



## THE DYNAMICS OF METHODOLOGICAL CHANGE AND RISE OF ACTIVITY BASED LEARNING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING LEARNING

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### RESEARCH ARTICLE



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#### Abstract

English language teaching learning has witnessed so many methods since its beginning advocated by many researchers. The Grammar translation method, the Audio-lingual method, the Structural Approach, the Structural oral situational approach, the Communicative Approach had long legacy in English language teaching learning. The latter half twentieth century witnessed the dynamics of methodological changes in language teaching learning with the researchers of Chomsky, Piaget, Nunan et. al. The paradigm shift gave importance to learners' autonomy, active participation in activity and natural flow of thinking, communicating and learning. The approach gave value on learning by doing rather than focusing only grammar and vocabulary. The theoretical principles of Chomskyan formal linguistics, Hallidayen functional linguistics, Hymesian socio linguistic and Austinian Speech Act theory shaped the theoretical basis of Activity based learning. A variety of labels such as approach, design, methods, practices, principles, procedures, strategies, tactics, techniques, and so on is used to describe various elements in language teaching learning. Still the debate in terminology and search for right kind of term continues. In the era of post positivism, it finds its antecedents in communicative approach, Task based approach and learner centered pedagogy. The term activity is more general not monolithic and refers to any kind of purposeful classroom procedure that involves learners doing something that relates to the goals of the course with the promotion of multilingualism.

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#### Introduction

Now-a-days English in India is a symbol of people's aspiration for quality in education and completely ensures participation in national and international life (National Curriculum Framework [NCF-2005], Teaching of English, 2006, p. 1). A varied range of English teaching learning situation prevails in India. The major procedural change of teaching-learning English language has been shifted from the structural perspective to 'cognitive claim' and 'meaningful contexts' and established as a recognized pattern with the seminal works of Chomsky (1959, 1972). In this context we should remember the works of Piaget (1955), Halliday (1975), Vygotsky (1978), Littlewood (1981), Nunan (1989), Ellis (2003), Van den Branden (2006). Teaching learning of English language has seen the rise and falls of many approaches and methods advocated by many linguists and still it is a matter of research. Still linguists have failed to mention definite numbers of approaches and methods in English language teaching (Hall, 2016 p.211). Since Language learning is a local concern (Mathew, 2008) administrators for their regions and teachers for their classrooms can adopt a varied range of approaches, methods and techniques for their students. But these should be mutually supportive with the philosophical arena of Chomsky, Piaget and Vygotsky (NCF, Teaching of English, 2006, p. 8). India has theoretically shifted its concern from form to 'meaningful contexts' through 'activities' with the promotion of 'multilingualism' (NCF, 2005 p.38-40).

#### History of Methods and Approaches of English Language Teaching Learning in India

"A variety of labels such as approach, design, methods, practices, principles, procedures, strategies, tactics, techniques, and so on is used to describe various elements constituting language teaching." (Kumaravadivelu, 2008 p.83). Still the debate in terminology and search for right kind of term continues (Anthony, 1963, Richards and Rogers, 1986, Brown, 2001, Bell, 2003, Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Hall, 2011&2016). Some methods and approaches of English language teaching-learning are mentioned below:

**The Grammar-Translation Method:** This method, also known as the classical method, is one of the oldest or traditional methods of teaching English. The emphasis in this method is mainly on translation of English words, phrases, and passages from the mother tongue of a learner. Teaching English in grammar-translation method had a long history and wide acceptability. Though unmethodical the method is still practiced in India (NCF, Teaching of English, 2006, p.1, Sheory (2006) and Vaish(2008) cited in Shah,2010).

**The Direct Method:** The direct method, sometimes also called as the ‘reform’ method, ‘natural’ method, ‘psychological’ method, ‘phonetic’ method, and ‘anti- grammatical’ method, was established in France and Germany around 1900, and introduced in India in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a reform which was needed in the methods of teaching English. This was developed as a reaction against the grammar-translation method. Again, this method is a logical extension of the Natural method. It is also an offshoot of the Behaviorist school of psychology. It insists that the key to all language learning lies in association. It stresses the need for direct association between experience and expression in the foreign language. The aim is to enable the learner to think in foreign language and to cultivate an unerring language sense. It recognizes that language sense has its roots in the spoken language and lays stress on the oral approach. In this method no translation is allowed. In fact, this method receives its name from the fact that meaning is to be conveyed directly in the target language through the use of demonstration and visual aids, with no recourse to the students’ native language. Many new words can be added to the vocabulary of the learner without the intervention of the mother tongue.

