

An Investigation into different theories and methodologies related to the teaching of English as a foreign/second language

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Introduction

Over the past twenty to thirty years, there has been a shift in ideas away from viewing language learning as a process of forming correct language habits to an emphasis on the learner and the mental processes that lead a person to be able to use a language. Much of this revision has resulted from developments in our understanding of second language acquisition (SLA) and has led to a realization that no single teaching ‘method’ will enable all students in every learning situation to acquire the target language they wish. As Nunan writes, “More recently, it has been realized that there never was and probably never will be a method for all, and the focus in recent years has been on the development of classroom tasks and activities which are consonant with what we know about processes of second language acquisition, and which are also in keeping with the dynamics of the classroom itself” (1995:228). Nevertheless, for teachers just joining the profession, this lack of a guiding ‘ideology’ (for want of a better phrase) can often lead to confusion and worries about the validity of the practices they use. Consequently, it is important that teachers such as these have

a knowledge of the historical background of language teaching. With this knowledge teachers will be better able to see where the practices they have been trained in originate from and will be better able to judge the potential benefits and drawbacks of such practices. This paper sets out, firstly, to briefly outline the development of English language teaching from the late nineteenth century through to the late twentieth century and, secondly, to consider in more detail the methodologies that appeared during this period. In considering these methodologies, particular attention will be given as to what extent ideas within them are still relevant to today's teaching environment.

A brief historical background to English language teaching methodologies

As with any historical review, the starting point is always somewhat arbitrary, nevertheless, in this paper mine will be the late nineteenth century. I feel that this is valid for two main reasons. Firstly, by this time the idea of Empire, regardless of the social and ethical implications of this phenomenon, was firmly established within Europe and it created a need for people to be able to speak more than just their native language. Secondly, it was at this time that a real consideration and attempt to create a 'science' of language learning was made largely in reaction to what were seen as the increasing inefficiencies of an approach based on the learning of the classical languages of Greek and Latin, known as the Grammar-Translation method.

The Grammar-Translation Method focused almost exclusively on reading and writing with only very marginal attention given to listening and speaking. Essentially in this approach, students studied notable literary texts taken from the target language and were shown how to analyze sentences into the various parts of speech. Great emphasis was placed on developing

a knowledge of grammar so that students would be able to analyze their texts correctly. Having analyzed the text, students were then required to translate it into their own language in order to show their understanding. This approach was adopted for the study of modern languages, in the mid to late nineteenth century, in attempt to give them the same prestige as that which accrued to the study of Greek and Latin (White 1988). Nevertheless by the 1880s, a group of researchers, mainly in Europe, began to question this style of teaching and to argue for emphasis to be given to the skills of listening and speaking over those of reading and writing.

During the latter part of the nineteenth century in Europe, a number of researchers were becoming increasingly interested in studying the sounds of different languages, how languages were structured and organized and, finally, how vocabulary was stored in the memory. With this growing interest in analyzing living languages, it was felt that a more scientific approach to selecting and grading grammar and vocabulary should be made. Although this Reform Movement, as it became known, remained disparate with researchers such as Henry Sweet in England, Wilhelm Viëtor in Germany and Paul Passy in France pursuing different but complementary lines of research, during the late 1880s there was a definite meeting of minds. This resulted in the formation of the International Phonetic Association in 1886 and the development of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) which it was hoped would provide the potential for any language to be transcribed (Richards and Rodgers 1986). Clearly, then, the Reform Movement was significant to the development of language teaching for a number of reasons. Firstly, it emphasized the importance of taking a scientific approach to selecting and dealing with the content to be studied. Secondly, it stressed the importance of accurate pronunciation so that learners would be understood.

Finally, the Reform Movement laid the foundations for the beginnings of the field of applied linguistics.

