Title	Eclecticism and English language teaching
Sub Title	折衷主義と英語教育
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Publisher	慶應義塾大学外国語教育研究センター
Publication year	2023
Jtitle	慶應義塾外国語教育研究 (Journal of foreign language education). Vol.19, (2022.) ,p.125- 133
JaLC DOI	
Abstract	
Notes	研究ノート
Genre	Departmental Bulletin Paper
URL	https://koara.lib.keio.ac.jp/xoonips/modules/xoonips/detail.php?koara_id=AA12043414-20220000-0125

Eclecticism and English Language Teaching

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> One teacher told me something like this, a teacher can only teach in the way they learn. That may be true. [But] as an English teacher, I try to draw on the methodologies like communicative teaching and the many different methods, and actually I make use of them. Yeah? It's really dependent upon the situation. So theoretically I believe in eclecticism. But still I think that the teaching grammar, the basic grammar, in whatever way it may be, is very important and ah, that is something I have been doing all my years.
>
> (Shizuo, 63, interview, April 3rd, 2017[1])

The interview excerpt above was taken from an interview with Shizuo, a university English language teacher in Japan who had been teaching English for 41 years. The excerpt shows Shizuo's view of his pedagogy and how it is shaped by his own experiences learning English in classes that emphasized grammar acquisition, and his subsequent acquisition of a variety of teaching methods. The excerpt highlights debate in English language teaching (ELT) in Japan concerning the relative merits of the grammar translation method (GTM) as compared with communicative language teaching (CLT) (Poole, 2010), as well as the ongoing conversation in English language teaching circles internationally concerning the appropriacy of various methodologies for English language teaching (Bastidas, 2022). In the excerpt above, Shizuo's belief, that eclecticism is a viable alternative to strict adherence to one methodology, echoes the argument put forward in this paper, that situational factors, including language use environment, student profile, course goals and learning needs should shape pedagogical choices.

Since the turn of the century, in Western English language teaching circles there has been a focus on a principles-based approach to the teaching of English (e.g., Brown, 2001; Ellis, 2008). However, both prior to and since the development of a principles approach to teaching, there have been many methods used in second language teaching, and despite Brown's assertion that "the whole concept of separate methods is no longer a central issue in language teaching practice" (2002, p. 10), numerous recent publications in the field of language

teaching attest to a continuing preoccupation with investigating various methodologies and/or approaches to English language teaching. This research is often produced outside of English-speaking countries, in EFL contexts (see, for example, Amano, 2017; Benstein, 2017; Kącka-Stanik, 2016; Kaharuddin, 2018; Zhao, 2014). Moreover, research indicates the continued use of specific methodologies and approaches (Cook, 2012; El Sawy, 2018; Rahman & Pandian, 2018; Vega, 2018), rather than the wholesale adoption of a principles-based approach to ELT as espoused by well-known practitioners such as Brown (2002), and Ellis (2008). This article seeks to address a few concerns expressed in the ELT literature regarding methods and approaches utilized in English language education.

An Eclectic Array of Methods and Approaches

The term "eclecticism" is herein used to refer to the act of selection by the teacher of a variety of methods and approaches they consider useful, rather than strict adherence to one way of teaching. Methods are less flexible than approaches in that they prescribe objectives and guidelines for teachers, whereas approaches allow greater freedom regarding implementation due to a focus on principles rather than procedures. This article presents six methods and approaches, in roughly chronological order, beginning with GTM, followed by the Direct Method (DM), the Audiolingual Method (AM), Total Physical Response (TPR), the Silent Way (SW) and, finally, CLT. This article is not intended as a comprehensive historical survey of ELT methodology and therefore various well-known approaches will not be addressed. Rather, the methods and approaches presented have been selected on the basis that they represent a broad range of methods or approaches when considered from a geographical, theoretical, chronological and procedural point of view, the point being to demonstrate how varied methodologies result in different learning outcomes which nonetheless may be appropriate and useful in various circumstances.

The grammar-translation method (GTM), sometimes referred to as the classical method, involves direct translation at the sentence level from L1 to L2. It is amongst the oldest documented methods of language teaching and has a long history of use internationally. The goal of using GTM is the development of written language skills, and the method was originally used in Japan for the purpose of translating first Chinese and then Dutch into the Japanese language (Nagatomo, 2012). The method has a focus on grammatical form rather than communicative oral competence.

Methodological debate in Japan and other Asian contexts has most notably centered on

GTM versus CLT, with many Asian scholars arguing for the appropriacy of GTM in their contexts (Durrani, 2016; Nagatomo, 2012; Poole, 2010). However, it has been criticized for producing skill sets that prepare students to pass written exams while leaving them poorly prepared to use the L2 in real-world contexts for communication (Nagatomo, 2012; Poole, 2010).

