Teaching English as an International Language:  
In search of a new methodology?

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Abstract
As part of a global community, the status of the English language has been redefined and educators are called to re-examine the principles that guide foreign language teaching methodology. Having experienced a number of transitions in language teaching (ELT) methodology, English language studies have entered the post-method period. In view of the demands of teaching English as an International Language (EIL), the aim of this paper is to challenge the application of a single methodology to multiple contexts and to consider the principles of instructional design that seem to underlie effective education.

Keywords: methodology, EIL, principles of instructional design

1. Introduction
In the history of language teaching, a number of teaching methods have been proposed, building upon previously adapted methods. Thus, language teaching has experienced many transitions and has provided solutions for effective language teaching irrespective of the local context (Howatt 1984, Pica 2000, Richards and Rodgers 2001). Thus, a survey of approaches and methods unravels a plethora of teaching methodologies, from Grammar Translation to the Direct Method and to the Audiolingual Method. However, the fall of the Audiolingual Method marked the rise of methods which had a lesser impact. The adoption of Communicative Language Teaching as the main language
teaching methodology since the 1980s has been globally accepted as the dominant method in nearly all English language teaching situations worldwide.

In recent years, English is experiencing a rather unique situation. English is no longer just a lingua franca but has achieved the status of the major language of international communication. This new reality imposes new demands on the teaching methodology (Pennycook 1994, Crystal 1999, Jenkins 2000, Sifakis and Sougari 2004). Does this necessarily imply the search for a new methodology or the adaptation of previously successful methods? This question is dealt with in an attempt to inform ELT professionals of the possibilities that arise as part of the new era.

More particularly, this paper looks at the intricacies of communicative language teaching in the English language classroom and examines the methodological implications for teaching English as an International Language. What becomes prevalent in this search for a suitable methodology in order to empower learners with intercultural communicative competence is that several principles of instructional design could be prioritised when opting for intercultural communication as a long-term goal of language teaching. The pedagogical approaches that pursue the promotion of teaching EIL need to reflect upon some major concerns that regulate the mainstream language instruction and to consider the preoccupations that are interwoven in the international scope of learners’ learning agenda.

2. Teaching methodology within ELT

A close look at the history of ELT over the last 50 years reveals that language teaching was characterised by a succession of consecutive language teaching ideologies. To be more precise, language teaching has experienced frequent change. As a result of this change, a number of methods emerge, making claims of superiority, and giving way to more recent developments. Thus, the search for better methods has led to the adoption of grammar translation, direct method, audiolingualism, cognitive code and many variations of these methods. Total Physical Response (Asher 1969), Silent way (Gattegno 1972), Counselling Learning (Curran 1972) and Suggestopedia (Lazarov 1978) have seen the light of language teaching as alternative methods that could render successful learning outcomes. All methods share many common features but they also incorporate several distinctive characteristics that differentiate one from the other.

Some points need to be clarified in connection with the defining characteristics of a method in language teaching. According to Richards and Rodgers
(2001: 245), "[a] method refers to a specific instructional design or system based on a particular theory of language and of language learning". Some essential components in the description of a particular method are the following: the content, the roles of teachers and learners, and the teaching procedures and set of techniques. Prabhu (1990) and Rost (2002) both agree that methods entail a set of characteristics that should be taken into account. More particularly, Prabhu perceives method as a set of activities which are undertaken in the course of the lesson and considers its underlying theory, belief or concept. However, Rost succinctly points out that teaching methodology is informed by the learning environment, classroom dynamics, classroom language, input, procedures, outcome, feedback and assessment. What seems to be closely linked with the successful adoption of a specific method is that its implementation calls for skilful training (Richards and Rodgers 2001).

Within this framework, the methodology that has prevailed as the most dominant and influential for over 20 years is the one guided by the tenets of Communicative Language Teaching. Even though Communicative Language Teaching has received the attention of the ELT profession worldwide and has been adopted in a variety of diversified settings, this particular methodology seems to be receiving on-going recognition and subjective interpretation, depending on the classroom context. The choice of a weak over a strong version of Communicative Language Teaching or vice versa does not affect the common theory of language, nor does it alter the instructional design, the learner-teacher relationship, the materials, and the teaching techniques. The focus of Communicative language teaching is the development of communicative competence (Hymes 1972) and appropriate language use. A number of influential linguists (Chomsky 1965, Halliday 1970, Widdowson 1978, Canale and Swain 1980) have looked at the focus of linguistic theory, drawing various conclusions concerning the theory of language learning behind the communicative model of language and language use; in certain cases, the theories seem to complement each other as is the case of Halliday’s functional approach to language which complements Hymes’ viewpoint of communicative competence (Savignon 1983). Other theories, such as that of Canale and Swain, draw on the pedagogical focus of developing communicative competence, outlining the importance of developing the subcomponents of communicative competence, namely, grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence.