**The Audio-Lingual Method:** During the World War II, through The Army Specialized Training Programme the method was invented. Later, in its development, principles from behavioral psychology were incorporated. It was thought that the way to acquire the sentence patterns of the target language was through conditioning, i.e. helping learners to respond correctly to stimuli through shaping and reinforcement. Learners could overcome the habits of their native language and form the new habits required to be target language speaker. The behaviorist theory of learning was adopted. Language learning was assumed to involve a chain of stimulus-response-reinforcement; and it was believed that one learnt a language by acquiring a series of stimulus-response chain. This method provided ‘contextualized’ language practice in ‘true-to-life’ situations including dialogue. Audio-lingual method can, however, be successful in the absence of a qualified, trained, inventive and resourceful teacher.

**The Structural Approach:** Since structure is important and unique about a language, early practice should focus on mastery of phonological and grammatical structures rather than on mastery of vocabulary. These structures are carefully graded in terms of both meaning and form. The two essential features of this approach are careful grading of structures, and vocabulary control. The intensive practice and drill in this approach provide multiple opportunities to the learner. In India this approach has been found effective at lower levels, but inadequate at higher levels. Without making any exaggerated claims for this approach, we may say that, it is quite effective in the hands of trained and dedicated teachers. Inadequate teacher-training has been the cause of the setback which the structural approach has suffered in India.

**The Structural-Oral-Situational Approach:** This approach, popularly known as the S-O-S approach, came into being as an alternative to the direct method. It is an outcome of the experiments carried out in the army camps during World War II. Language is viewed as structurally related elements for encoding of meaning, the elements being phonemes, morphemes, words, structures and sentence types. Nagaraj (2008) summarized the characteristics of this approach: a. Speech is the basis of language teaching- new language items and vocabulary items are presented orally before they are presented in the written form. b. The language items which are commonly used by native speakers in their day-to-day language are selected for teaching. c. The items are also graded according to their usefulness, frequency and teachability. d. The language items thus selected are presented and practiced in meaningful situations. e. Vocabulary items are selected with reference to the general service list. f. Reading and writing are based on items which have already been introduced and practiced orally.

**The Communicative Approach:** The communicative approach to teaching of English is organized on the basis of certain communicative functions, such as apologizing, describing, inviting, promising etc. It focuses on the significance of language functions, because the learner needs knowledge of both meaning and functions. It lays emphasis on functional, communicative and social interactive activities. It also lays emphasis on the semantic aspect of the language. In order to improve the ability of reading comprehension, it is essential that the learner knows the semantic aspect of the language. In communicative language teaching (CLT) teacher’s primary role is to organize the classroom as a setting for communication and communicative activities. The teaching materials are also designed to promote communicative language use. Richards and Rodgers considered three kinds of instructional materials, currently used in CLT and labelled these as: ‘text- based, task-based, and realia’. The communicative approach takes into account all the four basic linguistic skills viz. listening, speaking, reading, writing where the social context of utterances play a significant role.

**The Dynamics of Methodological Change and Rise of Activity Based Method in English Language Teaching Learning:** Change seems to be a constant process in education. “The term “paradigm” is another word for pattern. Pattern forming is part of the way we attempt to make meaning from our experiences” (Ausubel, 1968 cited in Jacobs and Farrell, 2008 p. 2). We use these patterns to understand situations, raise questions, build links and generate predictions. When a paradigm shift takes place, we see things from a different perspective as we focus on different aspects of the phenomena in our lives. Twentieth century paradigm shifts across a wide variety of fields can be seen as part of a larger shift from positivism to post positivism (Berman, 1981; Capra, 1983; Merchant, 1992 cited in Jacobs and Farrell,2008 p. 2). Jacobs and Farrell (2008, p.4) mentioned eight major changes associated with the paradigm of second language education. These eight paradigms are: a. Learner autonomy b.

cooperative learning c. curricular integration d. Focus on meaning e. Diversity f. Thinking skills g. Alternative assessment h. Teachers as co-learners. Behaviorists such as Pavlov, Skinner considered language learning as matter of stimulus-response mechanism acquired through the use of pattern, practice, memory and mimicry. In 1960's the schools of Behaviorism and Structural Linguists were severely criticized for inadequacy of representing nature of language, language learning process and the teaching methods also. It was Chomsky who shook the foundations of Behaviorism and considered language as living entity than passive one. Language was already in human mind hard wired in the form of Universal Grammar. His idea of Language Acquisition Device, Transformational Generative Grammar changed the idea and definition of language as well as the idea of language teaching-learning (Kumaravadivelu, 2008; NCF, 2005; NCF, Teaching of Indian Languages, 2006; NCF, Teaching of English, 2006).

