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Communicative Audiolingual Method; A Way Out for a Better Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Audiolingual is a method of teaching used in teaching languages based on behaviourist psychology and structuralist linguistics. At first, this method had many advocates, but later it was rejected as the result of having some problems. Later on new communicative methods were introduced. They emphasized the role of interaction as the means and the aim of learning a language. Similarly, they had their own problems. Therefore, it has been suggested that it is better not to hold rigidly to a single method, but instead use the points of strength of various methods. This paper intends to combine useful points of the two methods to devise an efficient method for teaching more especially in EFL contexts.

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Introduction

"In the century spanning the mid-1880s to the mid-1980s, the language-teaching profession was involved in a search." (Brown, 2001, p.14) Researchers tried to find an appropriate method of teaching language that could be generalized across various contexts. The history of the language-teaching profession indicated a succession of methods. Whenever new methods became popular, the previous ones became more or less discarded. One of the recent methods is communicative language teaching. As the name implies, it focuses on communication skills and meaning negotiation. However, many teachers around the world have found it difficult to apply since the authentic contexts and activities cannot be created in many settings. Moreover, EFL students may find themselves unable to cope with the difficult communicative classroom activities. Nowadays, introducing a new method and rejecting the previous one is not in the center of theoreticians' attention. In other words, "the heyday of methods can be considered to have lasted up till the late 1980s" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.245) since it has been believed that no single method can be adequate for all purposes and situations. "Therefore, teachers have practiced eclecticism, which is selecting several features from different methods." (Saetti, 2005, p. 160) The history of methods has led me to have a desire to combine Audiolingual and Communicative Language Teaching. They both have their own advantages and disadvantages, and a creative solution is to remove their weaknesses to make a new and beneficial approach in teaching language.

Audio lingual Method: A Review

"The emergence of the Audio lingual Method resulted from increased attention given to foreign language teaching in the United States." (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.53) There was a need to learn foreign languages in order to prevent Americans from becoming isolated from scientific progress that was made in other countries.

The Audio lingual (hereinafter ALM)'s underlying theory of language was derived from structural linguists. "Language was viewed as a system of structurally related elements for the

encoding of meaning, the elements being phonemes, morphemes, words, structures, and sentence types." (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.55) Structural linguists believed that language is equal to speech, and they considered oral as the primary medium of language.

The ALM theoreticians not only had a powerful linguistics basis but they were working during the time that the behavioral psychology was considered as a prominent school of psychology. Behaviorist psychologists supported conditioning and habit formation models of learning that were combined with mimicry drills and pattern practices of the ALM methodology. The more something is repeated, the stronger the habit and the greater the learning. Moreover, errors lead to the formation of bad habits; therefore they should be immediately corrected by the teacher. "Skinner's, the founder of new behaviorism, views of learning were a powerful influence on the development of the ALM. When this theory is applied to language learning, language is seen as a behavior to be taught." (Williams & Burden, 1997, p.10) A structural pattern can be considered as a *stimulus* to which the learners *respond*, and it should be followed by *reinforcement* (reward or punishment of actions).

The Characteristics of ALM

ALM theoreticians employed behaviorism and structuralism as the basis of its method, and they provided some principles for language learning.

The following list involves the characteristics of the ALM:

1. New material is presented in dialogue form.
2. There is dependence on mimicry, memorization of set phrases, and over-learning
3. Structures are sequenced by means of contrastive analysis and taught one at a time.
4. Structural patterns are taught using repetitive drills.
5. There is little or no grammatical explanation. Grammar is taught by inductive analogy rather than deductive explanation.
6. Vocabulary is strictly limited and learned in context.
7. There is much use of tapes, language labs, and visual aids.
8. Great importance is attached to pronunciation

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9. Very little use of the mother tongue by teachers is permitted.
10. Successful responses are immediately reinforced.
11. There is great effort to get students to produce error-free utterances.
12. There is a tendency to manipulate language and disregard content.

