

A Study of Language Learning and Language Approach

Masaji Ishida

Abstract

The aim of learning language is to acquire the hearing ability, the speaking ability, the reading ability and the writing ability. In order to accomplish that purpose many scholars have studied useful methods. In the useful methods there are the grammar-translation approach, the oral approach and the total physical response approach. In the grammar-translation approach the main matter of learning is translating the sentence from the target language into the native language. In the oral approach the aim is learning the basic language material orally. And the students do much oral practice to acquire the language habit. The goal of the total physical response approach is to internalize the code in the same way the students assimilated the native language, which was through commands. These approaches are very effective in learning and teaching the foreign language. Therefore I tried to research these approaches which are very useful for the language learning.

1. Preface

There are many problems in language learning and language approach. In many problems I would like to study the approach. We want to learn the foreign language as the means of communication. Therefore we aim that we understand what the other person is saying. And we aim that the other person understands what we are saying. In addition to this aim we have the goal of assimilating the foreign culture. And we have the goal of understanding the foreign life mode. There are the various approaches in order to accomplish those purposes. In here I would like to research three approaches. They are the grammar-translation approach, the oral approach and the total physical response approach. I would like to study these useful approaches and analyse the characteristics of these useful approaches.

2. Grammar-translation approach

In learning the foreign language grammar-translation approach uses the translation. Translating the sentence from the target language into the mother tongue is the main matter of learning. The important point in learning is to understand and acquire the rule of grammar. Grammar is explained and the instruction focuses on the form of words. Pronunciation is not taught in the lesson. Therefore in grammar-translation approach the students cannot acquire the ability of hearing and speaking. In the modern society it is emphasized that the ability of hearing and speaking is very important. In this point there is the big problem in grammar-translation approach. The characteristic of grammar-translation approach is stated as follows:

Classes are taught in the mother tongue, with little active use of the target language. Much vocabulary is taught in the form of lists of isolated words. Long elaborate explanations of the intricacies of grammar are given. Grammar provides the rules for putting words together, and instruction often focuses on the form and inflection of words. Reading of difficult classical texts is begun early. Little attention is paid to the content of texts, which are treated as exercises in grammatical analysis. Often the only drills are exercises in translating disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue. Little or no attention is given to pronunciation.⁽¹⁾

3. Oral approach

Oral approach aims at learning the basic language material orally. The students do much oral practice to obtain the new language habit. Lessons begin with a dialogue in the target language. The material is presented orally with actions or pictures. The exercise is questions in the target language. The students learn the sentence pattern which is the basic material. Grammar is learned inductively. Oral approach is very useful for acquiring the ability of hearing and speaking. In learning a new language, the chief problem is stated as follows:

In learning a new language, then, the chief problem is not at first that of learning vocabulary items. It is, first, the mastery of the sound system---to understand the stream of speech, to hear the distinctive sound features and to approximate their production. It is, second, the mastery of the features of arrangement that constitute the structure of the language. These are the matters that the native speaker as a child has early acquired as unconscious habits; they must become automatic habits of the adult learner of a new language.⁽²⁾

The repeated repetition is very indispensable for acquiring the foreign language. As the way of practice there is mimicry-memorization. This is the way based on the principle of oral approach. The students mimic and memorize the learning items. The utterance which is used in the fundamental situation is practiced. And in the mimicry-memorization the students learn from the words to the sentences. The learning items are presented by contrast. Vocabulary is limited and learned in the sentence. And after the students mimic and memorize repeatedly, they acquire the foreign language. The repeated repetition is stated as follows:

More than that, the oral approach --- the basic drill, the repeated repetitions of the patterns produced by a native speaker of the foreign language --- is the most economical way of thoroughly learning, for use even in reading, the structural methods of a language. Only when one has such a thorough control of the fundamentals of a language that he can almost automatically produce utterances in accord with the usual patterns of that language is he ready to proceed to the process of reading. With such a control the grasp of new words will come easily and speedily with increasing experience with the language, and reading will be profitable.⁽³⁾

