

Approaches To English As A Foreign Language And Their Implications For English Language Teaching In Kuwait

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Abstract

This paper attempts to evaluate the main approaches to English as a foreign language (EFL) and their implications for English language teaching (ELT) in Kuwait. The advantages and disadvantages of each approach are described as objectively as possible. The oldest, grammar-translation approach, usually called the traditional approach, is the collection of grammatical explanations and rules that, with innumerable variations including translation of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and even longer discourse, has been used by teachers over the last 200 years or so. Since ELT at an extensive level, especially in the State of Kuwait has assumed greater importance fairly recently, a purely grammar-translation approach has not been used as the only approach. Grammar and translation teaching went side by side with language use through demonstration, dramatization, pointing at objects, and reading with dictionary help. This situation continued to prevail till a new approach, the structural (or audio/lingual or aural/oral) approach emerged.

As a reaction against the grammar-translation approach and as a result of the expansion in foreign language teaching, itself a result of the growing contacts between the various peoples in 1930s and 1940s, the structural approach began to be used. It is based on the principles that language is speech not writing; language is a set of habits; teaching should be concerned with language not about language; language is what native speakers say, not what someone thinks they ought to; and languages are different (Moulton, 1961). The introduction of this approach in the Arab (Gulf) Area in the early 1960s was a desirable turning point. English language teachers, even the less qualified ones, could handle their job easily. Students used English inside and outside the classroom in an acceptable way. Taped materials helped teachers (being non-native speakers of English) and students to listen to authentic English and improve their English language. However, the approach was criticized on linguistic, psycho-linguistics and sociolinguistic grounds, but most of the criticism was based on pedagogical ones. It assumes one way of teaching in which the teacher always acts the role of the questioner, initiator, teacher or formal instructor, and the learner the role of the listener, respondent or formal class student.

The structural approach also disregards the fact that language learning is learning (language) behaviour for particular purposes: requesting, thanking, disagreeing, defining, describing, in addition to answering questions, as well as other functions of language. This functional behaviour is what the latest approach, the communicative one, sets itself to do. In this latest approach, there is organization of the language (to be taught and learned) around the concept of the different role relationships people play (when they engage in using language) or around the functions of language.

Until the beginning of 1970s there was little mention of the communicative approach in Kuwait or other Arab countries. Since then, the approach has gained popularity in Kuwait and some countries. However, it has not been adopted in its totality but in a modified version. This adoption has been a healthy trend since the communicative approach has helped pupils to gain an increased confidence in using the language in its spoken and written forms. Other countries have continued to use the structural approach.

The paper concludes by a set of suggestions outlining the trend that English language teaching might take in Kuwait and possibly other Arab (Gulf) countries.

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Aim of the Paper

This paper aims at providing an evaluation of the main approaches to English as a foreign language (EFL) that have prevailed in this century, as well as the implication of their use in English language teaching (ELT) in Kuwait. The study does not attempt to be biased to any one approach at the expense of another. Rather, the advantages and disadvantages of each, in terms of their scientific principles and their effectiveness in achieving the aims of English language teaching in Kuwait, will be described as objectively as possible. In order to do this, the basic assumptions, the psychological, social and linguistic foundations and the pedagogic and practical techniques of each approach will be briefly dealt with. Secondly, teachers' reaction and learners' performance in each case will also be discussed. Thirdly, the paper will discuss the effect each approach has created in maintaining those teachers and learners' interest in English as a foreign language as an instrument of communication in situations where English, rather than Arabic, is to be used. In other words, whatever the approach adopted may be, it has to be relevant to the objectives of foreign language identified or decided upon. These objectives, generally put, are enabling individuals to communicate with others in the personal and professional situations of daily life. This communication is not simply a matter of constructing and understanding grammatical sentences. It is how to use these sentences into larger communicative units (texts and dialogues for example), and how to produce and understand appropriate utterances in relation to particular aims, the role and status of interlocutors, the topic, the channel of transmission, etc. (Roulet: 1975: 73).

Communication also involves not only a referential function such as transmitting information on objects and events surrounding us ('He begins work at 8 O'clock', 'The bathroom is between the two bedrooms', for example). Rather communication involves expressive functions (asserting self, expressing opinion, feeling or judgements) and phatic functions (establishing or maintaining contacts with others, persuasion, etc.). Furthermore, communicating satisfactorily is not simply knowing one variety of a language, but being able at least to understand and if possible use different varieties of the language used in the particular community (cf. Roulet: 1975: 75).

With this yardstick in mind, I will now set on describing the main approaches to English language teaching. These approaches are the grammar-translation, the structural (or audio-lingual), and the communicative approaches. However, as a further preparation toward this task, a set of terms which will reiterate in the paper has first to be defined.

1.2 Terminology

1.2.1 English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

The nature of teaching and learning a foreign language implies a totally different situation from that of a first language or mother tongue. Unlike the latter, the foreign language teaching and learning process assumes no previous knowledge or use of the language to be taught. Pupils coming to learn English in Kuwait, for example, have little or no knowledge of English when they are in their fifth year of schooling (the beginning of the intermediate stage). English is not the language they will be using outside school; nor is it the medium of instruction in other subjects in the school curriculum. In other words, there is little, if any, immediate outside school reinforcement. Motivation to learning the new language is not expected to be very high especially in the early stages. There is also the possibility of negative transfer from the first language, Arabic, learnt early on at home, and later taught at school. Most, if not all, reinforcement, motivation and positive transfer have to be, explicitly or implicitly, provided by the foreign language programme itself; and in this I include the teacher.