Following on from the work undertaken by the Reform Movement, in terms of the development of English language teaching, three key names appeared during the early twentieth century: Daniel Jones, Harold Palmer and Michael West. Despite working in different areas, the ideas of these three men helped to create what became known in the United Kingdom as the Direct Method, or the Berlitz Method in the United States. Of the three, perhaps the most significant figure was Harold Palmer because through his collaboration with both Jones (phonetics) and West (reading skills and vocabulary selection) and his own work into the selection and grading of language he helped to establish many of the areas that concerned researchers in language teaching during the early to mid- twentieth century in Britain (Howatt 1984). In addition, Palmer also suggested that people can learn a language ‘informally’ as well as ‘formally’, the former being a natural process while the latter is that which takes place in classrooms, prefacing a distinction that would later become very important in 1970s SLA research (White 1988).

However, the Direct Method became known as such because it stressed the direct relationship between words and meaning and it was felt that language learning took place naturally through the development of listening and speaking skills. Consequently, Direct Method lessons made use of the target language rather than the students’ native language. Clearly, Palmer and others realized that simply bombarding students with large amounts of the target language would be unlikely to result in any language acquisition, therefore, a sub-theme of the Direct Method was developed which became

known as 'Situational Language Teaching'. This idea argued that language could not be learnt without a context and so new words should be introduced within the context provided by the classroom. As a result, it was argued, students would be able to visualize the intended meaning of the new language.

Therefore, the Direct Method can be seen as important to the development of language teaching, particularly in the United Kingdom, because it stressed the importance of developing aural and oral skills, the careful selection, and grading of language and the use of context to help embed the new language meaningfully.

Following the development of the Direct Method, the history of English language teaching begins to divide into two strands. The first remains in Britain and pursues a course largely charted by the effects of the Direct Method. The second, however, develops in the United States where a growing dissatisfaction with the Direct Method and an interest in applying elements of psychology to language learning gave rise to what became known as 'structural linguistics' and 'behaviouralism' in language. It is this second strand that will now be considered.

During the 1920s and 1930s in America, anthropologists such as Edward Sapir and Franz Boas became interested in studying the languages spoken by Native Americans. It was discovered that these languages were for the most part spoken only and that Native Americans had no tradition of objectively analyzing their own languages. Therefore, it was argued that techniques were required for transcribing what researchers heard. At the same time in America, there was interest in discovering how children

learned their own native language. From observations made, it was argued that children react to linguistic stimuli provided by their parents, and in turn, parents tend to positively reinforce the responses they desire, and negatively reinforce those which are deemed inappropriate or incorrect. Consequently, Bloomfield in a book entitled 'Language' (1933, cited in Crystal 1997) argued that humans, in learning language, follow a behavioural pattern of stimulus-response-reinforcement (Harmer 1991). It was posited that elements of the process of L1 acquisition would be appropriate to the process of acquiring an L2 and so, with some adaptation, these ideas could be applied to the classroom. Initially, new language would be modeled and explained through gestures to ensure correct understanding. Subsequently, the target phrases would be repeated chorally and individually, including both negative and interrogative versions. Finally the ability to respond correctly to stimuli would be checked by using unrehearsed versions of the target phrases (Nunan 1995). Thus, this behaviourist approach to language learning required plenty of pattern practice to establish the new 'rules' and remove any unwanted L1 interference.

As the 1930s progressed, the idea of being able to train large numbers of people to learn foreign languages through aural input followed by oral output became very attractive to the US military. As a result throughout the 1940s the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) was developed and following the end of World War Two, this programme evolved into what became known as the Audio-lingual Method.

In 1957 Skinner's book 'Verbal Behaviour' was published (cited in Harmer 1991). In this book, Skinner argued that language learning follows a behavioural pattern. However, two years later, in 1959, Chomsky led an

attack on behaviourist ideas. Chomsky argued that from the behaviourist perspective the learner was essentially passive, waiting to be acted upon. However, Chomsky argued that this view could not explain why children, when learning their own native language, made 'faulty' but common errors. Chomsky pointed out that often children used the regular 'ed' past ending of verbs even with irregular verbs. Chomsky therefore argued that rather than being passive and static in language learning, children were, in fact, active and creative. This idea of learners being creative with grammar, Chomsky termed 'transformational grammar' and it was from this that mistakes could be viewed as evidence of thinking about language rather than of inadequate understanding of language rules. In addition, Chomsky argued for attention to be given to the learning environment and for greater emphasis to be placed on linguistic competence. Linguistic competence refers to the ability to know about language, and from this knowledge of a finite number of 'rules' it was suggested an infinite number of utterances could be made. "Chomsky's proposals were intended to discover the mental realities underlying the way people use language: competence is seen as an aspect of our general psychological capacity" (Crystal 1997:413). Thus, it was concluded that language learning should not rely simply on repetition and rote learning, but should include some awareness of how a language is structured and formed.