Communicative language teaching has influenced the instruction of foreign language teaching in the worldwide community. For a number of years, it has been considered as the most favourable approach to teaching, receiving positive
evaluations. In recent years, ELT methodology is experiencing another transition, which is often referred to as the post-method condition (Kumaravadivelu 1994) or the post-method era; this emerging situation has necessitated the development of a post-method pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu 2001). During the transitional period, the new framework calls for an integration of older and more recent methods accompanied by a reconsideration of their underlying theories based on the latest research findings (Pica 2000). Under this scope, as English has become an international vehicle of communication, the whole context of teaching English, as well as its underlying methodology, needs to be re-examined (McKay 2003, Sifakis and Sougari 2003, Sifakis and Sougari 2004).

3. EIL and teaching methodology

The basic tenet of EIL lies in the premise that interlocutors engage in exchanges that demand intercultural skills and that they possess intercultural communicative competence. The ultimate aim of culture-bound EIL is to render non-native speakers’ discourse internationally comprehensible. Among the characteristics that designate the EIL framework are the following (Sifakis and Sougari 2004):

- The culture-bound approach to teaching
- The development of intercultural skills
- The promotion of mutual intelligibility.

It becomes apparent that we need to account for learners’ real linguistic needs within the EIL educational context and to empower these learners with the ownership of English.

Prabhu (1990) suggests that there is no best method and at the same time he claims that more than one method could be appropriate for a particular context and urges teachers to refer to their sense of plausibility for the choice of wise decisions. It seems that teachers’ sense of plausibility is based on personal judgements and experience; the latter is shaped by teachers’ personal experience as learners, their teaching experience and the exposure to and undertaking of various methods.

Kramsch and Sullivan (1996: 200) state: “Think globally, act locally”, based on the understanding that the teacher and the learners may have their own culture of learning affected by the local culture and institutional culture. That is why it has been suggested that “appropriate pedagogy must also be a pedagogy of appropriation” (Kramsch and Sullivan 1996: 211). What should be accounted for is how English is embedded in the local context and the means whereby a
methodology that is appropriate for the local context is adopted (McKay 2003, Sifakis and Sougari 2004).

EIL educators need to consider the features of English, as English is supposed to be used in international and intercultural encounters and to create instances of language use that offers ample opportunities for effective exchanges. McKay (2003) maintains that the pedagogy that informs the teaching of English must change and that "the culture of learning that informs communicative language teaching ... provides the most productive method for ELT" (McKay 2003: 1).

Taking into account the transitional period and the dissatisfaction with older practices, several methodologists would agree that there is no best method that is appropriate for the diversity in the teaching contexts; it has been suggested that the preferred choice would be not the adoption of alternative methods, but the embracing of an alternative to methods (Kumaravadivelu 1994). A combination of principles of instructional design in connection with the teachers' personal judgements of appropriate classroom practices in a particular educational context could render a favourable choice for teaching methodology within the EIL framework.

4. Principles of teaching methodology

According to Rost (2002), the underlying principles of instructional design should be consulted when tackling with the issue of effective education in an attempt to develop awareness of the relevant principles and apply the knowledge drawn in appropriate teaching contexts. The principles of instructional design are rooted in various educational theories that bear relevance to language education, a few of which have been isolated in order to form the basis for the principles of instructional design. Some theories are concerned with intentions of instruction whereas others are concerned with the design of the course.

4.1 Intentions of instruction

4.1.1 Learner-centred instruction (or aptitude specific instruction)

Classrooms are inherently heterogeneous as they are composed of individuals who bring with them different interests, needs, aptitude, unique learning styles, motivation, etc. The endless list of differences among the members of a particular class calls for differentiating the processes and varying learning activities to incorporate appropriate activities to facilitate the learning process. Tradi-
tionally approved methods may not be applicable in all classrooms and one teaching methodology may not be appropriate for all the teaching contexts. Due to the diversified nature of the classroom environment as a result of learners’ heterogeneity, the teacher has the authority to differentiate the teaching according to the interests, aptitudes, abilities and preferred learning styles of the learners.

