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# UNIT 1 APPROACHES, METHODS AND TECHNIQUES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you should be able to:

- understand how different methods have impacted language teaching learning in the 20th and 21st century;
- critically analyse and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each method; and
- use appropriate methods to enhance the teaching-learning process in your classroom.

We have dealt more extensively with some of the methods than others, for example Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as they continue to be used very widely even now.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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Several methods of language teaching learning gained prominence in the twentieth century which are still being followed in the twenty first century. However, the

twenty first century has also thrown up certain exciting perspectives. In this Unit, we will further shed light on all these methods, looking at them from the perspective of the learner, the teacher and materials. We will also at the same time ask you to think ‘beyond’ the concept of methods. We wish to state at the outset that we do not promote the efficacy of any one method. We believe that a teacher knows her teaching-learning situation best and should use whatever methods suits her context. But to be able to do this, you need to be aware of the current trends affecting methods of teaching learning and the rationale for them.

‘Language educators have sought to solve the problem of language teaching by focusing attention almost exclusively on method’ (Stern 1983). In other words, they have assumed that if a teacher teaches using the right method, learning will automatically take place. Therefore, over the twentieth century, researchers have been constantly trying to find the ‘best’ method. However, language learners have not really benefitted from these various methods. Scholars are now arguing that perhaps we have been looking in the wrong direction all this while. Probably there are variables besides *methods* which we need to take into account. Prabhu (1990) proposed that any attempt to find a best method was illogical because the teachers quite reasonably adapted and combined individual methods to suit their classrooms contexts and their own personal beliefs. Applied linguists like Pennycook (1989) suggested that teachers were frustrated because they could not implement any method fully and consistently because their context would not allow it. This search for a ‘best’ method also maintained an unequal relationship between the academics/researchers and the actual teacher who had to engage with her class.

As a result of this sustained criticism, the search for the best method has become less important in the twenty first century and scholars are now talking of a ‘post method’ era where the classroom teacher and her context is given more importance and the teacher herself is encouraged to become a theoretician, theorizing from the classroom.

In the following sections, we shall discuss some of the teaching learning methods that have gained some prominence in the twentieth century and are still in use to a greater or lesser extent in the language classrooms in India as well as in the production of materials.

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## 1.2 THE GRAMMAR TRANSLATION METHOD

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The grammar translation method was not based on any theory of language teaching, but its roots can be traced to the way classical languages such as Latin and Greek were taught. It was a way of learning a language through a detailed study of its grammar. The learner then applied the rules of grammar in translating sentences and parts of text from the mother tongue into the target language and vice versa. A distinctive feature of this method was its **focus on translating the sentence correctly**. Grammatical accuracy was given great importance. Literary texts were the basis of this translation exercise. Vocabulary was taught through bilingual word lists and there was a lot of stress on memorization of words. In short, listening and speaking were neglected and the skills of reading and writing occupied an important place. In this method the teacher was totally dependent on the text as she had to rigidly follow the lesson with no scope for any innovation. The learner’s role was passive; s/he did not play any active role in the **use of the**

**language.** Look at the example given:

These are some of the activities that a teacher using the grammar-translation method would use from the reading passage given below.

### Reading passage

I went out. And in the full blaze of sunlight in the field, stood two dogs, a black-and-white, and a big, bushy, rather handsome sandy-red dog, of the collie type. And sure enough this latter did look queer and a bit horrifying, his whole muzzle set round with white spines, like some ghastly growing; like an unnatural beard.

The black-and-white dog made off as I went through the fence. But the red dog whimpered and hesitated, and moved on hot bricks. He was fat and in good condition. I thought he might belong to some shepherds herding sheep in the forest ranges, among the mountains.

He waited while I went up to him, wagging his tail and whimpering, and ducking his head, and dancing. He daren't rub his nose with his paws any more; it hurt too much. I patted his head and looked at his nose, and he whimpered loudly.

He must have had thirty quills, or more, sticking out of his nose, all the way round: the white, ugly ends of the quills protruding an inch, sometimes more, sometimes less, from his already swollen, blood-puffed muzzle.

*(From Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine by D. H. Lawrence)*

- 1) Write the mother tongue equivalents of the following words in paragraph 1: queer, horrify, ghastly—
- 2) Translate the following sentences from the passage into the mother tongue.
  - i) I went out.
  - ii) The black-and-white dog made off as I went through the fence.
  - iii) I patted his head and looked at his nose, and he whimpered loudly.
- 3) Pick out the nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs from paragraph 1 and say what kind they are.

#### Reflection

- 1) Do you as a practicing teacher think that your students would benefit from such activities?
- 2) Would this help them learn L2?

Language experts of the early 1940's discarded the grammar translation method because they felt that learning **about** language through a detailed study of grammar was not the same as learning to use a language and that constant translation from the mother tongue stood in the way of the learner becoming a fluent user of the target language. However, in recent years, there has been a revival of the grammar – translation tasks, albeit in modified ways. For example, teachers may often ask a pair of students to get a folk tale in their mother tongue. They may be asked to translate it into English and then compare their translation and make modifications where required. Thornbury (2006) recognizes that the grammar translation may have survived due to its ease of implementation, especially with large classes.