This debate between behaviourists and those who followed Chomsky (who was himself not strictly a linguist nor was he primarily interested in language acquisition) led to a reevaluation of language teaching throughout the 1960s and 1970s in both America and Britain. Increasingly, researchers began to distance themselves from the now traditional behaviourist perspective, favouring a more cognitive psychological view point in which

the learner was seen as an active participant in the learning process and where the teacher was encouraged to take the role of facilitator rather than that of instructor. Of particular importance here, are methodologies which became known as 'humanistic' methodologies because of the importance they gave to affective and emotional factors of language learning (Nunan 1995).

Stevick in 'Teaching and learning languages' (1982, cited in Nunan 1995) argued that both the Audio-lingual Method and a cognitive approach could work as well or as badly as each other despite being educational opposites, therefore it was argued that neither was more effective than the other and thus a different approach was required. Consequently, rather than focus on the target language as the main factor, the humanist tradition argued for the centrality of the learner. Nunan points out that "Perhaps the most important article of faith is that the learner's emotional attitude towards the teacher, towards fellow learners, and towards the target language and culture, is the single most important variable in language learning" (1995:235). Thus, the teacher's role in these methodologies is to facilitate learning by providing the most optimal learning classroom environment by creating a relaxed and non-threatening atmosphere.

Consequently, during the late 1960s and early 1970s a number of new humanistic methodologies appeared. Firstly, Lozanov (1971), initially to teach Bulgarian nationals own their L1, developed Suggestopedia. This methodology required a sense of 'ease' and involved students primarily in listening to large amounts of input accompanied by classical music which was supposed to stimulate the memory. A second methodology, developed by Curran (1972 / 1976) was called Community Language Learning. Here students,

initially using their native language, talked through a 'knower' (the teacher) who then translated what they wanted to say into English. These exchanges were recorded and later transcribed by the teacher for group analysis in a subsequent session. Thus, despite being supposedly learner-centred, this methodology required a great deal of expertise and time on the part of the teacher. The final approach to be mentioned here was developed by Gattegno (1972) and called the Silent Way. In this approach the teacher modeled the language to be learned then silently indicated what the students were to do. This process was repeated until students provided the desired response. Because the expression of meaning relies, to a large extent on gesturing, sometimes the teacher made use of coloured Cuisenaire rods to indicate grammatical structures and stress patterns.

Finally, and to a certain extent growing out of the humanistic tradition, are methodologies which are based on SLA research. As had happened at the start of the twentieth century, so during the mid to late 1970s, attention returned to observing how children gained proficiency in their own native language. Following such observation, researchers such as Asher, Terrell and Krashen argued that students required large amounts of listening practice and that students should be allowed time before responding (a silent period). Krashen argued that input should be roughly-tuned, that is at a level which is slightly in advance of the student's current ability so that the student will be challenged but without being demoralized. In addition, Krashen suggested a difference between what he called acquisition (natural language learning and available for use automatically) and learning (formal study which can only be applied consciously). As will be seen later, these final methodologies are not without their critics and it is in part perhaps because of them that the language teaching profession is now wary of putting all its

eggs in one basket, so to speak.

Having completed this very brief and heavily edited survey of the historical development of language teaching over the past one hundred and fifty years or so, I would now like to move on and to evaluate these methodologies and attempt to point out in what ways they remain relevant to language teaching today.

Evaluation of the different language teaching methodologies

The Grammar-Translation Method

This method, which was also sometimes known as the German or Prussian method, was widely used in Europe between 1840 and 1940, especially in places around the world where developing a speaking ability was considered less important. However, in today's world, which requires a good speaking ability using up-to-date vocabulary, this method lacks relevance and, some have argued, any real educational validity. Richards and Rodgers say "... though it may be true to say that the Grammar-Translation Method is still widely practiced, it has no advocates. It is a method for which there is no theory. There is no literature that offers a rationale or justification for it or that attempts to relate it to issues in linguistics, psychology or educational theory" (1986:5). Therefore, whilst for a small minority of students the ability to analyze classical texts into parts of speech and use this analysis to translate a given text either into or from their own language may be a necessary skill, for most students this ability is no longer considered necessary.