1.2.2 Approach, Method and Technique

Anthony (1972) argues that an approach is “a set of assumptions dealing with the nature of language and the nature of language teaching and learning (p.5)”. An approach states a point of view or a philosophy concerning the language description, psychological theory of learning, and teaching pedagogy used in the language teaching-learning process. On the other hand, a method refers to the overall plan for the systematic presentation of language in terms of the selection and grading of materials. Thus the methods employed within a given approach are affected by the atmosphere in which the foreign language is presented: the age of the learners, their cultural background and previous knowledge of the foreign language.

The third of the trio is technique. It is concerned with what actually happens in the classroom: the ways the teacher uses to accomplish specific tasks for specific objectives. In Antony's words: an approach is axiomatic, a method is procedural and a technique is implemntational (p.7).

1.2.3 Applied Linguistics, Psycholinguistics and Sociolinguistics

Each of these terms is concerned with a set of theories all of which have something to do with language teaching and its preferred approach. Briefly put, these terms refer to the description of language adopted, the study of learning strategies and the definition of teaching aims respec-

tively. Language teaching and learning, as Roulet (1975) puts it, "cannot be content with deriving information solely from general linguistics or from descriptive linguistics, and ... it needs to rely on other disciplines as ... psycholinguistics ... or sociolinguistics." Therefore, a more detailed view of the three terms is, in the context of this paper, essential.

We have, first of all, to differentiate between general linguistics and applied linguistics. The former refers to the scientific study of language. As Allen (1975) puts it, "the linguist studies data in order to discover the nature of the underlying language system (p.16)".

Applied linguistics, on the other hand, implies finding practical applications of linguistics. But what does one apply when one applies linguistics? In answer, Mackey (1973: 248) argues that one applies either a theory of language and/or a description of one. As far as foreign language teaching is concerned, the important matter is the application of the description of language. For example, in the structural (audio-lingual) approach, it was the description of language offered by descriptive linguistics, that was taken as a basis. Harsh (1975) sums this up, in connection to English, as follows:

Descriptive linguistics postulates that English has a set of grammatical patterns unique to it alone, and that to convey meaning it uses word form, word order, and intonation patterns. In analyzing these patterns the descriptive linguists proceed from form to meaning, identifying first the meaningful minimal sounds (phonemes), then meaningful minimal lexical units (morphemes), and ultimately proceeding to large syntactic units (phrases, clauses, sentences) (p. 7) . '

We turn now to the definition of psycholinguistics. If linguistics is concerned with language, as a finished product, psycholinguistics is concerned with language as a process of learning. Therefore, psycholinguistics addresses itself to the learner and **how** he/she learns a given language. Although no one can assert that one knows exactly how we, human beings, learn, and learn language in particular, psycholinguistics provides us with theories about this learning. Learning, as explained by Stimulus - Response associationists, for example

involves primarily the formation of mechanical connections of some sort between stimuli and responses. Everything a student does, whether it is thought or action, is explained in terms of responses following stimuli or stimuli following responses ... (Bigge: 1964: 9).

Therefore, language behaviour consists of producing responses to the correct stimuli. As Clark (1975: 292) points out, these links between stimuli and responses become habitual as a result of being reinforced. If a child produces an utterance which happens to be an appropriate response to the situation, or to the previous utterance, he will be rewarded with some sign of approval, for example.

Finally, sociolinguistics is concerned with the aim of teaching. If foreign language teaching and learning implies understanding and producing grammatical utterances or sentences divorced from their context, or with the linguistic competence of, in Chomsky's terms, "an ideal speaker-listener (1965: 3)", then there is little place, if any, for sociolinguistics. But the aim of foreign language teaching involves, to borrow Hymes's words, the fact that a learner

acquires knowledge of sentence, not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He or she acquires competence as when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner. In short, a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and even to evaluate their accomplishment by others. This competence, moreover, is integral with attitudes, values, and motivations concerning language, its features and uses, and integral with competence for, and attitude toward, the interrelation of language with other codes of communicative conduct (Hymes: 1972: pp. 277-8).

And here lies the contribution of sociolinguistics to foreign language teaching.

1.2.4 Selection, Grading, and Presentation

The importance attached to selection, grading and presentation, or to put it differently, control, in foreign language teaching can not be ignored. No approach attempts to teach the language in its totality; it cannot do that. And no foreign language teaching/learning programme can simulate the process of acquiring first language in its totality. It cannot do that either. The former involves selection, while the latter involves grading of the content to be taught/learned. Once grading and selection are agreed upon, presentation follows. This presentation (which may or may not be followed by reinforcement) employs various techniques: presentation of structural items, presentation through drills or dialogues, and so on. Selection could be grammatical, that is taking the forms of the verb (present, past, future) as the basis of introducing the language, or it could be functional, situational or topical. Grading could be on the basis of a simple-to-difficult scale as in structural grading or by focus as in topical grading.

These issues will be discussed in detail in relation to the approaches discussed as well as in relation to the teaching and learning practices in Kuwait.

1.3 Approaches to English Language Teaching

In what follows the main approaches and their implications to English language teaching and learning in Kuwait will be discussed. These approaches are grammar-translation, structural and communicative ap-

proaches. Within each approach there are varieties but these are varieties in terminology, methods and techniques. For example, the grammar-translation approach is referred to as the traditional approach, or traditional grammar; the structural approach is often called the audio-lingual, or aural-oral; and the communicative approach is often called the notional, functional, situational, thematic or topical approach. In this paper, I will use grammar-translation, structural and communicative all through. A reference to the transition from one approach to another will also be made.