### 1.3 THE DIRECT METHOD

As a reaction to the grammar translation method, the direct method emerged in Europe at the end of the 19th century. This method was based on the belief that learning a foreign language is similar to learning L1. This method emerged due to the needs of late 19th and early 20th century contexts when international business and travel required people to be able to use and communicate in L2. The primary principles that characterize the Direct method are as follows:

- 1) Classroom interaction was conducted exclusively in the target language;
- 2) The process of learning was essentially of forming associations, i.e. speech associated with appropriate objects, actions, concepts;
- 3) Only everyday vocabulary and phrases were taught;
- 4) Oral communication skills were organized in a graded manner and based on question and answer exchanges between teachers and students in small classes;
- 5) Repetition was essential if associations had to be formed and reinforced;
- 6) Grammar was taught inductively;
- 7) Both listening and speaking were emphasized, and
- 8) Accuracy of pronunciation and grammar was essential.

*Adapted from Richards and Rodgers 2001 and Nagaraj, G. (1996)*

The Direct method was demanding of both the learners and the teachers, both had to be highly motivated. This method could be best implemented in schools where the class size was rather small. The method placed the teacher at the centre and the role of the text book was minimized. There were a large list of dos and don'ts for the teacher, for example:

- Never translate: demonstrate
- Never explain: act
- Never imitate mistakes: correct
- Never speak single words: use sentences
- Never speak too much: make students speak

(cited in Titone, 1968:100-101)

This method continues to be popular in the elite private schools in India. However, overuse of this method would be detrimental, because it not only rejects the mother tongue of the learners but also puts heavy demands on the teachers.

This could be a possible activity conducted in the classroom using the Direct method.

#### Activity

Teacher pointing to a picture of a girl:

Teacher: This is Rita.  
She has black hair.  
She is wearing a blue dress.

Teacher: Who is she? (Pointing to the picture)

Class: She is Rita.

Teacher: What is the colour of her hair?

Class: It is black.

Teacher: What is the colour of her dress?

Class: It is blue.

### Check Your Progress 1

**Note:** Write your answer in the space given below.

- 1) Write your own activity using the Direct Method for class 9 students.

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## 1.4 THE READING METHOD

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This method was very popular in India soon after independence since English at that time was envisaged to be a library language. Michael West who lived in India for a long time was instrumental in popularizing this method. His new 'method readers' emphasized the importance of the reading skill. West believed that silent reading is the key to proficiency and that exercises in reading comprehension would enable proficiency in speech and writing. Vocabulary was seen as an essential component of reading proficiency. This led to the development of the principles of vocabulary control and resulted in the compilation of 'a general service list of English words'. This was used as standard reference for developing teaching materials and Readers graded on the basis of vocabulary were created. Only the grammar necessary for reading comprehension was taught. The vocabulary of the early reading passages and texts was strictly controlled for difficulty. An attempt was made by the teacher to expand the vocabulary as quickly as possible, since the acquisition of vocabulary was considered more important than the grammatical skills.

English is no longer considered a library language in India. Therefore, the emphasis on the Reading Method can no longer be considered. However the importance of vocabulary has again taken centre stage in English language teaching learning.

### Reflection

How do you teach vocabulary in your classroom? Do you teach it as part of the reading comprehension exercise or are there any other contexts that you consider?

## 1.5 THE BEHAVIOURIST – STRUCTURALIST PARADIGM

### 1.5.1 The Structural Approach

About 1940's and later, language experts like Charles Fries applied the principles of behaviourism in psychology and structural linguistics to language teaching. They were of the view that different languages have different ways of expressing the same meaning. These are what we call *patterns* or *structures* of the language. In any language, a pattern is made up of words, but in each language, the words are put together in certain specified ways. To be able to use the language, therefore, one needs to know the words and the order in which they occur in that language. To teach a language (English in the present context) a particular pattern or structure is presented and practiced thoroughly before the learner goes on to a new one. Only when a learner 'masters' the individual structures that make up that language, can s/he be expected to come out with an infinite number of new utterances as required by a situation. A learner in this approach is expected to be accurate in whatever s/he says or writes and this grammatical accuracy is to be realized through constant drills and construction of correct (error free) sentences from substitution tables. The aim of such substitution tables is to condition the pupils into using the correct forms of the structure by getting her/him to **imitate** or produce many examples of the correct form, i.e., **repeated reinforcement**. In fact, errors were seen as **serious aberrations** which had to be removed immediately before they became '**habits**'. Errors were considered to be the result of interference from the first language, and were viewed as bad habits which were to be prevented at all costs and eliminated if they occurred. The focus of instruction did not move beyond the sentence level.