(Prator and Celce-Murcia, 1979, p.3)

“At the first level of instruction, learning is based on dialogues containing commonly used everyday expressions and basic structures of high frequency” (Rivers, 1981, p.43). Students learn the dialogue by a process of mimicry-memorization, and they are required to learn the dialogue sentences by heart. Pattern drills is another main activity that is based on the structures in the dialogue. Various pattern drills can be used in the ALM. “They usually range from repetition, substitution, backward build up, chain, and transformation to question and answer.” (Saetti, 2005, p. 92)

Repetition drill

The students are expected to repeat what they have heard.

Substitution drill

The students are expected to substitute part of a sentence with a new word.

Backward build up (expansion) drill

The teacher breaks a sentence into some parts because it's difficult for the students to repeat a long sentence. The repetition begins with the last part of the sentence.

Chain drill

The teacher starts the drill, and the students are expected to continue the drill with the same pattern.

Transformation (conversion) drill

The teacher asks students to transform or convert sentence patterns from positive to negative, from present to future, from declarative to interrogative, from active to passive, and so on.

Question and answer drill

The teacher gives students practice in answering and asking questions.

Advantages of ALM

Using pattern drills in language classrooms can have some advantages. First, it helps to ensure good pronunciation of the new material, and correct pronunciation is emphasized. Second, repeating the drills chorally, protect the students from the embarrassment. Third, younger children like to mimic and to learn through repetition and activity rather than through explanation. Fourth, students can improve their listening ability by hearing the drills either from the teacher or from the tape.

Another advantage of the ALM is that it has a strong theoretical base in psychology, i.e. behaviorism. Therefore, the notion of reinforcement as a powerful influence in shaping human behavior (e.g. language) had been supported. As a result, correct answers should be positively reinforced.

Disadvantages of ALM

Using pattern drills in language classrooms can have some disadvantages. First, repetition can be useless when it is not meaningful. Second, students may not be able to use the meaningful drills in other contexts. Rivers believed that:

“If audio-lingual training is given in a mechanical way, students may progress like well-trained parrots, able to repeat whole utterances perfectly when given a certain stimulus, but uncertain of the meaning of what they are saying and unable to use memorized materials in contexts other than those in which they have learned.” (Rivers, 1981, p.47)

“Third, techniques of memorization and drilling can become tedious and boring, causing fatigue and distaste on the

part of student.”(Rivers, 1981, p.47) Teachers should try to provide interesting situations for repetition. Otherwise it is likely that students easily get bored of repeating the drills or the dialogue. Fourth, making mistake is a natural part of learning. “However, audiolingualism, with its emphasis on correct responses, does not allow for learning from mistakes.” (Williams & Burden, 1997, p.11) Fifth, the role of mind and what goes on inside the learners' heads or the cognitive processes were ignored.

ALM Today

“Audio-lingualism continues to be used today, although it is typically not used as the foundation of a course, but rather, has been relegated to use in individual lessons.” (Wikipedia, 2012) “Some hybrid approaches have been developed, as can be seen in the textbook *Japanese: The Spoken Language* (1987–90), which uses repetition and drills extensively, but supplements them with detailed grammar explanations in English.” (Wikipedia, 2012)

Communicative Language Teaching: A Review

“The late 1970s and 1980s saw the beginning of what we now recognize as a communicative approach as we better and better understand the functions that must be incorporated into a classroom.” (Brown, 2001, p.42) In language teaching, British applied linguists, such as Henry Widdowson, emphasized on communicative proficiency rather than learning structures. Communicative competence development and interaction are the aims of language learning in Communicative Language Teaching (hereinafter CLT). Communicative competence, including grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competences, enables language users to understand and produce messages in the language.

Nunan (1991, p.279) lists five basic characteristics of CLT:

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
2. The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.
3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the Learning Management process.
4. An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom.

These five features indicate that CLT pays attention to both knowledge and ability to use language for interacting and expressing meaning in different contexts. Also the needs and desires of learners are taken into account. Therefore, CLT can be considered as a learner-centered teaching; in other words students are given decision making responsibility regarding the content and classroom activities. “Learning activities are consequently selected according to how well they engage the learners in meaningful and authentic language use (rather than merely mechanical practice of language patterns).” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.161)

Some CLT activities:

The followings are some CLT classroom activities:

Crosswords

It gives students a list of words and makes them define or explain the words.