The direct method (DM) was a 'natural' method developed in Europe in reaction to the perceived deficiencies of GTM concerning the development of aural and oral language skills. Unlike GTM, the goal of using DM is to teach speaking and listening skills by giving the students ample opportunities to listen and to speak in class. It is based on the understanding that adult language acquisition should attempt to mimic the language acquisition route of children learning their native language. Omaggio Hadley (1986, 2001) characterizes DM thus: language learning begins with concrete objects present in the classroom and moves onto common situations and locations; pictures are frequently used; translation is avoided in favor of paraphrasing; language is taught at the sentence level from the very beginning; correct pronunciation is emphasized and phonetic notation is frequently used; grammar rules are rarely explicitly taught; and dictionaries are not used in reading instruction.

DM does have various potential drawbacks, for example, time may be wasted in class trying to use pictures to explain a word's meaning when it may be more efficient to simply translate the word. Another issue is that grammatical errors may quickly fossilize because students are encouraged to immediately start expressing themselves freely in the language without an initial focus on form (Omaggio Hadley, 2001). Conversely, some aspects of the DM are clearly congruent with principles of modern language teaching, for example Ellis (2008, p. 4) summarizes one principle as "the opportunity to *interact* in the second language is central to developing second language proficiency" (italics added). The method is effective at quickly developing speaking and listening skills, and if the context is one in which these skills are primary objectives, it may well be a method of choice.

Some years after DM began being used in Europe, on the other side of the world, the audiolingual method (AM) was developed in America. It is a method based on scientific research (Richards, 2002) which has its roots in courses developed by university faculties in response to a government request to develop foreign language programs for military personnel. Similar to DM, it also focused on listening and speaking skills, but unlike DM, it focuses on structure, and on achieving grammatical accuracy in speech. The following characteristics are featured in Brown's (2001, p. 23) summary of AM: new material is presented in dialogue form, set phrases are memorized, grammatical structures are taught one at a time; students are drilled

repetitively; grammar is not explained; vocabulary is limited; language labs and tapes are used extensively; students are given positive reinforcement when they have given a correct answer or otherwise quickly corrected; and teachers must use the target language.

Widespread use of pure AM was eventually abandoned because of various drawbacks, the most notable of which was "its ultimate failure to teach long-term communicative proficiency" (Brown, 2001, p. 23). However, the method has remained in use (Cook, 2012; Navarro Romero, 2013; Samawiyah & Saifuddin, 2016; Zhao, 2014) because it is successful in a particular context, when quick results in aural/oral skill development was required. Indeed, Richards and Rodgers (2001), when discussing early army programs, wrote, "in small classes of mature and highly motivated students, excellent results were often achieved" (p. 51). It may be claimed that AM-based teaching executes one of the principles of language teaching highlighted by Ellis (2008, p.1), that "[i]nstruction needs to ensure that learners develop both a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions and a rule-based competence." Certainly, formulaic expressions are provided and practiced in drills, even if rule-based competence is not a feature of the method.

The role of memory in the acquisition of language has been a key concern of many methods. While the AM emphasizes the role of various drills in promoting memorization and language acquisition, the total physical response method (TPR) takes an original approach with its emphasis on movement. It is based on a belief that physical movement in compliance with a directive promotes retention of the language (Asher, 1966). It is also based on the idea that children learn their first language by physically complying with directions given by their parents, and the method seeks to mimic this (Asher et al., 1974).

According to Omaggio Hadley, TPR has the following characteristics (2001): It is teacher lead; the teacher determines the aims of each lesson; the teacher dominates the speaking time within the class in the early stages; students respond physically to imperatives spoken by the teacher; imperatives are used to teach various grammatical points; the curriculum is based around various grammatical points; students are not pressured to speak but speak when 'ready'; and only the target language is used. Because it is largely teacher driven it might be best used in a context in which the students themselves have no immediate use for the language outside of class and would find it difficult to determine their own curriculum.

TPR emphasizes the development of aural and oral skills (Amano, 2017). It does not have a well-developed reading and writing component (although it may be useful in facilitating the reading of "procedure text"; see Zulpan, 2018) and should be used in conjunction with other teaching strategies if these skills are required. However, a teacher may write new vocabulary

on the board and elaborate with sentences, saying out loud what they have written and by also acting it out. Students may copy the sentences (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Despite drawbacks there are many positive aspects to TPR: it has the potential for humor, it can be used across age groups and seems especially popular with teachers of young learners (Ferlazzo & Sypnieski, 2018; Al Harrasi, 2014). Children enjoy the humorous possibilities of TPR, and many teachers probably understand this subconsciously when they use common childhood games such as 'Simon Says' in their classes. The effectiveness of TPR in terms of achieving its primary goals of listening and speaking retention has been demonstrated by Asher (1966). Furthermore, Brown (2001, p. 30) writes that TPR is "especially effective in the beginning levels of language proficiency."