Teachers in India continue to be influenced by the structural approach and still use manipulative drills, substitution tables and fill-in-the-blank exercises.

Do you use exercises like the following?

A. Make as many correct sentences as you can from the following table.

1	2	3	4
I You We They	have been	watching TV doing the assignments pottering in the garden painting	for an hour. since 8 o'clock.
He She	has been	waiting for the doctor cleaning the cupboards	

B) Fill in the blanks with **a** or **an** where necessary:

- 1) Raju hopes to be \_\_\_\_\_ engineer.
- 2) He comes \_\_\_\_\_ home twice \_\_\_\_\_ week.
- 3) Draw \_\_\_\_\_ elephant.
- 4) He is the son of \_\_\_\_\_ accountant.

**Reflection**

Do such exercises serve a useful purpose? What would the students learn from such an exercise? What problems/advantages do you foresee in using such an exercise?

**1.5.2 The Audio Lingual Method**

**The Audio Lingual Method** was one of the methods which was based on the **Behaviourist – Structuralist Paradigm**. Towards the end of World War-II, the US armed forces needed to learn foreign languages on a large scale as US soldiers needed to communicate with both their allies as well as the enemy countries where they had been deployed. The languages taught ranged from European languages such as French and German to East Asian languages such as Japanese and Korean. This method focused on oral/aural work and pronunciation taught through drills as well as dialogue practice in small groups of motivated learners and native language teachers. Dialogues were the main aspect of the audio-lingual approach as they provided the learners an opportunity to mimic/imitate, practice and memorise bits of language considered to be relevant to their situations. In fact, the Audio lingual method adapted many strategies of the Direct method, especially the emphasis on the spoken skill. Based on the principle that language learning is **habit formation**, the method encouraged imitation and memorization of set phrases. Structures were taught one at a time using drills. Little or no grammatical explanation was provided. Vocabulary was limited and taught in context. There was use of language laboratories, tapes and visuals. Teaching points were often determined by the differences and similarities between L1 and L2, with an emphasis on the differences. Successful responses were reinforced; great care was taken to discourage errors, as it was felt they led to bad habits. Great emphasis was given to native-like pronunciation.

Read the following conversation. The verbs in **bold** are in the simple past tense:

Priya: **Did** you go someplace last week?

Venkat: Yes, I **did**.

Priya: **Did** you have a good time?

Venkat: Yes, I **did**. I **had** a very good time.

Priya: What time **did** you get home?

Venkat: My flight **got** in a little after eleven.

**Check Your Progress 2**

**Note:** Write your answer in the space given below.

- 1) Suggest the five key words which describe the Behaviourist model.

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- 2) Explain the main features of language learning through the structural approach.

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- 3) Write any two main features of the Audio Lingual method of language teaching.

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### 1.6 ANOTHER PARADIGM SHIFT: COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Communicative language teaching (CLT) emerged in Europe and in the USA in the 1970s. This has been the dominant paradigm for several years in all the different contexts where English is taught. It continues to be the major teaching methodology in the Indian context even now.

The origin of CLT can be traced to the changing view of language which veers away from language structure towards language functions and communications (Hall, 2011). Thus language teaching moved away from individual linguistic structures to teaching people how to use language effectively when communicating. In other words, it moved from linguistic competence to communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). Communicative competence essentially suggests that forming grammatically correct sentence by the learners is not enough, they should be able to use language appropriately in a variety of settings and situations and with different types of interlocutors.

For example, linguists pointed out the hiatus that exists between form and functions of utterances. For example, how will you understand the utterance – ‘Why don’t you close the door?’ What kind of a sentence is this in grammatical terms? What meaning does this utterance convey? Is it a question or a request? Is it about asking someone to shut the door or asking someone why they are not shutting the door?

To quote Littlewood, “... from a structural viewpoint the sentence is unambiguously an interrogative, from a functional viewpoint, however, it is



ambiguous. In some circumstances, it may function as a question. For example, the speaker may genuinely wish to know why his companion never closes a certain door. In others, it may function as a command – this would probably be the case if a teacher addresses it to a pupil who had left the classroom door open. In yet another situation, it would be interpreted as “a plea, a suggestion or a complaint”.

In other words, whereas the sentence structure is stable and straightforward, its communicative function is variable and depends on specific situational and social factors. A second language learner may not be able to interpret or judge the intention of a speaker and would need to be taught.

The key word in CLT is ‘learner centred’ and activities should be planned in such a manner where active learner participation is essential. Unlike other approaches where the learner has a passive role, here the learner is the active agent and negotiator who must contribute as much as s/he gains in a cooperative atmosphere. Hence, there is a great emphasis on pair work and group work. The teacher’s role also changes to that of a facilitator, organizer, guide, monitor, manager and counselor. The teacher has to facilitate the communication process between the learners, the text and the various activities which the student and the teachers must participate together.

The communicative approach to language teaching also ushered in an era of *fluency over accuracy* and the teacher was expected to stress more on the ‘meaning of a message conveyed’ rather than on the ‘grammatical correctness of the utterance’.