Jigsaw Reading

It involves students in speaking and summarizing skills. It is usually used with short authentic text such as newspaper. The text should be divided in some parts while each student has one to read and understand it. The students come together and talk

about what they read. Then as a group they make the complete picture of what the whole text says.

Role Plays

Students can play different roles to practice some functions as booking a hotel room, ordering in a restaurant or meeting a client.

The Common Principles of ALM and CLT

A very good comparison between ALM and CLT is given by Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983, cited by Brown, 2001, p.45). The following table is extracted from their comparison, but for the writer's purpose, only the common grounds are mentioned.

<i>Audio-lingual</i>	<i>Communicative Language Teaching</i>
1. Drilling is a central technique.	Drilling may occur, but peripherally.
2. Native-speaker-like pronunciation is sought.	Comprehensible pronunciation is sought.
3. Communicative activities only come after a long process of rigid drills and exercises.	Attempts to communicate may be encouraged from the very beginning.
4. Translation is forbidden at early levels.	Translation may be used where students need or benefit from it.
5. Reading and Writing are deferred till speech is mastered.	Reading and Writing can start from the first day, if desired.
6. Linguistic competence is the desired goal.	Communicative competence is the desired goal (i.e. the ability to use the linguistic system effectively and appropriately).
7. Varieties of language are recognized but not emphasized.	Linguistic variation is a central concept in materials and methodology.
8. Accuracy, in terms of formal correctness, is a primary goal.	Fluency and acceptable language is the primary goal; accuracy is judged not in the abstract but in context.
9. Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in the structure of the language.	Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in what is being communicated by the language.

Advantages of CLT

CLT have some advantages. One advantage is that the aim of this method is the conveyance of information rather than the learning of grammatical correctness. It suggests that grammatical correctness is considered only as a small part of communication; in other words accuracy as well as fluency is taken into account. As mentioned earlier, grammar is one of the four communicative competences (i.e. sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competences). In the past, learners might not dare to speak English either in classroom or out of it since they were afraid of making grammatical mistakes. Therefore, another advantage can be the less stressful atmosphere achieved by reducing the anxiety factor of grammatical correctness. Third, language is used and taught according to real and everyday life. CLT considers language functions such as apologizing, persuading, negotiating, and conveying information that are extremely important for interaction with others. It makes learners able to use language for communicative purposes in different situations appropriately and effectively. CLT puts "greater emphasis on fluency and appropriateness in the use of the target language than structural correctness; minimal focus on form with corresponding low emphasis on error correction and explicit instruction on language rules or grammar." (Mangubhai et al., 2004, p. 292)

Disadvantages of CLT

Although CLT has proved to make students able to interact, it may have some disadvantages. First, learners may consider classroom activities as abstract since the authentic language use and real life classroom activities may not be achieved in spite of the teacher's effort. Second, participating in oral classroom activities may be a difficult task for students with low level of proficiency in the target language. Therefore students may not be willing to participate in communication activities. Besides, participation of all of the students cannot be possible in crowded classrooms. Third, applying CLT may not be an influential approach in EFL settings where English is hardly heard or used outside of classroom settings. Therefore, it makes the application of CLT difficult for beginning levels. Li (2001) conducted a research in Korea and discovered some difficulties by applying CLT. These problems included: students' lack of motivation for developing communicative competence, low English proficiency, and resistance to class participation, teachers' misconceptions and lack of training in CLT combined with deficiencies in sociolinguistic competence and little time for developing materials for communicative classes and large classes.

