. Suggestopaedia has as its aim to desuggest these barriers and thus make people believe in their success.



Illustration

Watch the following video from 2:25 to 21:02:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rkrvRlty5M>

- 1) While watching, observe what the different stages of the lesson are.
- 2) What is the classroom environment like? How is it different from other classrooms?
- 3) In what way do you think this method serves to reduce stress and desuggest the psychological barriers of learners?



Summary

The classroom and the teaching style of the teacher are adapted to fit the goals of the Suggestopaedia method.

- 1) As you could observe in the video, the classroom environment differs from other classrooms: there is a friendly atmosphere, comfortable circumstances, music, posters and pictures everywhere and the teacher speaks reassuringly.
- 2) Communication happens on “two planes”, the linguistic message is encoded on one level, and factors influencing the linguistic message are present on the other. On the conscious level, the learner is consciously focusing on the target language, while on the subconscious level the music suggests that learning is easy and pleasant.

Comparison of the three methods

For a better understanding of the differences between the two methods, please check the table below. In the table you can see ten aspects (Larsen-Freeman 2000), along which you can see how these methods work and what their essence is.

	Audio-Lingual Method	Total Physical Response Method	Suggestopaedia
goals	communicative language use automaticity by learning new habits	learners should enjoy the learning experience, reduce stress	everyday communication learners' barriers to learning are 'desuggested'
role of the teacher/learner	the teacher directs and controls the activities, the teacher provides model of L2 for imitation	the teacher directs the learners, first the learners imitate the teacher, and then, when they are ready to speak, they give instructions to each other	teacher is the authority, the learners trust and respect him/her learners adopt a childlike role feeling of security is important
characteristics of teaching/learning process	grammar and vocabulary is introduced through dialogues drills inductive grammar teaching learning is a habit formation	first phase: modelling, second phase: learners demonstrate understanding by performing the commands, then students learn to read and write the commands and finally they say them	comfortable classroom, relaxing atmosphere, music, posters on the walls (thus activating the whole brain, peripheral learning is taken into account) learners take on new identities for the language classes first reception then activation
nature of learner /teacher interaction	teacher-directed interaction between learners: drills, dialogues	initially: the teacher initiates and the learners respond nonverbally, later: learners issue commands to each other	initially: the teacher initiates and the learners respond later: learners interact with each other
learners' feelings	N.A.	relieving anxiety, feeling of success is promoted	great attention is given to feelings focus on confidence and sense of security by desuggesting the psychological barriers that learners have

view of language/culture	everyday language is emphasized culture is the lifestyle of the native speakers	natural process, just as the acquisition of the mother tongue, culture is the lifestyle of the native speakers	communication is a 2-phase process: language + extra-linguistic factors
emphasized language skills	Structures are important natural order of skills: listen-speak-read-write	grammatical structures and vocabulary are emphasised, understanding precedes production	vocabulary is emphasized explicit but minimal grammar
role of the native language	L1 habits interfere with L2 use of L1 is avoided L1 serves the purpose for the teacher to anticipate where problems might occur	the mother tongue is rarely used, but allowed	L1 is used in translation of dialogues the teacher uses L1 if necessary as the course proceeds, L1 use is reduced
evaluation	discrete point testing for accuracy	the teacher observes whether the students understand the commands	in-class performance
treatment of errors	avoid errors by overlearning	errors are tolerated, only major ones are corrected, correction happens nonobtrusively	no overt correction if errors occur, the teacher later models the use correctly



Test your knowledge

- 1) Test your knowledge on the Audio-Lingual Method, the Total Physical Response Method and Suggestopaedia by opening the file **innovative methods** in the attached folder.
- 2) If you were to start teaching an EFL course for beginner learners, which method would you prefer to apply? Would it be one pure method? Or would it be a combination of methods?
- 3) If you have the opportunity to visit and observe real English lessons, try and identify which elements of which methods you can see. Think about the teachers' choices. Do you agree with them? Why? Why not?

References

Diane Larsen-Freeman. 2000. *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. Oxford University Press.