

**AN OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE TEACHING AND COMMUNICATING**

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**Abstract**

Information and technology has brought the world into a global village, knowing and understanding various languages plays an important role in this globalised world. Teaching English language is taken a front sheet especially in India because once it was a British Colony and more so computer programming languages are written in English. This article is also discusses the historical origin of language teaching and method derive a new methodology for following in the classroom to improve communications skills of the students especially at the school where the strong foundation of language communication can be erected.

**Historical background:**

Before discussing the approaches and methods used in imparting language teaching happening at present has its own root immemorial. The language teaching has its own historical background. About 60 per cent of today's world population speaks different languages due to inheritance. Learning another language apart from the mother tongue has always been important for people, because of the reasons such as knowing other cultures, travelling, trade, and religion and to be espionage. If we examine where and when second language education started, we cannot give a precise answer; however, it is a fact that bilingualism has always been the norm instead of monolingualism. Another point is that this second language education has changed through languages. According to Richards and Rodgers bilingualism or multilingualism is the norm rather than the exception (5).

Throughout the history, foreign language other than their mother tongue was always an important problem. Today, English is the world's widely spoken language and around 900 million people speak that language. It is estimated that over 1 billion people are currently learning English worldwide. According to the British council, as of the year 2,000 there were 750 million English as a Foreign language speakers. In addition, there were 375 million English as a Second Language speakers. Learning alien language is always an important problem. Today English is the world's most widely learned language.

Another point is that this second language education has changed through languages. Romans were trying to learn Greek, and then Latin became popular. Finally, English has the importance now. So, we know why people want to learn other languages, but the question is this. How can they learn these languages? This question has always got the attention of pedagogues, linguists and scientists. The answer to this question has also changed according to reasons why people want to learn languages and what the pedagogues, linguists and scientists understand from teaching language. For example, we can see a trend from written language to oral language. Furthermore, many approaches methods, and techniques have been developed for the needs of language teaching. When we look at them, we can divide the second language teaching to four periods. Although there are not exact names of these periods, we will call them as Classical Period, Alternative Period, Current Communicative Period, and Post-method Era.

With the status of Latin diminishing in its importance, English has taken its place. From the 17th to 19th centuries though Latin was the model for foreign language study when children joined various grammar schools for getting rigorous training in Latin grammar, English as a modern language has made a steady existence in most of the European and Asian countries. The main reason for this is that English is a blend of several elements of foreign languages like Latin, Greek, French, Scandinavian and Celtic. However, the influence of Latin has continued for many years leading to the evolution of different approaches and methods in language teaching.

The approach to the foreign language teaching is initially known as the Grammar Translation Method. As a result we have various methods of grammar teaching such as:

1. Grammar Translation Method 2. The Reformative Method and 3. The Direct Method

### **Grammar Translation Method:**

Grammar Translation method of foreign or second language teaching which makes use of translation and grammar study as the main teaching and learning activities. In the 19th century it began to be used to teach “modern” languages such as French, German, and English, and it is still used in some countries today. Because the Grammar Translation Method emphasizes reading rather than the ability to communicate in a language, there was a reaction to it in the 19th century and there was later a greater emphasis on the teaching of spoken language.

Grammar Translation is a way of studying a language that approaches the language first through detailed analysis of its grammar rules, followed by application of this knowledge to the task of translating sentences and texts into and out of the target language.

The selection of vocabulary is based mainly on reading the original text. To teach the meaning of the words, the bilingual method is adopted. In a grammar translation text, the grammar rules are presented and exemplified. A list of vocabulary items is presented with their translation equivalents and translation exercises are prescribed.

The sentence is a basic unit and a fundamental requirement of teaching and language practice. Most of the lesson that is taught is devoted to translating sentences into and out of the target language. Thus the focus on the sentence is a distinctive characteristic of this method. Previous approaches to alien language study used grammar as an aid to the study of texts in a foreign language. But this was felt to be very difficult for the students in secondary schools. The focus of the sentence was thus an attempt to make language learning easier.

Emphasis is laid on accuracy. Students are to attain high standards in translation because it is a pre condition for the success in any formal written examination.

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The deductive method is adopted in teaching grammar. By deductive method it means a rule is studied and presented and then an example is given. In most of the grammar translation texts a syllabus is followed for the sequencing of grammar in an organized and systematic way.

The mother tongue is the medium of instruction. It is used to explain new items and comparisons are made between the foreign language and the students' native language.

The Grammar Translation method was predominantly adopted in language teaching from 1840's to the 1940's. In modified form it continues to be widely used in some parts of the world today.