In the initial stages the syllabus based on CLT concentrated on the notional functional syllabus. However, the focus later became more **eclectic**. There were primarily three types of materials used: 1) text based, 2) task based and 3) realia (authentic material). The textbooks produced according to CLT in the Indian context have been varied. Many of them have followed the traditional ‘structural’ syllabus but included tasks which include games, role plays, information gap, problem solving and so on. Many of the books have also been divided around themes which are close to the student’s world, such as - my family, school, holidays, travel, culture, environment and so on. Realia has also been included as part of CLT, i.e. posters, advertisement, maps, train schedule, graphs. The tasks set have a specific communicative purpose and train the learners to be fluent as well as accurate, although CLT has tended to emphasize fluency over accuracy.

### **Example of a problem solving activity:**

In the passage below, two paragraphs are jumbled up. Can you separate them again into two paragraphs?

Once there lived a cruel wolf in a town. One day a king saw an old man planting small mango plants. He asked him, “When will you get any fruit from these plants?” Saint Francis visited the town and wanted to see the wolf. The king laughed and said “You’ll die before the trees bear fruit.” People told him that he would be killed. But the saint would not listen. The old man smiled and said “Yes, but others will eat the fruit. Now, I am eating the fruit from the trees which my grandfather planted.” He went into the forest. When the wolf ran towards

him, he said “Come here Brother Wolf”. The king was ashamed. The cruel wolf closed its mouth and sat down at his feet.

**Example of Gap filling activity**

Ramesh Sinha is 12 Years old. He was born on 10th May 2001. His father Rakesh Sinha is a doctor. They live at No. 10, Kutab Institutional Area, Delhi. Ramesh studies in Adarsh Vidyalaya. He plays cricket and chess. His hobbies include painting and coin collection. Ramesh wants to join the local children’s club. Could you help him fill in the application form below?

**The Kutab Children’s Club**

Name:

Age:

Date of Birth:

Father’s Name:

Father’s Occupation:

Mother’s Name:

Mother’s Occupation:

Address:

Name of School:

Hobbies:

Any Special Interest:

(The teacher could get photocopies of authentic forms and ask the children to fill them).

However, all methods are subject to criticism, and from the 80’s itself there was a questioning of CLT. Brumfit (1984) for example, questioned the overemphasis on fluency at the cost of accuracy. Towards the late eighties there was again an emphasis on grammar teaching and vocabulary acquisition which had been relegated to the background in the early years of CLT. Additionally, the so-called authenticity of communicative activities was questioned. Widdowson (1998) for example questioned the authenticity of tasks such as giving directions in a classroom context, suggesting that such pair work activities cannot be termed genuine, taken away as it were from the context in which it is required. Moreover, it was suggested that CLT was not appropriate for all cultures and contexts. For example, pair work, group work, and less teacher intervention may not be suitable in more traditional cultures where there are certain expectations from a teacher.

**Check Your Progress 3**

**Note:** Write your answer in the space given below.

- 1) How is ‘linguistic competence’ different from ‘communicative competence’? Explain with examples.

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- 2) Why did communicative language teaching not produce the results it was expected to?

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## 1.7 COMMUNICATIONAL TEACHING

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Communicational teaching refers to a five-year project of exploratory teaching of English as a second language which was ‘planned, carried out and reviewed regularly by a group of interested teacher trainers and teachers of English as a part-time activity but with institutional support from the Regional Institute of English, Bangalore and the British Council in Madras (now Chennai) from 1979 to 1984’ (Prabhu 1987). The origin of this project was ‘A strongly-felt pedagogic intuition that the development of competence in a second language requires not systematization of linguistic inputs or maximization of planned practice, but rather the creation of conditions in which learners engage in an effort to cope with communication.’ This project and its findings caused a lot of excitement all over the world and while it has not been formalized into an approach, it greatly influenced other approaches, especially the Task based approach to language teaching.

### Some features of the communicational teaching

- It was a reaction against the structural-oral-situation method that was predominant at the time where the focus was on structure and its repetition.
- Problem-solving activities or tasks were the main thrust of the teaching-learning process. The communicational syllabus was not based on pre-selected language items but driven by the difficulty level of the tasks.
- The tasks provided ‘meaning-focused’ activity that required students to understand and convey meaning and where attention to language forms was incidental. These tasks were primarily cognitive in nature.
- In dealing with the class, the teacher controlled her language just as any adult would do when speaking to a child. This is called ‘natural control’.
- In communicational teaching the learner has to engage with more than one language that may be required for problem-solving activities. Hence the use of mother tongue or other languages were not prohibited.