PART II: THE GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION APPROACH

2.1 The Grammar-Translation Approach:

The grammar-translation approach is the collection of grammatical explanations and rules that, with innumerable variations and modifications including translation of words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs and even longer discourse, have been used by teachers for the past two hundred years or so. This is perhaps the reason why it is called the traditional approach. It has its foundations in the 18th century studies of the so-called prescriptive grammarians-scholars who were primarily concerned with formulating and fixing rules for the correct use. The grammar-translation approach, unlike the two main approaches that followed it, namely the structural and communicative approaches, is not based on any explicit psycholinguistic or sociolinguistic theory. In other words, it does not concern itself with how learners learn the language or how this learner actually uses it. The main concern of the grammar-translation approach is purely linguistic. This concern centred around a description of English based on languages like latin and Greek, thus ignoring a systematic description of the language as it is actually used (Harsh 1975: 3).

The philosophy underlying the teaching and learning in the grammar-translation approach could be summed up in the following points (Roulet, 1975: 5-11):

- (1) It imposes norms generally derived from the language of the great authors of the previous centuries, without taking into account present day usage.
- (2) It describes the written language with little consideration to the spoken language.
- (3) It devotes a great deal of time to secondary grammatical points (in particular orthography).
- (4) Its methodology gives a predominant place to morphology and neglects syntax. Eighteenth century scholars set up a classification of seven to nine parts of speech, eight of which are still listed: noun,

pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, and interjection.

- (5) The method does not set out rules enabling the learner to construct systematically correct complex sentences.
- (6) Outside the area of morphology and syntax, the treatment of phonology is very often inadequate.

As far as the grading of the teaching and learning materials is concerned, this is done on the basis of grammar. A quick look at any course book of this kind will illustrate that the materials are divided into regular and irregular verbs, nouns, pronouns, adjectives and adverbs, and simple, compound and complex sentences. The content of such materials was centred around literary texts for reading and translation following intensive work on grammatical analysis and memorization of rules.

The techniques of presentation of materials attended to definitions, rules and explanations, and students were asked to memorize definitions like:

A sentence is a more or less complex expression offering the complete sense of a thought, feeling or wish.

OR

The object of the verb is the term indicating the being or the object acted upon.

The presentation of grammar followed too closely the grammatical systems of Greek and Latin. For example, "noun case", was presented as nominative, vocative, accusative, genitive and dative. All in all, the approach followed an analytic presentation. Such an analysis has naturally little to do with the use of language in everyday situations (cf. Zandvoort, 1963). Finally, as Lado (1964) points out translation as a class activity was erroneously equated with understanding, speaking, reading and writing, which are very different skills and need to be learned as such.

These are the basic principles of the grammar-translation approach. Some of the criticism that have recently been addressed to it has been implied in this description. However, the major criticism of the approach could be summed up in the following:

- (1) The main hypothesis of the approach is that one knew a language once one had mastered its forms and rules. But this learning disregards the functional nature of language, and how language is used to convey social functions such as requesting, greeting, introducing people, forms of address, agreeing and disagreeing, expressing feelings and attitudes, etc.
- (2) Apart from translation, the traditional approach equates the teaching of the foreign language with the teaching of the mother tongue or first language. In the latter case, there may be some justification since the learner already knows how to use the language and all is needed is the analysis of language forms of correcting errors in these forms against a given norm. But the foreign language learner has no such previous knowledge of the foreign language he is learning.
- (3) With the growing interest in modern languages for communicative

purposes, it has become even more evident that teaching techniques based mainly on parts of speech and memorization of grammatical rules are inadequate.

Recently, renewed interest in grammar-translation has been observed, in particular, after the emergence of generative-transformational grammar and partially as a reaction to structural linguistics based on formal description of sentence patterns. In this respect, Allen and Widdowson (1975) give the following evaluation of the approach; this evaluation sums up perhaps a more enlightened and modern view of this approach:

The aims and methods of traditional grammar have been widely criticised in recent years, mainly by linguists wishing to promote one or other of the currently more fashionable theories. It is possible, however, that this criticism has been overdone. Much has been made of comparatively trivial shortcomings, and the achievements have been belittled or ignored. Teachers who wish to maintain a balanced view of linguistics should not overlook the fact that traditional grammar has many useful virtues. The traditional handbooks [e.g. Zandvoort (1963)] provided the array of terms and distinctions which most of us used in learning to talk about ... language, and which many educated people continue to find serviceable throughout their lives ... (p.51).

2.2 The Grammar-Translation Approach and ELT in Kuwait

Before turning to “the currently more fashionable theories” Allen and Widdowson talk about, the place of the grammar-translation approach in teaching English as a foreign language in Kuwait will be discussed. Since English language teaching at an extensive level in Kuwait and other Arab countries assumed greater importance fairly recently, in some countries in the early days of this present century, and in others more recently in the Forties and Fifties, to the best of my knowledge, a purely grammar translation approach has not been used as the only approach. What happened is that techniques from various methods have been used. Although these methods such as the Direct Method de-emphasized (and sometimes eliminated) translation and the memorization of conjugations, declensions and rules, grammar and translation teaching went side by side with language use through demonstrations, dramatizations and pointing at objects, etc. When the Direct Method failed to achieve decisive results, foreign language teaching drifted into the reading method. “This was a purely passive understanding of graded readings with dictionary help on difficult words” (Lado, 1964: 5).