The Reform Movement

In contrast to the Grammar-Translation Method, the Reform Movement through the International Phonetic Association (IPA), which was formed in

1886, put forward five main points in relation to language teaching: (i) to study the spoken language (ii) to teach phonetics in order to aid pronunciation (iii) to use conversations to introduce idioms and conversational phrases (iv) to use an inductive approach to grammar (that is, enabling students to discover grammatical rules for themselves) and (v) to teach meaning with reference to known words in the target language rather than the mother tongue. In 1899 Sweet in 'The Practical Study of Languages' (cited in Richards and Rodgers 1986) argued for language skills to be split into the four distinctive skill areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing. This idea is now widely accepted throughout the language teaching profession.

With reference to the IPA's five points noted above, whilst in general I would argue that the *ideas* of the Reform Movement remain valid today, a few need qualification. Firstly, it is true that emphasis needs to be placed on the spoken language and conversations are a useful means of demonstrating the use of idioms and conversational phrases (points i and iii above), but I would argue that neither reading nor writing skills should be neglected as these can also provide valuable insight in the contemporary usage of language. Secondly, phonetics can be useful in pronunciation (point ii), but it is also directly linked to both reading and writing and students should be made aware that they can use their knowledge of phonetics to help them 'sound-out' words when reading and, *in addition*, to spell words they want when writing. Thirdly, whilst in an ideal world it may be best to leave students to discover the 'rules' of a language, in practice I believe this needs to be assessed in relation to time constraints and other factors surrounding the teaching-learning situation. Nevertheless, giving students the independent ability to think about the target language is a useful guiding principle. Finally, as with the previous point, I think that a flexible approach should be taken with regard to establishing meaning, especially where the new vocab-

ulary and phrases express a difficult or abstract concept. Relating this to the mother tongue may, in the long run, both speed and aid the learning process.

The Direct Method

The Direct Method is important because it helped to put into practice the ideas of the Reform Movement by deliberately teaching the spoken language with the aim of developing 'good' pronunciation. The Direct Method also drew on the interest of the mid to late nineteenth century into natural language acquisition and attempted to apply ideas about L1 acquisition to the acquisition of the L2. Nevertheless, even leading members of the Reform Movement, such as Sweet, had reservations about it and ultimately it was criticized because "... it lacked a rigorous basis in applied linguistic theory, and for this reason it was often criticized by the more academically based proponents of the Reform Movement" (Richards and Rodgers 1986:11). In addition, to be fully effective, the Direct Method required native speaker quality teachers who really understood the method but, unfortunately, such people were not always available.

Consequently, although the emphasis given to the spoken language in the Direct Method is valuable, because of the insistence on the use of only the target language in the classroom, I feel that this method lacks relevance to today's language teaching situation.

The Oral Method and Situational Language Teaching

These two approaches, associated with Palmer and A. S. Hornby respectively, attempted to make a more principled explanation of teaching English in order to make up for the perceived deficiencies of the Direct Method. Palmer argued that grammar should be taught explicitly and developed

substitution tables to enable students to practice different structures. At the same time, he also became aware of the need for some sort of selection and grading process. This tied in with work done by West in relation to vocabulary and the teaching of reading to Bengali students of English in India during the early part of the twentieth century. Consequently the Oral Method was designed to make students develop desired linguistic habits and as such can be seen as a behaviourist approach which “... in all probability ... is a label he [Palmer] would have accepted without much of a struggle” (Howatt 1984: 274).

Through the 1920s and 1930s, Palmer developed an ideological basis for the Oral Method and published a number of texts both in justification of the method and as resource books for teachers interested in pursuing it. At the same time, Palmer was aware that in classrooms language needed to be presented in context to aid meaning. This tied in with ideas being developed by Hornby through his Situational Language Teaching (SLT) method.