### Sample task

Given below are a few of the tasks used during the project:

CTP Lesson: 30 January 1981

Standard VIII

The following is written on the blackboard

Mr. George	
9.15 am	Leaves home
9.45 am	Arrives at his office
10.45 am	Goes to the court
3.30 pm	Returns to his office
5.30 pm	Leaves the office
6.00 pm	Arrives home

Mrs. George	
9.45 am	Leaves home
10.00 am	Arrives at the college
12.30pm	Leaves the college
12.45pm	Arrives home
1.45 pm	Leaves home
2.00 pm	Arrives at the college
4.30 pm	Leaves the college
4.45 pm	Arrives home

Pre-task: Questions which are deliberately varied in form are as follows:

- 1) Where is Mr. George at 10.00 am?
- 2) Who leaves home first in the morning?
- 3) When does Mrs. George arrive at the college, in the afternoon?
- 4) How long does Mrs. George take to go from her house to the college?
- 5) Who is at home at 1.00pm?
- 6) How much time does Mr. George spend at his office, in the morning?

Task:

- 1) Who comes home last, in the evening?
- 2) Where is Mrs. George at 1.30 pm?
- 3) How much time does Mrs. George spend at the college, in the morning?
- 4) When does Mrs. George leave the college in the afternoon?
- 5) Who is at home at 9.30 pm?
- 6) Where is Mr. George at 4.30 pm?
- 7) How long does Mr. George spend at his office in the afternoon?
- 8) Who does not come home for lunch?

Pre-task is guided by the teacher. It is a whole class activity. The pre-task activity is meant to orient the learner for the task based activity, which means the learner is expected to do the task by herself.

(Nagaraj, 1996, pp 92 -93)

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## 1.8 THE HUMANISTIC APPROACH

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The Humanistic movement in language teaching emerged, as did some of the other approaches, from developments which occurred in education and psychology. The ideational basis of humanistic education was developed by authors such as Maslow (1970) and Rogers (1961). In terms of acquisition of L2, this approach argued even more strongly against the authoritarian teacher-centred classroom and emphasized the importance of creating environments which minimized anxiety, enhanced personal security and promoted genuine interest through a deeper engagement of the learner's whole self (Roberts, 1975). Unlike the Communicative approach which to a large extent remained syllabus-centred, the Humanistic approach permitted students to diagnose their own needs and create their syllabus. The key concerns of this paradigm shift included factors such as the following:

- Respect for learners as people, being sensitive to their feelings and encouraging respect for each other. The affective nature of the learning experience was emphasized.
- Respect for the learners own knowledge and independence, and faith that learners know best how and when to learn. The classroom activities focused on what the learners wished to engage in. This contributed to learner autonomy and critical thinking skills as well as encouraged self-discovery.
- Responsibility and respect for the need for criticism and correction.
- Teachers were regarded as enablers and facilitators who assisted the learners in their process of self-discovery rather than instructors that transmit knowledge to learners.

The ways in which these psychological and educational principles can be implemented in second language teaching learning was explored and tried out by four language teaching methods. These include 'Asher's Total Physical Response, Curran's Community Language Learning, Gattegno's Silent Way, and Lozanov's Suggestopedia.' We shall discuss briefly two of these methods which will bring out the ways in which the basic principles of humanism can be realized in the classroom.

### 1.8.1 Community Language Learning

Charles Curran, who was the originator of community language learning (CLL), was a catholic priest who taught psychology and counseling. His approach to teaching L2 is heavily influenced by the methods of counseling therapy. In a CLL class, learners typically sit in a circle and talk naturally about the subject which is of personal relevance to them. The learners may speak either in the first language L1 or in the L2. The teacher stands behind the learner who is speaking and either gives the L2 translation of what the learner has said in L1, or reformulates the learner's L2 utterance correctly and appropriately. The learner then repeats what the teacher says and so that class moves on from one learner to the other in a similar fashion. The conversations are recorded and replayed at the end of the class. The whole purpose being to help the children analyse the contents and learn from the experience.

A CLL class thus had no preset syllabus; the language content was derived directly from the interests and concerns of the learners themselves. The teacher had two roles: first was that of the resource person who helps the learner to formulate the L2 message that they wish to convey. The second was to create a supportive and non-judgmental, anxiety free atmosphere in the classroom.

Most institutional settings such as schools and colleges find such an approach much too democratic to follow. However, many language programmes have drawn upon its principles such as the emphasis on learner-centeredness, group work, learner autonomy and the facilitative role of the teacher.

### 1.8.2 Total Physical Response

This method was evolved by James Asher, an experimental psychologist who theorized that the acquisition of L2 is very similar to L1. Since young children acquire their first language largely in the form of commands or encouragement to act ('sit down' 'finish your dinner') the acquisition of L2 should follow a similar pattern through commands that require a physical response. Central to TPR is the notion that all language learning (including L1 and L2) can be presented through commands and physical actions.

TPR did not become a fully implemented method within ELT. However, teachers might draw on it from time to time especially when teaching young learners. This method can be offered at the beginner level but may not appeal to learners at an advance level.

#### Check Your Progress 4

**Note:** Write your answer in the space given below.

- 1) Describe the salient features of the Humanistic approach to language teaching.