Placing the learner at the center of the teaching situation seems to be the focus of the theory that accounts for aptitude-treatment interaction. According to the theoretical framework of this theory, successful learning outcomes occur when individual learner aptitudes are accounted for as part of the instruction and feedback is administered accordingly (Cronbach and Snow 1977, Snow 1989). Thus, Snow (1989) supports the view that the learning potential is maximised once appropriate methods are applied; highly structured instructional environments are favoured by low-achievers, whereas low structured environments are preferred by high-achievers.

In the case of the EIL context, the choice for differentiating language learning according to the learning context becomes compulsory, because the learners are confronted with a unique situation in which they are called to cope with varied situations of quite unpredictable interactional events.

4.1.2 Positive climate for learning

The process of learning is enhanced once certain parameters are catered for, such as (i) establishing a positive climate for learning, (ii) acknowledging learners’ needs, (iii) organising and making learning resources available, (iv) balancing learners’ intellectual and emotional components of learning, and (v) sharing thoughts and feelings in a non-dominating way with the learners (Rogers 1969, Valett 1977, Rogers and Freiberg 1994).

The origin of Rogers’ theory is traced on the grounds of a humanistic approach to psychology, applying primarily to adult learners. While overlooking the cognitive aspect of language learning, Rogers (1969) is concerned with the qualities of experiential learning which leads to personal change. However, the prerequisites for personal growth and change are the incorporation of independent learning, the direct confrontation with personal, social or research problems, and the self-evaluation of learning. In the process, learners are familiarised with the techniques of learning and overcome any resistance to change. Thus, the teacher assumes a facilitative role in his/her attempt to expose learners to experiential learning, while exploring language learning possibilities.

In the EIL teaching context, the focus is not only on the learner but also on learning itself. The learning-centred approach places learning outcomes at the
core of teaching while tailoring the instruction to the needs, beliefs and aspirations of individual learners (Sifakis and Sougari 2004). Learners follow a culture-bound approach to the use of English as a lingua franca, bearing in mind the interactional nature of language. As regards the teaching methodology within the EIL framework, the activities promote opportunities for self-reflection and self-development, as a result of active engagement in tasks that are reflective in nature and allow for independent in-class and out-of-class learning. To maximise the opportunities that learners have for experiential learning, the teacher has to set up authentic activities that allow interactional exchanges with learners from other countries (e.g. in person or by class exchanges via telephone communication, teleconferencing, e-mails, etc.; for a more detailed methodological account refer to Sifakis and Sougari 2004). Thus, the organisation of a classroom that promotes EIL learning rests with the teacher who is responsible for implementing appropriate supplementary materials, based on individual learner needs, and setting up various liaisons which will ensure contacts with learners from other ethnicities.

4.1.3 Cognitive flexibility

"By cognitive flexibility, we mean the ability to spontaneously restructure one's knowledge ... in adaptive response to radically changing situational demands ... This is a function of both the way knowledge is represented and the processes that operate on those mental representations" (Spiro and Jehng 1990: 165). Based on the cognitive flexibility theory, it becomes apparent that once learners find themselves beyond their initial learning situation where they learn the basic concepts in a rather linear fashion, then the input must be presented from multiple perspectives to accommodate a variety of situations. The theory emphasises the importance of constructed meaning on the part of the learners; thus, effective learning occurs when the learners develop and organise their own representation of content. The multiplicity of contexts in which the information is presented maximises long-term retention.

With regard to the methodological application of the cognitive flexibility theory, the input is supposed to be presented multimodally (e.g. using the computer, the video or audio player, the text). Mere transmission of information does not guarantee active knowledge construction as the learners need to experiment with the various facets of language and experience language construction. To this end, the teaching of EIL stresses the importance of the involvement of the individual in language learning, thus rendering the accumulation of knowledge to personal experience. The learner is supposed to develop his/her own mechanisms for self-constructed meaning and adapt to the specific
circumstances. Furthermore, due to the interactional nature of the culture-bound pedagogy, the teacher is urged to supplement his/her teaching, using all the necessary audiovisual aids at his/her disposal, in order to cater for individual needs. Exposure to an extensive number of resources provides more opportunities for the development of intercultural competence which is interlinked with the requirement for authenticity of the input.