In the Arab World and in Kuwait in particular, English language school textbooks, such as Michael West’s books, were characterized with English-Arabic word lists intended to facilitate reading. The content of these books consisted of simplified extracts from great writers or texts specifically written to illustrate the grammatical points being taught in a particular lesson. However, much analysis of the language, memorization of rules and paradigms (Rivers, 1981: 28) continued to dominate

classroom activities. The teachers, coming from different parts of the Arab World were, themselves, taught by the same methods and therefore continued to use them in their teaching in Kuwait. Such teachers had little or no training in or knowledge of other possible approaches. Indeed, the approach adopted by those teachers was a mixture of grammar-translation, direct method, and common sense. Therefore, under the umbrella of the grammar-translation approach and before the adoption of the structural approach in the early 1960s, English language teaching in Kuwait could be characterized by what may be called the absence of a systematic approach in the classroom. To label the mixture of techniques used by the teachers as having been "eclectic" in the present technical sense would be inaccurate. In most cases two or three factors governed the teaching and learning practices in the classroom. First the aims of English language teaching (for example, for the purpose of general communication where English rather than Arabic was to be used, and for study purposes at the university) were unclear to teachers. Secondly, teachers' preference to one technique of teaching, rather than another was *ad hoc* and arbitrary. The teachers' own intuition and experience, as to what best suited the learners, guided the whole operation. Furthermore, under the influence of the grammar-translation approach there was also the absence of a systematic use of audio-visual aids, apart from the pupils' textbooks and teachers' "chalk and talk". The absence of sufficient information on the level of English achieved by pupils in Kuwait makes it difficult to issue a confident judgement. However, one can say that that achievement had the same strengths and weaknesses of school leavers in other Arab countries: reasonable vocabulary, grammatical knowledge and graphology, the basis for reading comprehension acquired through emphasis on texts, limited writing skill and poor speaking skill.

This situation continued to prevail till new approaches, the structural approach and the communicative approach, eventually emerged in the early 1960s and mid 1970s respectively.

PART III: THE STRUCTURAL APPROACH

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As a reaction against the grammar-translation approach and as a result of the expansion in foreign language teaching and the growing contact between various peoples in the Thirties and Forties of the present century, there was an increasing discontent with that approach and people started to have their doubts about its validity. The work of the historical grammarians, of the Indo-European language scholars and of anthropologists who analyzed and described unrecorded native language not only helped in increasing the shift of interest away from the grammar translation approach but also paved the way for descriptive linguists such as Bloomfield, Sapir, and others who described language in general, and Fries,

Pike and others "who gave a systematic and detailed description of the English language as it is actually used in its various regional and social dialects." (Harsh, 1968: 5). As a result, there was a movement, or rather movements which began first in Europe and then spread to other parts of the world, and which emphasized "language learning by direct contact with the foreign language in meaningful situations. This movement resulted in various individual methods such as new method, reform method, natural method and even oral method, but they can all be referred to as direct methods or the direct methods." (Lado, 1964: 4). The advantage of these methods over a purely grammar-translation approach lies in emphasizing direct contact with the foreign language and in de-emphasizing or even eliminating translation and the memorization of conjugations, declensions and rules. The main assumption of the direct method is that learning a foreign language is the same as learning the mother tongue, and that "exposing the student directly to the foreign language impresses it perfectly upon his mind" (Lado 1964: 5). This extreme attitude might have been one of the reasons for its failure. This failure led in turn to the emergence of reading methods which focussed on understanding graded readings with dictionary help on difficult words.

However, the main reaction against the grammar-translation approach, both in theory and practice is manifested in the emergence of the Structural Approach, well known as the audio-lingual approach. This is the subject of the following section.

3.2 The Structural Approach

While the grammar-translation approach has its roots in Greek and Latin, and in "a vague and unscientific approach to the questions of human behaviour including the acquisition of knowledge" (Sadler, 1974: 1), the Structural Approach can be traced rather directly to the so-called 'scientific' linguistics of Leonard Bloomfield and his followers in the 1920s and 1930s on the one hand, and to the assumptions of behaviouristic psychology of learning on the other. Two other factors, both of which are external to linguistics and psychology, have helped a great deal in popularizing the approach all over the world. First, during and after World War II, the widespread use of tape recorders and other audio devices such as language laboratories made it possible to provide authentic models for oral-aural practice which is essential to the approach. Secondly,

this emphasis on the spoken aspect of foreign language has been caused by the fact that people suddenly found themselves living in a very small world. The tremendous growth in transportation, communication and mass media has brought to the front the necessity for people coming face-to-face and communicating orally ... (Kharma, 1969: 7)

The methodology underlying the structural approach could be summed up in the following points:

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- (1) The approach is concerned with a description of language in use in a particular community at a particular time. Accordingly, published language teaching courses aimed at teaching the language of daily usage, (see for example, **Living English for the Arab World**, 1961 and later editions)
 - (2) The approach is concerned with the spoken language the pupil needs as an instrument of communication.
 - (3) Unlike the grammar-translation approach, this approach is based on analyses of phonological systems which in turn served as a basis for the systematic teaching of pronunciation.

- (4) In view of the Structural Approach, it was unnecessary to have recourse to meaning as did traditional grammar in order to define parts of speech. In English, for example, there are four form classes: nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. These are identified by their formal/grammatical features (e.g. singular and plural markers) and by their distributional features (e.g. position in the sentence.) A sentence like Lewis Carroll's sentence (quoted in Roulet, 1975: 23)

The slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe
and a sentence like Chomsky's (1965: 149)

Colourless green ideas sleep furiously

are considered well-formed/grammatical though meaningless sentences.