The Functional Linguistics School of Halliday considered sociology in its orientation. The theory revolves round the notion of language function. Halliday considered that language communication is the product of the process of interplay between the ideational, interpersonal and textual function of language (Brown, 2001 and Kumaravadivelu, 2008). Both Chomsky and Hymns were similar in the notion of 'Competence' but the basis of them was different. While Chomsky's basis was biological, Hymns basis was social i.e., functional (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). Austin's speech act theory divided every speech act into three acts such as locutory, illocutory and pre-locutory acts. Context plays significant role in speech act (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). Piaget and Vygotsky worked with the cognitive development of children. Piaget analyzed that like other cognitive system language is constructed through interaction with the environment. Like Piaget, Vygotsky proved that child's speech is result of interaction with society. According to Piaget's constructivist approach assimilation and accommodation is the process of creation of all knowledge system including language (NCF, Teaching of Indian Languages, 2006 p.8-11).

So, the dynamics of methodology changes mainly with the invention of Chomsky and Piaget. Both of them revolutionized in the field of Linguistics and Education. The emphasis of English Language teaching shifted from practice of structure to meaningful contexts. These philosophical bases of language govern the teaching-learning of English Language till now (Mallett, 2008, p.194-196). Van den Branden (2006) describes Nunan's (1989) (cited in Kotaka, 2013 p. 49) definition of activity as a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on meaning rather than on form.

Cambridge English (2015, p. 2) defines activity-based learning as "an approach to learning by doing activities and focusing on the activity rather than focusing on grammar and vocabulary. Learners do an activity in groups; e.g. they solve a problem, draw or paint a picture or make or build something. The rules of language used in the activity are looked at either after the activity or not at all. An activity-based learning approach is more common with school-aged children." Prof J. C. Richards who is a famous professor of applied linguistics in modern times said that the term activity is more general than task and exercise. He defines that "the term activity is more general and refers to any kind of purposeful classroom procedure that involves learners doing something that relates to the goals of the course. For example singing a song, playing a game, taking part in a debate, having a group discussion, are all different kinds of teaching activities." (Richards, 2017, difference between Task, Exercise, Activity, para. 2). Regional disparities, methods of teaching and environment of learning have major influence on learning of English. Activities are at the core of learning of various subjects including English. "At the early stage of learning, from pre-school to the primary school years, an important place must be given to language and mathematics in all activities across the curriculum" Schools have a big responsibility to transform community activity into guided activity (NCF, 2005, p. 33-34).

### **Activity Based Method in the Era of Post positivism**

In the era of post positivism Activity Based Method of English language learning finds its antecedents in the theoretical premises of Communicative Language Teaching or in communicative approach (Littlehood, 1981; Larsen- Freeman, 2000 and Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011), Task-Based Approach of Language Teaching (Nunan, 1989; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Ellis, 2003) and Learner centered Pedagogy and Learning Centered Pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). Activities are the bases of communicative language teaching, proposed by Littlehood (1981) and major part of task components as proved by Nunan (1989). Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) are of no exception to it. They also depend on activity to teach pupils in communicative approaches. Task Based approaches of language teaching use activities as one of the major components of 'task frame work' (Nunan, 1989). Task based instruction is characterized by activities that engage learners in meaningful, goal-oriented communication in an aim to solve projects and reach decisions. Kumaravadivelu (2008) mentioned three types of language teaching method that is language centered method, learner centered method and learning centered method. The theories of language and language learning of learner centered method and learning centered methods have no significant difference. Both of them owe to Chomskyan cognitive perspectives of language learning and Hallidayan functional perspectives of language use. Activity based Learning falls on the theoretical principles of Chomskyan formal linguistics, Hallidayan functional linguistics, Hymnsian socio linguistic and Austinian speech act theory. The input modifications of classroom procedure are form and meaning based approach. The greatest achievement of the learner centered pedagogies is that they have successfully directed the attention of language learning from a rule governed system to meaningful practices of communicative activities. The emphasis of learning centered methods was exclusively on meaning focused activities (Kumaravadivelu, 2008).

### **Conclusion**

Activity Based Method is not a monolithic method like Grammar Translation Method or Direct Method. It is based on communicative approach (Littlehood, 1981; Larsen- Freeman, 2000 and Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011), Task-Based Approach of Language teaching (Nunan, 1989; Freeman, 2000; Ellis, 2003), Learner centered Pedagogy and Learning Centered Pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). Activity Based Learning of English Language has already proved its superiority. (Padmavathi, 2013; Gomathi and Kiruthika, 2013; Sumanjari, 2012; Butterfly, 2013 and Thayniath, 2015). Differential use of the context varies the term. It is supported from the various researches that Activity Based teaching learning helps students to improve their achievement in language (Hansraj, 2017, p.4436).

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