The silent way method (SW) was developed by Gattegno in the 1970s. In stark contrast to TPR, SW asserts that teachers should control or limit the amount of teacher talk in class as far as possible, and conversely, encourage extensive talk and collaboration on the part of their students. Notable features of SW are that learning tasks encourage and shape student speech without direct oral instruction from their teachers, and also with extremely limited modelling by the teacher. Instead, teachers rely on the use of charts, rods, gestures and other aids to elicit responses. From the very beginning students are involved in monitoring their own accuracy and that of other students in a collaborative approach to error correction.

One major criticism of SW made by Brown (2001, p. 29) is that "In one sense, the Silent Way was too harsh a method, and the teacher too distant, to encourage a communicative atmosphere." On the other hand, Ellis (2008) noted that one principle of instruction best practice was that "[i]nstruction needs to ensure that learners also focus on form", which is certainly a major aspect of the SW method. Richards and Rodgers (2001) wrote, "An immediate objective is to provide the learner with a basic practical knowledge of grammar" (p. 83). They also note that SW has "a strong focus on accurate repetition of sentences modelled initially by the teacher and a movement through guided elicitation exercises to freer communication." Furthermore, it goes beyond Ellis' principles in that it makes fostering learner autonomy and self-awareness a primary teaching goal. It would seem to be particularly suited to small group classes of mature students, and where students have ample access to native speaker models and culturally based materials outside of class.

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is a principle-based approach which still has currency among language teachers. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 155) there is, "no single text or authority" on it. One can say that its goal is communicative competence

in all four skills and therefore expected learning outcomes are comprehensive in scope. Because CLT is understood and used in many varied ways any attempt to characterize it may be overlong, and open to dispute. However, Savignon (2002, p. 8) proposes the following as 'core' characteristics of CLT: it is learner-centered; the learners' communicative needs provide the framework for determining course goals; meaning is a key focus of learning but form is also addressed as a necessary component of effective communication; contextualization of language is important; a primary role of the teacher is to facilitate communication between students; and there is a cooperative approach to learning. CLT has various well-known branches such as task-based language teaching (TBLT) (Ellis, 2003; Prabhu, 1987) and content and language integrated learning (CLIL) (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010).

It is difficult to provide a procedural outline of a CLT lesson due to the huge range of possible activities and the individualized approach of many teachers. Examples of possible activities occurring in a CLT include information gap activities, guessing activities, storytelling, jigsaw listening, comparing pictures, and noting similarities and differences, following directions, solving problems from shared clues, conversation and discussion sessions, role plays and debates.

In terms of in class interactions, the teacher will often speak during the lessons to outline tasks, organize students to work in pairs or groups to complete tasks, and to move among students while comprehension checking and facilitating task completion. Written communication on the part of the teacher might be in terms of handouts outlining task requirements or providing examples of written assignments. Students themselves will need to communicate with each other to complete many of the class activities.

As Omaggio Hadley (2001) argued, CLT is a not bound to any particular methodology or curricular design (p. 118) and can therefore be flexible and responsive to the needs of learners. Of course, a corollary of this is that the success or effectiveness of CLT will primarily depend on "the choices made by the program designers and instructors" (p.118). It therefore requires extensive teacher training.

Concluding Thoughts

As argued throughout this paper, many of the methods and approaches used over the last hundred or so years have aspects or techniques which may be effective today depending on the learning and teaching context. Research (Amano, 2017; Benstein, 2017; Kącka-Stanik, 2016; Kaharuddin, 2018; Zhao, 2014) indicates these methodologies are still used internationally today. Some of the earlier methodologies, such as AM and TPR, seem particularly suited to

beginner learners. Course objectives should also impact significantly on the selection of teaching techniques. For example, it is easy to see that a course whose primary focus is the development of writing skills will not be well served by a heavy reliance on TPR but may be better served using methodologies such as GTM. While many of the methodologies discussed may be able to contribute in some way to English language classes it is up to the individual teacher to use their knowledge of teaching principles and course objectives to guide them in their application.

To return to the comments of Shizuo, excerpted at the beginning of this article, no one methodology is superior to any other. To use his words, what is important is an identification of the learning situation and teaching in *whatever way* is most helpful in the situation. To sum up, the eclectic range of methods and approaches developed in the field of ELT provides language teachers, such as Shizuo, with a diversity of effective tools from which they may select. Further it is argued that the use of any such methods may be appropriate as part of a language learning program depending on the context and learning objectives.

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Note

[1] This interview took place at Shizuo's campus when he was a participant in a study on language teacher identity reported in Mason (2018).