- (5) The approach presents language units in terms of sentence patterns. In this respect Hornby (1962) writes:

Analysis is helpful, but the learner is, or should be, more concerned with sentence-building. For this he needs to know the patterns of English sentences and should be told which words enter into which patterns (Preface, P.V.).

As a result of this, one of the most known techniques of teaching the approach is substitution exercises: substituting new elements in one or other slot, changing the order of the slots, modifying the number of the slots, etc.

- (6) The approach, as pointed earlier, reflected a behaviourist view of language learning. Principally under the influence of the psychologist Skinner, the approach proposed a mechanical process of habit formation through which the phases of stimulus-response-reinforcement would determine the formulation of structure drills and would lead the student to the acquisition of these structures.

William Moulton, in 1961, summed up the basic principles of the Structural Approach in the following slogans:

1. Language is speech, not writing
 2. A language is a set of habits
 3. Teach the language, not about the language
 4. Language is what native speakers say, not what someone thinks they ought to say.
 5. Languages are different. (quoted in Prator, 1976: 3)
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These constitute the basic principles underlying the structural approach. However, it should be mentioned that the approach since it started to be used, has faced many challenges, undergone many modifications, and been subject to criticism especially very recently. It will be very difficult if not impossible in this presentation to give all these issues in detail. And since the approach is very familiar in Kuwait and the Arab World as in other parts of the world, I will limit myself to some main developments related to these issues:

(1) Most of the **criticism** addressed to the approach centred around the following:

- (a) The structural approach attached excessive weight to grammatical facts of secondary importance (e.g. morphological or morpho-phonological rules) as much as the traditional approach attached too much importance to secondary graphic facts, and thus, therefore it neglects important generalizations.
- (b) The approach only describes the surface structure of sentences, thus cannot take account of important grammatical facts. Chomsky's well known example makes this point clear:

**John is easy to please, and
John is eager to please**

are two sentences having the same surface structure but the structure of their meaning is different. Another fact is related to syntactic ambiguity:

The fear of the enemy overthrew our plans.

This sentence means either

**The enemy was afraid: this overthrew our plans. Or
We were afraid of the enemy: this overthrew our plans.**

As Roulet (1975) points out: "What is necessary, therefore, is to make pupils aware of such grammatical facts because the comprehension of the utterance and often its correct translation into another language depends on the distinction." (p. 29).

- (c) The emphasis on formal patterns at the expense of situational and semantic factors, in addition to the importance given to step-by-step learning, led both teachers and pupils to manipulate structures as an end in themselves while neglecting their application in everyday life.
- (d) Structuralists led teachers to think that language was the only variable in language pedagogy and thus to neglect many problems of language learning and teaching. The two essential questions: "What to teach?" and "How to teach?" were not adequately solved.
- (e) Finally, the structural approach is based on an inadequate (or at least incomplete) model of language learning, i.e. the verbal conditioning theory associated with Skinner. Chomsky (1959) has made this point very clear in his review of Skinner's **Verbal Behaviour**, i.e. that the Skinnerian theory does not account in a satisfactory manner for the acquisition and creative use of language.

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- (2) As far as the **modifications** on the approach are concerned, although the principles of grading and selection (e.g. on the basis of neutral grammatical sentences, what Widdowson (1982) calls "contrived" sentences) as well as the basic techniques of teaching (pattern-practice) remained unchanged, there have been various attempts aiming at making foreign language teaching and learning more interesting, motivating and appropriate to the aims in view. Among these major modifications are the following:
- (a) **Situational teaching:** This implies using physical demonstration of notions and objects in order to present and practice the structures of the language. As Cook (1970) reports, "The teacher needs to collect' up to five each of the following objects: books, cups, pegs, shoes, bags, tins, pens, pencils, bottles, balls, keys'. After he has staggered into the classroom with this load, he demonstrates 'This is a book' and 'That is a pen' using objects near to him and far away from him ... When the supply of actions and objects in the classrooms runs out, the teacher goes on to pictures ..." (p. 68).
 - (b) **Contextual teaching:** This implies an attempt to teach "the language which is likely to occur within a specific context of situation" (Cook, 1970: 69). In other words the language is controlled by restricting it to those items that are likely to occur in a given context or everyday situation such as in the supermarket, going to the post office, at the baker's, visiting a friend, the school library. etc.
- (3) Finally in this discussion of the structural approach there are today four types of **challenge** facing it: these are linguistic, psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and pedagogic. I will discuss each briefly:
- (a) **Linguistically:** The approach is based on a description of language concerned with formal patterns. This description is based on a corpus of existing sentences. The grammar emerging from the description explains neither the deep relations between sentences, the ambiguity of such constructions as "Flying planes can be dangerous", nor the universality in language. The newer generative grammar "proposes to describe not just existing English sentences but all possible English sentences and to give an explanation of how native speakers form or 'generate' sentences" (Harsh, 1968: 8).
 - (b) **Psycholinguistically:** Based on behavioural psychology, the structural approach emphasizes pattern-practice and memorization. It also assumes that people learn language by repetition, exercise and fitting new things into an old pattern. The approach also assumes that language learning is a kind of stimulus-response relationship: the learner hears a sentence and this stimulates a verbal response. Naturally people do learn language in this way, but there are other ways of language learning. An alternative view which Wilkins (1972: 168) calls "mentalist" contradicts the behaviourist one. "Everybody learns a language, not because they are subjected to similar conditioning process, but because they possess an inborn capacity which permits them to acquire a language as a normal maturational process. This capacity is by definition universal (pp.
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- 168-9). Therefore, the greater the exposure to meaningful language the more effectively the learner will learn it.
- (c) **Sociolinguistically:** "The structural approach equates internalized mastery of the rules of the target language ... with the ability to communicate effectively in a range of given social situations" (Candlin, 1971). Learning to produce grammatical sentences (What Widdowson (1973) calls rules of usage) does not necessarily mean that one will be able to function in situations demanding the 'use' of the language being learned.
- (d) **Pedagogically:** The structural approach assumes one way of teaching in which the teacher always acts the role of the questioner, initiator, teacher or formal instructor ... and the learner acts the role of the listener, respondent, or formal class student. The approach disregards the fact that language learning is learning language behaviour for particular purposes: answering questions, (Yes, but also asking questions), requesting, thanking, disagreeing, as well as other functions, or "How to do things with words" as the philosopher Austin (1962) put it.