The sentence pattern must be made the automatic reaction. For this purpose there is the pattern practice. The pattern practice is the form of oral practice. This aims that the students acquire the foreign language by the repetition. There are a few ways of the pattern practice. They are the substitution, the conversion and the expansion. The substitution is the practice of substituting the word. The conversion is the practice of conversing the sentence. The expansion is the practice of expanding the sentence. By the students do much pattern practice, they can acquire the foreign language. The pattern is stated as follows:

The fundamental matters of the language that must be mastered on a production level should, as soon as possible, be made unconscious habits. For this purpose many whole sentences, questions and responses, demand repetition and more repetition and these will become automatic reactions early. But besides such specific formulas, useful phrases and sentences, there are many "patterns" that must eventually become the customary molds into which the productive expression must fit without conscious thought. Examples in English are the word order patterns of statements, questions, and requests, and the fixed positions of single word modifiers of substantives. These, in the early stage of language learning, remain for considerable time on the level of production with conscious choice rather than of production as an automatic unconscious habit. Only after much practice of the same "patterns" with diverse content do the

patterns themselves become productively automatic. When the student has reached this level of achievement, within a satisfactorily useful but definitely limited range of vocabulary items, he has “learned the language.”⁽⁴⁾

4. Total physical response approach

The main matter in learning the foreign language is to internalize the code of the foreign language. In the total physical response approach the students acquire the target language by the commands. The total physical response approach combines the language and the action. This is the way which the students move by commands. The way which uses the command is very useful for acquiring the foreign language. The characteristic of this total physical response approach is stated as follows:

The first step in learning another language is to internalize the code of that language. You will internalize the code in the same way you assimilated your native language, which was through commands. Like most of us, you probably have amnesia for your infancy, but research suggests that many of the utterances directed to you when you were a baby --- perhaps half of what you heard --- was in the form of commands such as “Don’t spit up on my blouse!” “Give mommy a big kiss!” “Hold daddy’s hand!” or “Look at the bird on the branch of that oak tree!” So what I am saying is that, as an infant, you probably deciphered and internalized the code of your first language in a chain of situations in which people manipulated and directed your behavior through commands.⁽⁵⁾

The students hear the command for several times and they act through the command. The students act through the command repeatedly and they become to acquire the code of the new language. And the students become to understand the new sentence and create the new sentence. The approach by command is stated as follows:

For hundreds of hours you were silent except for babbling, but during that time you were deciphering that important code. You were sorting out the patterns that would transform the noise coming from people’s faces into information. It was only after many months of decoding that you began to speak, and even then your understanding was far in advance of your speaking skill and it remained that way for years. Well, that’s the way you will enter this new language --- through commands. I will utter a command and act along with you for several times. Then each of you will act alone when I give you a command. Gradually, the entire code of the new language will be visible to you, and spontaneously your tongue will produce utterances in the new language.⁽⁶⁾

5. Summary

The language learning is the indispensable matter for us. Therefore I tried to research the useful approach and find the useful approach. Especially the total physical response approach is new and very useful for us. In future it is effective to use this approach. Lastly we want to have the sentence about the total physical response approach.

Widely cited in journals on foreign language instruction, Asher's Total Physical Response methodology reportedly provides rapid, permanent instruction through the use of commands accompanied by a physical response. TPR is still in the development stage, although four major controlled experiments have been conducted in TPR during the past dozen years.⁽⁷⁾

Notes

- (1) Celce-Murcia, M., and McIntosh, L.,
Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language,
Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, Inc., 1979, p.3
- (2) Fries, C.C.,
Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language,
Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1945, p.3
- (3) Ibid., pp.6~7
- (4) Ibid., pp.8~9
- (5) Blair, R.W.,
Innovative Approaches to Language Teaching,
Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers, Inc., 1982, pp.54~55
- (6) Ibid., p.55
- (7) Celce-Murcia, M. : Ibid., p.29