SLT was designed firmly within the confines of the language classroom. It focused on developing proficiency in all four skills but with a primary focus on speaking skills. As such, all mistakes were corrected because ‘accuracy’ in speech was deemed to be important. In addition, SLT used a structural syllabus with sufficient vocabulary to make these structures meaningful, *therefore* here, “... *situation* ... means the use of concrete objects, pictures, and realia, which together with actions and gestures can be used to demonstrate the meanings of new language items” (Richards and Rodgers 1986:38).

Within both the Oral Method and SLT the learner is viewed, particularly in the early stages of learning, as something to be controlled and shaped

by the teacher to ensure against the faulty use of grammar and use of poor pronunciation. Later, as the learner becomes more proficient, a little more freedom is given to them but essentially control remains firmly in the hands of the teacher. Therefore the role of the teacher is to (i) present language (ii) orchestrate the students' learning and (iii) carefully manipulate students through use of questions and commands to elicit correct responses. Nevertheless, controlling the teacher is the textbook which clearly sets out what the teacher should do, consequently the textbook here can be seen as being more of a guide for teachers than for the students. However, it should be pointed out that this was because the methods would likely be used by inexperienced and under-resourced teachers rather than due to a lack in teachers' abilities *per se*.

The Oral Method and SLT remained influential in Britain throughout the 1950s and 1960s and although his work was not known in Britain until the 1960s reflected research being undertaken by Charles Fries in the United States. Thus, these methods can be seen as the British version of structural linguistics and behaviourism, though it should be noted particularly in the late 1950s and early 1960s that emphasis was being placed on the relation of language to situation by researchers such as J. R. Firth and M. A. K. Halliday in Britain.

Given the above description, I would argue that, with certain reservations, the Oral Method and SLT still have some relevance to today's language teaching. In particular, the emphasis on teaching all four skills with a primary focus on speaking remains persuasive. I would also suggest that, especially at the early stages of language learning, practice in substituting vocabulary in structures is useful. In addition, explicit explanations of grammar

can also be useful for students, though this should be done in moderation as determined by the teaching situation. Finally, the importance of introducing language within context also remains important today. However, the lack of freedom given to students and the idea that the students' linguistic ability is to be molded by the teacher are problematic.

The Audio-lingual Method (Behaviouralism)

In terms of language teaching, the method which has become to be regarded as exemplifying behaviouralism is the Audio-lingual Method. The Audio-lingual Method has its roots in work undertaken by structural linguists and behavioural psychologists such as Bloomfield, Skinner and Fries in the United States. As has been noted above, Bloomfield's interest in anthropological work in relation to the languages spoken by Native Americans led him to develop a guide to illustrate how field researchers should gather information about the spoken language and how to learn language. These ideas were further refined and later adopted by the US military in the ASTP. Here, an experienced linguist worked with a native speaker of the target language whose role it was to drill the students in the structures identified by the linguist (Howatt 1984) with the intention of ensuring learners develop 'correct' linguistic habits. Moulton (1963) identified five key aspects which form the Audio-lingual rationale: (i) language is speech, not writing (ii) a language is a set of habits (iii) teach the language not about the language (iv) a language is what native speakers say, not what someone thinks is the right way (v) languages are different (Nunan 1995). These aspects were influential in guiding the development of language teaching the 1950s and 1960s.

As with the Oral Method and SLT above, there was no place for errors in the Audio-lingual Method. Fries was interested in why mistakes occurred

and began research into contrastive analysis, that is comparing different languages to each other in an attempt to discover where they complement and interfere with each other. It was felt that such research would aid learners' progress by helping them to see where their L1 might hinder their understanding of and progress in the L2.

Nevertheless, both behaviouralism and the Audio-lingual Method were criticized from the late 1950s largely because they viewed the student as passive and that through repetition there was no guarantee that learners would have the facility to cope with new and unfamiliar language in real-life situations. Furthermore, it was argued that 'mistakes' may not result from only L1 interference but rather occur because students are actively trying to assimilate and experiment with the language they are learning. Indeed, research by H.C. Dulay and M.K. Burt who looked at 145 Spanish children learning English (aged between 5 and 8) found that 85% of errors made by these children were similar to those made the students made in their native L1 acquisition process. Thus, it was clear that making 'mistakes' was a more complex issue than behaviouralism could allow for. Therefore, while the Audio-lingual method provided a clear structure for inexperienced teachers "It was based on theories which were inadequate as explanation of human learning" (Nunan 1995:232).