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## 1.9 THE CONSTRUCTIVIST PARADIGM

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**The National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF 2005) envisioned the aim and methodology of teaching learning as the process of construction of knowledge by the child. Every experience of life adds to the previous knowledge and helps to create and develop new ideas.** Thus in constructivist methodology the teaching learning environment should be designed to support the learners' knowledge construction process. Wilson 1996 defines a constructivist learning environment as "a place where learners may work together and support each other as they use a variety of tools and information sources in their guided, pursuit of learning goals and problem solving activities". He calls it a learning

environment rather than an instructional environment because in a constructivist setting learning rather than teaching is emphasized. Designers of the constructivist learning environment emphasize the following seven pedagogical goals:

- 1) Provide experiences with the knowledge of what is a constructivist process;
- 2) Provide experiences and appreciation for multiple perspectives;
- 3) Embed learning in realistic and relevant contexts;
- 4) Encourage ownership and voice in the learning process;
- 5) Embed learning in social experiences;
- 6) Encourage use of multiple mode of representation. For example, written and spoken modes as well as films, projects, experimentation and so on; and
- 7) Encourage self awareness of knowledge of construction process.

*Cuningham et al 1993*

For the proper facilitation of knowledge construction, a teacher should create an interactive environment between students and teachers and between the students themselves. This can happen when students are engaged in collaborative activities which involve leadership, negotiation and cooperation thus encouraging an authentic way of learning. At the same time, students should be encouraged to make optimal use of what they know and be individual in their thinking process.

A good example of this could be role play where students take on the roles of characters in a book, famous historical figures, body parts and plant parts. In this way, they will understand the depth and importance of these perspectives.

### **1.9.1 Discourse Perspective in Constructivism**

Anandan 2012 strongly feels that since language exists only in the form of discourses, our focus should be on enabling children to construct discourse, both orally as well as in the written form. This is possible only through providing authentic linguistic experience to children through discourses.

Discourse oriented pedagogy necessitates redefining curricular objectives in terms of discourses and not in terms of structures. For example, grammar teaching and teaching of writing are not separate skills but are inextricably linked to the students own writing. Using the students' own writing as a text, teachers using the constructivist approach teach grammar using one or a combination of the following methods: mini-lessons, grammar journals, one-to-one conferences and peer group activities. We shall briefly discuss each of these methods.

Mini-lessons arise from student written work and are designed to be very brief, say 5 to 10 minutes. For example, if a teacher has noticed certain problematic sentences from students' essays, rather than refer to textbook exercises to address the issue, she may select sentences from the students' work and use those sentences as a way to promote discussion about the stylistic choices that students make. Note the strategy emphasises stylistic choices rather than right or wrong answers, therefore, it gives students an opportunity to discuss their own writing as well as that of their peers. It sharpens their critical skills as they must consider whether their sentences work or don't work effectively. The goal is to have the students work on 2 or 3 sentences every day, hence the term 'mini-lesson'.

A Grammar Journal is a notebook in which students keep a record of ungrammatical sentences they have written. Teachers often guide the students to these errors but do not correct them. Students rewrite these sentences, making alternative stylistic choices to improve each sentence. During the one-to-one conference, the teachers discuss the editing choices and monitor the student's progress (Gupta 2012, pp159-160).

The following section would give you an idea about a typical lesson which follows the discourse perspective.

The Unit is titled "The Voice of the Voiceless".

The issue of discrimination is presented using a number of discourses like cartoon, newspaper report, profile, story and poem.

We present here a lesson transaction using the news reports.

### **Reading the news reports:**

#### **Process-reading**

Let the learners go through the news reports individually.

Ask one or two learners to present the ideas they have conceived from the reports.

Divide the class into 5/6 member groups.

Assign each piece of news to two groups and ask them to read it again.

Interact with the groups and help them with their reading (by asking them to refer to the glossary, asking probing questions, etc.)

You may ask questions such as:

What is the report about?

Where did it happen?

Who were involved in it?

Let the groups present what they have understood from the news reports.

Let there be a brief discussion on the atrocities against the weaker sections of the society based on the newspaper reports.

Ask the learners to present instances of such atrocities against the weaker sections of the society in their neighbourhood.

Let the groups collect as many reports and photos as possible in English or any other language from newspapers and magazines.

Let them categorise those issues under five or six heads.

Let all groups compile a 'magazine', each using the collection of newspaper reports and photos based on different issues.

Based on all the issues, let them fill in the table given in the text.

Assessing the data entered in the table, the learners may prepare a brief report.

(Activity taken from English Sourcebook (p.45), Standard-7, Government of Kerala, SCERT, 2008)



In this paradigm, it is expected that the teachers fix goals together with students, asking them what they need and want to achieve and the different discourse domains and skills. This methodology avoids the linear mode of presenting language elements to learners whether in terms of structural grading or lexical grading or even in terms of functions and notions. Instead, the text book is now worked out in terms of gradation of discourses. For example, diary as a discourse is introduced in class four and autobiographical writing at the secondary level.