The Necessity to Combine the Two Methods

Teachers need techniques that work in their particular situations with the specific objectives that are meaningful for the kinds of students they have in their classes (Rivers, 1981, p.54). Therefore many experienced teachers prefer to be eclectic in their teaching to combine the activities and approaches that are suitable according to their classes. According to Sweet (1899, cited by Rivers, 1981, p.43), "a good method must, before all, be comprehensive and eclectic. It must be based on a thorough knowledge of the science of language." We can take the good ideas of each method and reject useless or harmful techniques. In other words, "eclecticists try, then, to absorb the best techniques of all well-known language - teaching methods into their classroom procedures using them for the purposes for which they are most appropriate." (Rivers, 1981, p.55) As mentioned earlier, both ALM and CLT have their own advantages and proponents. By considering the description of these two methods, to some extent, I found them as complementary methods. Personally I believe that they can remove each others' disadvantages when combined with each other.

Communicative Audiolingual Method: A New Method for Helping People Learn Better

In some ways, the two methods can be combined to make the teaching process efficiently. As mentioned earlier, the ALM drills has both advantages and disadvantages. By using CLT techniques, the disadvantages of the drills can be removed. In other words, the teacher is responsible for making the drills meaningful to the students by either using them in an appropriate context or making them relevant to the students' background knowledge. In the process of teaching the drills, teacher should bear in mind that students may make mistakes, so they shouldn't be blamed. In such case, the anxiety factor of making grammatical mistakes will be removed. Unlike CLT that doesn't pay attention to mistakes and errors, they can be corrected implicitly to make students familiar with the correct form.

ALM ignored the role of communication, and CLT used it improperly. If teachers try to move from mechanical to meaningful and then communicative drills, they can encompass an important concerns of CLT, that is "communication". For

example, teachers can ask students voluntarily to use the drills to talk about their experiences or new ideas. Therefore, using the drills can facilitate interaction. Moreover, the talks of the more proficient students can be a practice for the less proficient ones, and they can interact easier. Here, not only grammatical competence but also other three competences, including sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competences will be developed.

ALM put too much emphasis on teaching and learning grammar. In other words, it focuses on accuracy rather than fluency. On the contrary, CLT stressed the need to focus on fluency rather than accuracy to make the students able to talk freely. However, learning a language efficiently involves attention to both accuracy and fluency, and they both should be included in teaching a language.

Some Sample Tasks Combining the Two Methods

The above section described the combination of the two methods, and now it is better to describe some sample tasks that are devised by combining the two methods. For example, before repeating the drills, first the teacher should use them in an appropriate context or relating them to the students' background knowledge to make sure that the repetition is meaningful. And then the repetition of the drills can start.

E.g.

Drill: I'm going to the bakery to get some bread.

Teacher can show the pictures of a bakery and bread by making sure that students are familiar with the vocabularies. Then the teacher can ask some questions such as 'what do we usually buy from bakery?', 'Why do we go to bakery?'....

Now that teacher made the task meaningful and the repetition can start.

Another task can be carried out by using the familiar drills that students already learned. Teacher can ask students to interact in pairs about their own experiences. First the more proficient students can share their experiences with the rest of the class voluntarily, and then the less proficient students can talk.

E.g.

Some familiar drills: 1. I wake up at 7 everyday. 2. I go to school every day. 3. I practice English on weekends. 4. I wash my hands 4 times a day. 5. I go to bed at 10 pm. ...

Teacher asks students to use the old drills and talk about their own lives & experiences.

Another important task is considering both accuracy and fluency. During the interaction or the repetition of drills, teacher should pay attention to developing all of the four competences. Therefore, grammatical accuracy should not be ignored, and the mistakes can be corrected implicitly by the teacher.

E.g.

Student: She go to school every day.

Teacher: She **goes** to school every day (repetition with emphasis on goes).

Conclusion

Teaching a language is a complex task involving different factors which contribute to or hinder the process. There different stakeholders involved too: teachers, students, parents, policy makers, sponsor agencies, and institutes. Considering their shares and problems and incorporating their special needs and attitudes and the features of the situation or context of learning is a must. All these have led pedagogy experts to conclude that an eclectic method devised by a given teacher for his/her special situation and students is the best method; Communicative Audiolingual Method is one to be considered as well.

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