Therefore, I would suggest that, though, ideas of pattern practice may be useful in the early stages of language learning, as learners develop their ability they will need to be given more challenges and freedom to allow them to continue to improve their skills. Because neither behaviouralism nor the Audio-lingual Method allow the student this freedom, I would argue that they have a limited relevance in language teaching today.

Communicative Language Teaching

With research that was taking place during the mid to late 1960s, it was clear that behaviourism could not answer questions that contemporary research was posing. Researchers such as Austin and Searle were proposing that language was made up of 'speech acts' and that these acts could only be fully understood when language was placed in context. In 1965 Chomsky developed his idea of linguistic competence which argued that a learner needed a working knowledge of language structure as opposed to simply developing performance, that is, the ability to use the language. The following year, Hymes (1966) developed the idea of communicative competence which has had a huge influence on language teaching. Therefore, the emphasis in language teaching was changing to one in which the real world, or at least real world situations, were brought into the classroom. This movement was also reflected in the treatment of language texts. Rather than trying to slice them up into their component parts, emphasis was placed on looking at the text as a whole, thus ideas of cohesion and coherence in discourse became of increasing importance in understanding how language was created and used.

I would argue that the communicative approach to language teaching remains relevant to language teaching today for a number of reasons. Firstly, it sees the students as active in their learning and in some respects is interested in encouraging them to take responsibility for their own learning by furnishing them with strategies to facilitate communication (Selinker 1972, cited in Howatt 1984). Secondly, it stresses the need for students to cooperate together either through exchanging information to complete a task or working on problem solving. Thirdly, errors that students make can be seen as evidence of attempts to learn rather than a failure to acquire the language. Finally, it stresses the importance of taking into account the needs

of the learners and attempting to accommodate these needs within the programme of study.

Nevertheless, I think there are some points which limit the relevance of the communicative approach. Firstly, the types of syllabi offered retain an underlying structural basis. Thus, though 'situations' are isolated, the intention is mainly to introduce particular elements of grammar. Secondly, there is a danger that students may focus so intently on trying to solve problems and complete the task that they do not actually develop their language skills. Finally, there is no clear basis therefore grading remains impressionistic.

The Humanistic Methods

As was noted above, the Humanistic methodologies, whilst having certain differences, shared a concern for stressing the need for establishing a positive learning environment to allow learning to occur 'naturally'. Nevertheless, as the brief summary of these methodologies indicated, very often the actual teaching practices that take place could be said to put the students into quite unnatural learning situations. Thus, as Nunan suggests when ".... the classroom techniques proposed by methods derived from humanistic psychology, you might like to note just how inhumane some of these appear to be" (1995:234). Consequently, instead of freeing students from the constraints of the traditional language classroom, teachers pursuing these methodologies may actually have to work hard to convince students of their validity. In addition, it is clear that as for the most part these methodologies require students to work collaboratively, where students are reluctant to do this the overall progress of the class may well be hampered. Furthermore, with reference to the Silent Way, Nunan argues that the methodology is highly teacher controlled and, with respect to the written justification of the

method, that “despite the rather mystical quality of Gattegno’s writing ... the approach is less radical than might first appear ... the syllabus is highly conventional, and the classroom techniques themselves are in many ways not so different from audio-lingual techniques, centering on the accurate repetition of the teacher’s model sentences” (1995:239).

Lozanov claimed that through Suggestopedia a person could increase their vocabulary by between one thousand to three thousand words a day. However, Nunan cites a study by Wager and Tinley (1983) entitled ‘The effect of ‘superlearning techniques’ on the vocabulary acquisition and alpha brain wave production of language learners’ which rejects these claims as being largely mumbo jumbo (1995:239).