Wilkins (1972a) expresses his criticism in this way:

Language learning has concentrated much more on the use of language to report and describe than on doing things through language. This is because the learning of lexical labels (command, threat, warning, surprise ...) has been substituted for the learning of how the acts themselves are performed and because grammatical categories have too often been taken as categories of communication (p. 12).

3.3 The Structural Approach and ELT In Kuwait

Over the last two decades or so, English language teaching in Kuwait witnessed major changes. These changes took place in line with recent trends and developments in applied linguistics, language teaching and learning methodology, and educational technology. The main manifestations of these changes were the introduction of the structural approach and later the communicative approach. Before the early 1960s and as pointed out in 2.3. above, ELT in Kuwait was characterized by the absence of a systematic approach and teachers used classroom techniques which drew upon various sources such as grammar-translation, reading methods and direct methods. The introduction of the structural approach in Kuwait, which was described as a "grassroots" change (Kharma, 1967), implied a revision of the ELT situation in all its aspects including materials, teaching aids, techniques of teaching. The main manifestations of the approach were however reflected in the following (Hajjaj, 1972):

- (1) A new course, namely **Living English for the Arab World** (1961) was adopted. This was later revised several times in the light of the teachers' experience. The content of the course was structurally graded. The backbone of the grading was the forms of the verb around which all other structures were built. No grammatical rules were given but rules were practised through repetition and substitution, and reinforcement in the form of reading and writing. The vocabulary items introduced in each lesson were limited, and the order of their

presentation did not always depend on the frequency of their use but on how they could be demonstrated (or their meaning given in Arabic). In pronunciation, the teacher was always the model for his students. This was always assisted by flash cards and later by taped materials. The reading passages grew in length gradually, covering several paragraphs and dealing with topics of varied nature.

- (2) The adoption of the new approach necessitated intensive in-service training for teachers. This included an initial programme for preparing teachers to use the new textbooks, short orientation courses for new teachers every year and continuous demonstration visits by inspectors. In addition, invited experts came to assess the work done (Kharma, 1967), joint meetings between inspectors and teachers were held, and inspectors and teachers were encouraged to pursue graduate courses in linguistics and English language teaching.
- (3) Pupils were interested in learning English. They felt they were handling the new language fairly easily, especially in its spoken form. The use of different teaching aids such as flashcards, wall pictures and tape recorders aroused their interest. The pupils' ability to read with comprehension and interest in reading simplified books appeared to have improved. Similar improvement also appeared in their ability to write not only isolated sentences but also paragraphs and longer writings though with the help of some guidance. Such an improvement was indeed reported by outside observers (Lee, 1969).

However, with all these positive aspects of the introduction of the structural approach, there were various negative aspects many of which were also felt in other (Arab) ELT situations (Cf. Zughouli, 1983: 328-32):

- (1) Repetition of teaching/learning points was conducted mechanically without sufficient attention to meaning. Instead of asking questions and encouraging pupils to ask questions, many teachers found group and chorus repetition an easy escape. The result was often monotonous drilling making pupils bored and uninterested.
- (2) Over emphasis on oral skills came at the expense of reading and writing.
- (3) That the teaching materials were structurally graded is quite obvious; but a major weakness of the course books used was that once a structure was presented it was not re-cycled. The fact that the one and the same structure might serve various uses or functions was totally neglected.
- (4) Most of the exercises, which were meant to revise and reinforce what was previously taught, dealt with points as discrete units isolated from others, thus depriving pupils from making useful language generalizations.
- (5) Most of the materials presented in dialogues, stories, and description were unnatural and unauthentic though they were meant to be examples of authentic use of language for communication of the sentence patterns taught.

In the event, there were attempts in materials and techniques to depart partially from the purely structural approach. Early in the 1970s when the

findings in sociolinguistics began to emerge (see below), **Living English for the Arab World** was revised and modified. A new version, **Progressive Living English**, attempted to introduce reading passages and dialogues of a communicative nature. It included a story-line, science fiction, journalistic English and every day verbal and non-verbal situations. It also attempted the introduction of role-playing, description and reporting. Other attempts involved encouraging teachers to produce their own additional materials (Al-Mutawa, Hajjaj and Borno, 1985).