### Check Your Progress 5

**Note:** Write your answer in the space given below.

- 1) Create a classroom activity using the discourse perspective for class IX students.

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### 1.9.2 Vygotsky's Theory of Social Constructivism

Social Constructivism was developed by the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky, although himself a cognitivist, believed that it was not possible to separate learning from its social context. He firmly asserted that learning was not simply the assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge by the learners. Instead, he argued that all cognitive functions originate in social interactions. Therefore, the active learner not only links new knowledge to prior knowledge, but also applies it to understand authentic situations.

Vygotsky's main interest was in the study of language development. Learning for him occurred through dialogue which took place between the teacher and the learners, between the learners themselves and between the learner and the text. Vygotsky believed that learners made sense of new knowledge through an internal or intermental dialogue. Thus learning was interacting in a social setting as well as reconstructing ideas in one's own mind and sharing them with others. Language was used by the learner to organize thought, to learn as well as to communicate and share experiences. In other words, language enabled a child to imagine, create, manipulate and use new ideas and share them with other people. Parents and teachers provided learners with new vocabulary in terms of words, phrases and chunks along with the structures of language. Children jointly reconstructed experiences which provided guided support to each other, hence furthering their learning. While working with others, in groups or in pairs, the children brought about developmental change not only in themselves but also in others.

Some of the major tenets developed by Vygotsky was the **Zone of Proximal Development** and the **Level of Actual Development**. The area in which an individual's optimum learning can occur is called the **Zone of Proximal Development**. The **Level of Actual Development is the level of development that learners' have already reached, and can attempt any activity independent of any help**. Vygotsky conceptualized ZPD and recognized that learners were able to reach beyond their capacity if they were guided and given prompts by someone more advanced. They needed to be scaffolded until they gained confidence to work independently.

Since the basis of constructivism is learner centredness where the learner is actively engaged in the construction of knowledge, a set of language learning strategies are implemented by the learner. Some of the strategies which have gained prominence in recent years are Critical Thinking and Reflective Learning.

**Critical thinking** is that mode of thinking — about any subject, content, or problem — in which the thinker improves the quality of his or her thinking by skillfully analyzing, assessing, and reconstructing it. Critical thinking is self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. It produces learners who are bright and innovative and likely to succeed in the academic and other spheres of life. According to Halpern (1996), Critical thinking is purposeful, reasoned and goal directed. It involves problem solving, making inferences, predicting and using skills which involve inferencing in specific contexts. Critical thinking is also sometimes called directed thinking because it focuses on the desired outcome. In order to be critical thinkers, we must encourage our students to assess the validity of statements, news stories, arguments and so on. Therefore, using the material and class room activities, the teacher should help the learner develop critical thinking skill. This would involve:

- 1) the ability to identify and interpret information, facts, opinions, intentions in any reading / writing material.
- 2) employ contextual clues to analyse the meaning of sentences and words.
- 3) express personal response to description of experiences using reasoned judgement.
- 4) make hypothesis, explore alternatives and predict consequences.
- 5) communicate effectively.

**Reflective Learning** is a part of critical thinking which refers to the process of analyzing and making judgements of what has happened. Reflective learning helps learners to develop higher order thinking skills by inducing them to relate new knowledge to prior understanding. It enables them to think in both abstract and conceptual terms, applying specific strategies to novel tasks. The reflective learner must understand their own thinking and learning strategies. If a teacher must give scope for reflective learning to her learners, she must provide enough *wait time* to the learners when they are asked a question. She must provide an emotionally supportive and non-threatening environment in the classroom. In a reflective classroom, the teachers ask questions which require reason and evidence providing some help / explanation to guide the learners' thoughts during exploration. In a reflective socioconstructivist classroom there is a lot of peer/ group work which help learners to see the other's point of view. This helps learners to become sensitive to the people and issues around them.

**Check Your Progress 6**

**Note:** Write your answer in the space given below.

- 1) What was the main emphasis of the Social Constructivist Approach and how did it differ from other constructivists?

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## 1.10 THE POST METHOD ERA

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For over a century, ‘language educators sought to solve the problems of language teaching by focusing attention almost exclusively on Method’ (Stern, 1983:452). Traditionally it was believed that if we followed the right set of teaching principles it would lead to the most effective learning outcomes. However, this thinking has been questioned in recent times as we have witnessed the rise and fall of several methods throughout the recent history of language teaching learning (Brown, 2002). Hence, now there is disillusionment with ‘methods’ as a problem solver for the teaching learning problem. In this ‘post methods era’, attention has shifted from **method** to **pedagogy**, i.e. to the teaching learning processes and the contribution of the teacher to this process. Brown (2002) discusses some of the reasons for the decline of what he calls the “method syndrome”:

- There cannot be an all –purpose ‘designer method’ that will work for all the disparate contexts where L2 is taught
- It leads to an unequal power relationship between ELT academics and researchers on the one hand and teachers in the classroom on the other hand, as she merely has to apply the method which is handed to her. It is forgotten that it is the teacher in the classroom who best understands her students and their contexts.
- **Methods** suggest a static set of procedures while **Pedagogy** suggests a dynamic interplay between learners, teachers, and the instructional materials during the process of teaching learning.