Thus, I would suggest that these methodologies are firstly, too specialized for the general language teacher and secondly, remain controversial. Therefore, in general, I do not believe that they have practical relevance to language teachers today. However, that is not to say that they are totally without benefit. In Particular these methodologies are significant in that they stress the importance of creating an environment in which students will both want to and are able to learn. Therefore, the relevance of these methodologies lies in reminding the teacher that the physical learning situation of the student can have a significant effect on their ability to learn language.

SLA TRADITION

While behaviouralism had been interested in developing ‘correct’ habits and humanistic methods sought to focus on the needs of individual learners, the SLA tradition emphasized the processes of language learning. Of central

importance here, is the distinction which SLA researchers, in particular Krashen, have made between 'acquisition', on the one hand, and 'learning' on the other. Essentially, acquisition is naturally learnt and fully useable language, while language which is learnt, it is argued, can only be used to 'monitor' utterances and will never become fully operational (Richards and Rodgers 1986).

Therefore, the SLA tradition attempts to replicate the process of natural L1 acquisition during the acquisition of an L2. Consequently, much of the theory behind this approach comes from research into, in particular, children acquiring their native language. Based on this Krashen identifies four important principles for L2 acquisition. Firstly, learning should refer to the here and now. This is because he argues that in first language acquisition meaning is gained through non-verbal clues stemming from the child's immediate physical environment. Secondly, Krashen argues that parents simplify and often repeat the language they use with their child. This provides the child with many opportunities to thoroughly comprehend the language being used. Thirdly, parents are intent on exchanging meaning rather than directly teaching the form of language. Finally, Krashen argues that a child learns the form of language from repeated exposure before attempting to produce it. Asher, in supporting Krashen, also points out that child acquiring its native language receives a lot of visual input which aids its comprehension.

Nevertheless, these methodologies are not without their problems. Nunan (1991) and Crystal (1997) argue that Krashen and Asher are incorrect because caregivers do not always focus on the here and now: "an analysis of L1 child-parent interaction shows that that the assumptions made by

people such as Krashen, Terrell and Asher about L1 acquisition and its application to second language are, in the main, naïve, simplistic and, in some cases, simply wrong” (Nunan 1991:247). Also, Nunan points out that while using Total Physical Response it is difficult to move from concrete to more abstract ideas thus, the potential for development beyond a certain point is limited. White argues that using first and second language acquisition research as the basis for foreign language learning is problematic because “... a natural order of acquisition of given functions by a child learning its native language does not logically provide a basis for grading and sequencing language functions for the SL learner, while the differences in both the needs of the SL learner and the situations in which the target language is used will give rise to further differences between the functional development of first and second languages” (1988:83). Nunan concludes “my major criticism of these ‘acquisitionist’ methods is that they oversimplify the nature of first language acquisition, and mislead teachers by suggesting that it is possible to recreate in the classroom the conditions underlying successful first language acquisition” (1991: 244).

Therefore, I would argue that the SLA tradition is relevant to today’s language teaching in that it encourages teachers to consider the process of learning and stresses the need for language to be taught within a meaningful context. However, despite continuing advances in SLA research, it is still far from certain that the claims made by these researchers concerning the process of L1 acquisition are correct, therefore, it is still premature to accept these methodologies wholeheartedly.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have presented a very brief historical overview of the many different methods that have appeared in language teaching over the past one hundred and fifty years. Following this overview I have attempted to suggest to what extent these methods are still relevant to the teaching of language today. With each method I have suggested that there are various points which still remain relevant and are of importance to teachers today. These points, I feel, teachers should be made aware of in order to provide them with a solid basis on which to develop and improve their own teaching abilities. In addition, I have argued that each method also has certain drawbacks which make its total adoption, at the exclusion of all other methods, unwise. Thus, I would urge teachers to be aware of the historical development of their profession and at the same time to feel free to select those points from the various traditions which they think are relevant and useful in their particular teaching situation without feeling they are betraying some politico-educational philosophy. Therefore, as Richards argues "methodology is not therefore something fixed ... rather it is a dynamic, creative, and exploratory process that begins anew each time the teacher encounters a group of learners" (1990:35). In short, teachers should be eclectic in their approach to teaching language.

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