4.1.4 Coordination of teaching and learning / Conditions of learning

Teaching and learning are at the forefront of the theory of Conditions of Learning which stipulates that there are different types or levels of learning. The rationale behind this kind of classification is that the various levels of learning necessitate appropriate teaching methodology. The five major categories of learning can be classified as follows: intellectual skills, cognitive strategies, motor skills, verbal information and attitudes. It seems that the organisational process posits a certain hierarchical order that should be retained for more effective outcomes and learning events are supposed to be sequenced accordingly.

Furthermore, the theory identifies nine instructional events that correspond to nine cognitive processes (Gagne and Driscoll 1988, Gagne, Briggs and Wager 1992):

1. gaining attention (reception)
2. informing learners of the objective (expectancy)
3. stimulating recall of prior learning (retrieval)
4. presenting the stimulus (selective perception)
5. providing learning guidance (semantic encoding)
6. eliciting performance (responding)
7. providing feedback (reinforcement)
8. assessing performance (retrieval)
9. enhancing retention and transfer (generalisation).

The different ‘learning events’ (i.e. reception, expectancy, retrieval, selective perception, semantic encoding, reinforcement, generalisation) should comply with the learning situation and provide learning opportunities for learning in the classroom context. These events should be accounted for when designing a particular classroom event. The need for long-term retention of the input receives calls for adequate exposure to the different learning events via the appropriate selection of audiovisual aids.

The various events need to be planned appropriately for the EIL educational context by selecting tasks which reflect the culture-bound pedagogy.
4.1.5 Schema-based modes of learning

Rumelhart and Norman (1978, 1981) suggested the existence of three modes of learning: accretion, structuring and tuning. Accretion refers to the new information that is added to existing memory; this is the main mode of learning. Structuring is concerned with the creation of new concepts in the place of schematic knowledge. Tuning is linked with expert performance as a result of considerable effort. Restructuring, however, occurs once learners reflect upon their learning and exercise their metacognitive strategies which are not automatically activated. Learners need to be exposed to the various strategies to call upon the most appropriate ones when the opportunity arises. The incorporation of various activities has certain implications for the skills involved but does not necessarily affect the initial knowledge.

EIL teaching and learning is based on the principle of reflectivity as learners are subjected to activities that demand reflective thinking, while trying to discover similarities and differences in transcultural encounters. The development of intercultural communicative competence presupposes the engagement of the individuals in communicative events that call for structuring and restructuring of currently held beliefs.

4.2 Course design

4.2.1 Anchored instruction

Anchored instruction occurs in an anchored learning environment in which all activities are interwoven as part of a realistic situation (Bransford and Stein 1993). The focus of anchored instruction involves problem-solving activities in which learners work together toward the compilation of information that provides the solution to a given problem. Thus learners can apply the knowledge that has been acquired rather than be involved in rote learning. The major application of anchored instruction can be traced in technology-based learning, found in the shape of interactive tools that allow for constructive work on the part of learners. Certain materials such as videos or multimedia serve as anchors (macrocontexts) for subsequent teaching and learning; the use of interactive technology enhances language learning possibilities as learners are actively engaged in exploration. Technology-based materials are frequently used in anchored learning environments, offering an alternative way to learning. Particularly, in the case of implementing computer-based materials, feedback possibilities increase and teacher presence is optional, as learners can work individually or in pairs and progress at their own rate.

The possibilities that arise from anchored instruction are endless in the EIL
context, because the use of technological equipment (mainly, the personal computer) can expose learners to a multitude of tasks which require problem-solving. The computer is no longer just a teaching aid but becomes the source of helpful input.

4.2.2 Course structures – the ESP-as-an-approach perspective

Language learning is practised within a framework that purports learner control; this entails that learners select the materials that match their own preferred learning styles and needs. Learning becomes individualised and subsequently learners develop their autonomy. Originally, Merrill (1983) proposed a Component Display Theory which in more recent years evolved to a new version of the previous theory and became known as Component Design Theory (Merrill 1994). The latest version is mainly concerned with course structures and instructional transactions; presentation forms that are teacher-led do not rank high in this theory. The central focus of the Component Design Theory is to place emphasis on the instructional strategies in order to generate effective learning outcomes.