Kumaravadivelu (2003) noted that in the initial form, post method practice may be termed as: principled eclecticism in which the teachers plan and adapt their classroom procedure by absorbing practice from a variety of methods. However, while this is how most classes are actually taught, the post method discourse has developed further via three principles: Particularity, Practicality and Possibility (Kumaravadivelu, 2006 page: 59).

These principles are as follows:

**Particularity:** Teachers have to take into account the social, linguistic and culture background of their learners.

**Practicality:** The teachers are encouraged to theorize from their own practices from their classrooms and put into practice their own theories. This gives them autonomy and self respect.

**Possibility:** The socio political consciousness of learners is addressed in the classroom ‘as a catalyst for identity formation and social transformation’.

Brown (2002) suggests that a teacher must prepare a checklist of questions in the dynamic process of teaching learning:

- 1) Does the technique appeal to the genuine interests of your students? Is it relevant to their lives?
- 2) Is the technique presented in a positive, enthusiastic manner?
- 3) Are students clearly aware of the purpose of the technique?

- 4) Do students have some choice in: (a) choosing some aspect of the technique? And/ or (b) determining how they go about fulfilling the goals of the technique?
- 5) Does the technique encourage students to discover for themselves certain principles or rules (rather than simply being “told”)?
- 6) Does it encourage students in some way to develop or use effective strategies of learning and communication?
- 7) Does it contribute – at least to some extent – to students’ ultimate autonomy and independence (from you)?
- 8) Does it foster cooperative negotiation with other students in the class? Is it a truly interactive technique?
- 9) Does the technique present a “reasonable challenge”?
- 10) Do students receive sufficient feedback on their performance (from each other or from you)?

(Brown, 2002, p.15)

**Check Your Progress 7**

**Note:** Write your answer in the space given below.

- 1) What is the difference between method and pedagogy?

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**1.11 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit we discussed the various methods which have attempted to solve the teaching learning problems in recent times with little success. We discussed the fact that there has been a preoccupation with the search for the best ‘method’ which would serve as a panacea for all the problems of teaching learning of L2. In the current scenario there has been a major shift from the obsession with method to the stress on pedagogy. This was primarily because the concept of ‘method’ was too prescriptive, assuming knowledge of contexts in a top-down fashion. The shift to language pedagogy is much more dynamic involving an interplay between the teachers, learners, the instructional material as well as the curricular objectives.

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## 1.13 ANSWERS

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### Check Your Progress 2

- 1)
  - Stimulus - response
  - Imitation
  - Repetition
  - Reinforcement
  - Habit formation
- 2)
  - A particular language pattern or structure is presented and practiced thoroughly before the learner goes on to a new one.
  - Grammatical accuracy is emphasized which is realized through constant drills and construction of correct (error free) sentences from substitution tables.
  - Errors are seen as serious aberrations
  - The focus of instruction does not move beyond the sentence level.
- 3)
  - Audio Lingual method focused on oral/aural work and pronunciation was taught through drills as well as dialogue practice.
  - Dialogues were the main aspect of the audio-lingual approach as they provided the learners an opportunity to mimic/imitate, practice and memorise bits of language considered to be relevant to their situations.

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) 'Linguistic Competence' refers to the mastery of grammatical rules and structures of the language. 'Communicative Competence', on the other hand, refers to the ability to understand the appropriateness of the social context in which utterances are produced and exchanged. It also involves the ability to produce socially appropriate utterances.
- 2)
  - CLT over emphasised on fluency at the cost of accuracy.
  - Authenticity of communicative activities was questioned.
  - CLT was not appropriate for all cultures and contexts.

#### Check Your Progress 4

- 1)
  - Respect for learners as people, being sensitive to their feelings and encouraging respect for each other. The affective nature of the learning experience was underscored.
  - Respect for the learners own knowledge and independence, and faith that learners know best how and when to learn. The classroom activities focused on what the learners wished to engage in. This contributed to learner autonomy and critical thinking skills as well as encouraged self-discovery.
  - Responsibility and respect for the need for criticism and correction.
  - Teachers were regarded as enablers and facilitators who assisted the learners in their process of self-discovery rather than instructors that transmit knowledge to learners.

#### Check Your Progress 5

- 1)
  - Emphasis on social interaction
  - Knowledge construction to be built through a social activity
  - Other constructivist approaches primacy given to the individual and knowledge construction at an individual level.

#### Check Your Progress 7

- 1) **Methods** suggest a static set of procedures while **Pedagogy** suggests a dynamic interplay between learners, teachers, and the instructional materials during the process of teaching learning.