To sum up, the adoption of the structural approach, in spite of its limitations, proved to have been a favourable and desirable turning point in ELT in Kuwait. The teachers, even the less qualified ones, could handle their job easily. The pupils used English inside and outside the classroom in an acceptable way. The taped materials helped teachers (given the fact that almost all of them are non-native speakers of English) as well as the pupils' to listen to native speakers' English. In fact, the whole TEFL scene became more favourable. For example, the teachers, having felt confident enough to use the new approach effectively, contributed significantly to the improvement of the materials used—something which was reflected in subsequent revisions and new editions of those materials. Furthermore, the changing scene, among other factors, inspired a growing interest among teachers and inspectors to seek courses in education, linguistics and methodology. The fruits of this growing interest have created a healthy atmosphere which has opened the eyes on the limitations of the structural approach I have outlined above, but which has also made it possible to see new developments in the field, in particular the newly emerging communicative approach to teaching and learning English.

PART IV: THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Broadly speaking, “two highly-contrasting general accounts of language acquisition” (Wilkins, 1972: 1961) have dominated the EFL scene over a great part of the present century. One is the behaviourist theory based on stimulus-response, reinforcement and repetition and other forms of environmental learning which has already been discussed. The other, is what Wilkins calls “mentalism”, which claims that language is a very complex form of behaviour which cannot be accounted for in terms of features external to the individual. Chomsky, in his “Review of Skinner's **Verbal Behavior** (1959), attacks the idea that language responses are under the control of external stimuli. For Chomsky:

The most important thing of all this is that human beings use language whereas other animals do not. It is no use applying principles of learning that have been derived from research with animals, as he says the behaviourists do, to explain a form of behaviour that

animals are not capable of. Since all normal human beings learn their language successfully they must possess some internal capacity for language that other animals do not have. Since this capacity cannot have been acquired socially it must be innate (Wilkins, 1972: 169).

Since Chomsky (1965) also first advanced the two notions of “competence” and “performance”, they have been manipulated extensively in different disciplines, from linguistics through psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics to pedagogy. By competence Chomsky means the ideal speaker/hearer’s implicit knowledge of his language, while by “Performance” he means the actual use of language in real situations. Competence, therefore does not deal with speech but with the ability of the native speaker of a given language to produce, out of a finite set of rules an infinite number of grammatical sentences. Performance, on the other hand, refers to what people do when they engage in conversational interaction. Canale and Swain (1980) put it this way :

Chomsky’s..... claim is that competence refers to the linguistic system (or grammar) that an ideal native speaker of a given language has internalized whereas performance mainly concerns the psychological factors that are involved in the perception and production of speech, e.g. perceptual parsing strategies, memory limitations, and the like (p. 4).

As a broadening of Chomsky’s notion of competence, Hymes (1971) has proposed the concept of “communicative competence” which refers to the psychological, cultural and social rules which discipline the use of speech. Communicative competence, therefore, refers to a speaker’s unconscious, internalized knowledge of the underlying system of rules for the use of the language he is speaking. In this respect, Hymes (1971) himself writes,

..... a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences, not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate... In short a child becomes able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and to evaluate their accomplishment by others. This competence, moreover, is integral with attitudes, values, and motivations concerning language, its features and uses and integral with competence for, and attitudes toward, the interrelation of language with the other codes of communicative conduct (p.277-8).

4.2 The Communicative Approach

With this theoretical framework in mind a communicative approach to foreign language teaching has emerged. The methodological principles underlying this approach may be summed up in the following points :

(a) The learning theory underlying the approach is a cognitive one. While the behaviourist learning theory has some applicability to the acquisition of specific linguistic habits, it does not have much to say about the ac-

quisition of rules, grammatical or social, which is "mainly accomplished by the internal processes of the learner.... Man is a self-regulating organism not wholly at the mercy of external stimuli..... In other words, the acquisition of language depends not only on exposure to environmental stimulation but also on specific innate propensities of the organism" (Hwang, 1970: 28).

(b) Communicative competence in a foreign language does not imply only grammatical competence but also a sociolinguistic competence. Canale and Swain (1980: 27) also add what they call "strategic" competence. By this latter competence they refer to communication strategies to be used by the learner.

(c) Structural grading taken as the only factor in deciding a foreign language teaching and learning approach has now to give way to communicative grading. A communicative approach to language teaching and learning implies a totally different approach from the structural one as far as the target language is concerned. In place of structure grading there might be organization of language around the concept of the different role relationships people play or around the language functions such as : to give information, to agree, to request and so on.

(d) Related to this is the question of selection in as far as the content of foreign language teaching is concerned. In the structural approach, the selection was again a grammatical one, concerned, more or less, with a neutral type of English based on a list. In this respect Breen and Candlin (1980: 102-4), suggest five criteria for the selection and organization of content in a communicative approach.

- (1) Focussing one knowledge-- both cognitive and affective-- significant to the learner.
- (2) Sequencing the content is therefore likely to be a cyclic process where learners are continually developing related frameworks or aggregations of knowledge and ability to use, rather than accumulating seperable blocks of 'static' knowledge. The learner's communicative competence will, in other words, be expanded, reinforced, and built upon as his conceptual grasp enlarges, rather than a mere accumulative linguistic knowledge.
- (3) Subdividing content is in terms of activities rather than units of grammatical content.
- (4) Continuity of learning is not provided by content only, but it resides in the activities and the tasks within each activity.
- (5) Choosing directions become a part of the curriculum itself, and involves negotiation between learners and learners, learners and teacher, and learners and text.

(e) The approach is concerned with situations which culturally and intellectually cause learners to want to use target language in order to learn something, in order to do something, and in order to be able to contribute something of themselves.