The Component Design Theory could be accounted for within the principles of the EIL framework as the teacher orchestrates the lessons in such a way that the learners develop gradually their autonomy by being allowed to choose the materials that would render their learning outcomes more successful. The design of such a course calls for teachers who exhibit organisational and managerial skills and learners who have an understanding of the demands involved in such an undertaking.

4.2.3 Spiral learning

The development of constructivist psychology has informed our understanding of the processes involved in the construction of new ideas or concepts. The curriculum and instruction should be structured in a way that caters for spiral learning (i.e. spiral curriculum), enabling learners to scaffold upon previous learning experiences and grasp meaning easily (Bruner 1986, 1990, 1996). Furthermore, instruction should incorporate tasks that allow for extrapolation and filling in the gaps (i.e. constructing deeper knowledge). Within Bruner's framework, learners' language and learning environment are influenced by the processes of social interaction that facilitate the learning experience. The presence of interlocutors challenges learners' existing knowledge and subsequently assists them in practising their inference skills by making appropriate choices of language learning strategies. Bruner's most recent work supplements his theoretical framework by accounting for the social and cultural aspects of learning.
The basis of the EIL framework rests on the incorporation of in-class and out-of-class activities that allow for the development of social interaction skills, as this is considered the only way toward the attainment of intercultural communicative competence. Previous knowledge undoubtedly serves as helpful input to the understanding and acquisition of new information.

4.2.4 Elaborative sequencing

One of the important aspects of instructional design is the organisation of the teaching material in an appropriately sequenced fashion that reflects its increasing internal complexity. Reigeluth’s Elaboration Theory (Reigeluth 1987, 1992) stipulates that the sequencing of ideas presupposes certain prerequisites, the absence of which would demand elaboration on the part of the teacher. The key for effective sequencing is careful planning. The choice of structuring knowledge in a certain way may lead to greater critical thinking, greater demands on reasoning and further manipulation of information. The elaboration approach is considered to lead to the formation of stable cognitive structures; this approach affects retention, learner motivation, the provision of information about the content and the attainment of learning goals. It seems that learner control over the content may influence subsequent learning as learners themselves make an informed decision upon the sequencing of new information.

Based on the principle of elaborative sequencing, it becomes clear that EIL teaching methodology can adopt elaborative sequencing as the gradual increase in the internal complexity of learning events can help learners frame those events in their minds appropriately. As learners are confronted with various dimensions of the English language, it is important that the new knowledge be presented with dexterity.

4.2.5 Criterion referencing

Mager (1988) offers a comprehensive set of methods for the organisation of training programmes and suggests certain principles which are part of the Criterion Referenced Instruction. According to the theoretical framework of this theory, when designing primarily training sessions or language sessions, certain issues need to be considered prior to the course: identifying the needs of the target group, setting performance objectives and evaluation criteria, administering criterion-referenced testing based on the objectives specified, and developing learning modules. In addition, agreed instructional goals and clear feedback result in the creation of an amicable relationship between teacher and learners.

With regard to criterion referencing, the approach to EIL tuition is quite
similar to the teaching of English as a foreign language. This entails that certain general considerations that are common in the two different instructional contexts need to be accounted for, but the specialised context of teaching EIL would need to create opportunities for an international use of the language.

5. Conclusion

In our growing global community, the teaching methodology of English prioritises the reconsideration of older practices, the reflectivity upon personal practice and local culture and the consideration of the basic principles of instructional design. “Approaches to the teaching of EIL above all need to be culturally sensitive to the diversity of contexts in which English is taught and used” (McKay 2002: 128). Changes should mainly concern the choice of appropriate materials and the priorities set to comply with the intricacies of the designing of such a course (Sifakis and Sougari 2004). However, the teaching methodology of the EIL classroom needs to be informed by the principles of instructional design that draw insights from educational theories. Communicative language teaching has not been accepted by the worldwide community, as one particular approach is unlikely to satisfy the learning styles and preferences of all learners – which to a certain extent are rooted in the local culture. Thus, within the EIL framework, the adoption of certain principles of instructional design are seen as an alternative to the adoption of one particular method; teachers’ sense of plausibility allows the implementation of methods that are culturally sensitive and appropriate.

References


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