“It was not necessarily the horror that its critics depicted it as”

### **The Reformative Method:**

During the colonial period in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century, English teaching and speaking has happened by taking into consideration of all the rules and regulations of the grammar for constructing a sentence and while conversing/ communicating. Generally teaching of grammar is considered a dull and monotonous activity simply because neither creativity nor critical thinking required as we only have to apply the rules of grammar strictly. As a result it is felt that a reformative approach is needed in language teaching which resulted in promotion of alternative approaches to language teaching took place. Only from 1880's the linguists like Henry Sweet, Wilhem Victor and Paul Passy of England, Germany and France respectively contributed a great intellectual leadership necessary for reformative ideas in order to gain credibility and acceptance. The discipline of linguistics was evolved with vitality and strength.

A new branch of knowledge in the name of phonetics was established. It was intended for the scientific analysis and description of the sound systems of languages. It gave new insights into speech processes.

The rules of grammar should be taught only after the thorough practice of the grammar points by the students i.e., the inductive method of teaching grammar should be adopted.

Translation to be avoided though the mother tongue can be used for the explanation of the new words or for the testing abilities of comprehension

These principles paved a way for the theoretical foundations for a principled approach to language teaching. The first one is based on a scientific approach to the study of language and of language learning. They reflect the beginnings of the formation of a new branch of knowledge in the name of the applied linguistics. This branch of knowledge deals with the scientific study of second and foreign language teaching and learning.

### **The Direct Method:**

The Direct Method was a reaction to this Translation Method and was introduced in India in the early Twentieth Century. It is a method in which attempt is made to teach English without using the mother tongue as a medium. That is, a direct as well as immediate bond is established between the English words, phrases or idioms and their meanings.

For the first time the Direct Method has accepted in theory needs and principles of learning a foreign language. It aims at teaching English in its natural setting and does not tolerate any interference of the mother-tongue. It seeks to establish direct relationship between the real experience and the corresponding expression

The main characteristics of the Direct Method are listed here under:

Classroom instruction is to be conducted exclusively in the target language. Grammar is to be taught inductively. New teaching points are to be introduced orally. Concrete vocabulary is to be taught through demonstration, objects and pictures and abstract vocabulary for the association of ideas. Both speaking and listening comprehension are to be taught. Correct pronunciation and grammar are to be emphasized.

Don'ts	Do's
Never translate	Always demonstrate
Never Explain	Always act
Never make a speech	Always ask questions
Never imitate mistakes	Always correct
Never speak with single words	Always use sentences
Never use the book	Always use your lesson plan
Never go too fast	Always keep pace of the student
Never speak too slowly	Always speak normally
Never speak too quickly	Always speak naturally
Never speak too loudly	Always speak audibly
Never be impatient	Always take it easy
Never translate	Always demonstrate

The Direct method has proved to be successful in private language schools such as Public and International schools where paying clients are highly motivated and the use of native speaking teachers is the secret of success. As it is a known factor that every method there is always pros and cons and this direct method too has several draw backs and they are listed below:

It requires teachers who are native speakers with fluency in the foreign language.

It is largely dependent on the teacher's skill rather than the text book.

All teachers are not proficient enough in the foreign language to adhere to the principles of the direct method.

Strict adherence to the direct method principles is often counterproductive.

The teachers are required to go at length to avoid using mother tongue.

A simple brief explanation in the students' mother tongue will be a more proper way to comprehension.

### **Communicative Language Teaching:**

The need for communication has been persistent leading to the emergence of communicative language teaching. Having understood the nature of styles and non-verbal communication, the teachers and researchers are now better equipped to teaching communication through actual communication, not merely theorizing about it. Here, it is an approach rather than language

teaching which transcends the boundaries of concrete methods along with good techniques. Let us seed the basis premises of this approach.

- Focus on all of the components of communicative competence, not only grammatical or linguistic competence. Engaging learner in the practical functional use of language for meaningful purposes.
- Viewing fluency and accuracy as complementary principles underpinning communicative techniques
- Using language in unrehearsed contexts.

### **Conclusion**

English is the universal language as of today, the study, teaching, communicating that language requires some approaches. I have given some overview on historical perspectives of teaching approaches in English. These approaches and methods provide the teachers with a view of how the field of language has evolved. They can be taken as source of well established practices which teachers must adopt and implement based on their class room needs. Experience in using different teaching approaches and methods not only extend them basic teaching skills but also at a later stage extend to develop teaching experience both theoretical and communicative.

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