(f) Related to the above point is the fact that the approach is concerned with activities which create realistic situations for language work in which, for example,

questions must be asked, information recorded, information recovered from text, knowledge, ideas, reminiscences exchanged, emotions and attitudes expressed in one way or another, in which the student has the opportunity to experience participant and observer language roles, and in which language skills must be used (i) to make sense of information, experience, ideas and feelings for oneself, and (ii) to solve problems, discuss, consult, instruct share, argue, organize... (Levine, 1972)

(g) The communicative approach departs radically from previous ones in that it does not assume one way of teaching in which the teacher always acts the role of the questioner, initiator, teacher or formal instructor, and the learner acts the role of the listener, respondent or formal class-student. Given the fact that a communicative approach is a student-centred one and that language learning is learning language behaviour for particular purposes, its teaching techniques will be flexible enough to attain these ends.

There are times for intensive work, times for extensive work, times for individual work, times for cooperative work, times for guidance and control and times when these can be counter-productive; there will be students who learn faster and students who learn slower than others, and some ... who are more motivated than others (Levine, 1973).

(h) The approach, moreover, will not only help the teacher gain pedagogic practices (something that is common to all approaches) as well as help students acquire aspects of the language, but will also enable both of them to engage in the ever continuous process of developing their respective communicative competence. This is a crucial issue when we consider the fact that the teaching of school English in the State of Kuwait, and in other Arab countries for that matter, is almost completely undertaken by non-native speakers of the target language.

To sum up, in previous approaches what received most (if not all) attention was the presentation of structural information.

What has not received sufficient attention is the rather obvious point that constructing an utterance involves making choices [who speaks what, to whom, when and where]. Clearly if the student is to make choices he must have some idea of the options which are open to him. The emphasis, therefore, should not be solely on teaching the student one way of saying many things but should also be replaced on teaching the student different ways of saying the same thing (Kirkwood, 1972).

Syntactic structures continue to be important, but instead of presenting them on a basis of increasing difficulty, the communicative approach presents structures in relation to specific communicative functions. Moreover, the role of both the learner and the teacher are recast, and a more flexible, more student-centred approach is adopted-an approach that tries to capitalize on the student's own learning strategies.

Since the communicative approach first emerged in the early 1970s, much criticism has been addressed to it, some of which could be summed up in the following:

- (1) What ever it does, a communicative approach assumes that learning a foreign language is achieved better through exposure to authentic language in terms of communicative acts (utterances or sentences) in speech events (speech events taken broadly so as to include dialogues). This remains a theory rather than the theory of language learning. Wilkins (1972a) comments:

It is possible that a learner who already has an advanced knowledge of the lexical and grammatical systems of a language can himeself go a long way towards inferring the communicative functions of utterances to which the systems are applied. He may not need to be "taught" how to interpret utterances (p. 14).

It is true that Wilkins also adds that this could only be the case where the learner's knowledge is really very advanced; even so there would be many cases where grammatical and lexical knowledge was not enough. But this is exactly the point I am trying to make which is that there is no one theory of learning.

- (2) In a foreign language situation you cannot always reproduce culture in its entirety; you should not. You have to idealize. This idealization involves simplification, isolation, and compartmentalization of content rather than producing authentic chunks of language. The implication here is that the approach is idealistic rather than realistic: theoretically, it is possible but is it possible, in its entirety from a practical classroom point of view?
- (3) A truly communicative approach implies producing learners with a native-speaker's communicative competence. This, in turn, implies that the learner is seen as if he were learning the foreign language for integrative rather than instrumental purposes. While this may be desirable for some (and only some) learners, it is not desirable for all learners or at least for most learners of English as a foreign language, for example.
- (4) A truly communicative approach also implies a very highly competent language teacher. In the Arab World such a competent teacher is desirable but is it possible to have all our teachers as communicative as native speakers of the target language, given the fact that not all those Arab teachers have the opportunity to experience the target language in its real social, and cultural settings?
- (5) Another, and very important problem in the communicative approach is related to testing. Whiteson (1981) argues that "tests ought to measure CC [Communicative Competence]. i.e. the ability to function adequately in verbal communication situations. The problem is that our knowledge of what constitutes CC is scanty and as a result it is difficult to construct valid tests" (p. 347).

In support of these criticism, I will quote two people: one giving a sceptical remark, and the other expressing caution. Meys (1973) argues that the communicative school posits an ideal teaching /learning situation and he asks, "how does one cater for [students' individual needs] in the normal, non-ideal teaching learning situation...?" "Widdowson

(1973) argues that we ought to be careful of assuming too readily that communicative syllabi are universally appropriate. He goes on to say :

I do not wish to appear reactionary but I believe that we should be wary of recommending radical change. English teaching has suffered badly in the past from the imposition of pedagogic dogma... the usual consequence of this has been that teachers have been led to renounce their faith in their own methods in order to embrace principles they cannot practise (p. 4).

However, despite these criticisms and the arguments supporting them, the communicative approach has gained increased popularity not only in English for Special / Specific Purposes which has witnessed its early application, but also at school level as well. A quick look at most, if not all, course books that have appeared in the last few years, will show that such course books concentrate more on the language we use in social situations than on grammatical structures. It is true that few, if any, of such materials claim that they adopt a communicative approach to teaching English as a foreign language in its totality but also, equally, none of these courses claim that they are solely based on a structural approach.

4.3 The Communicative Approach and ELT in Kuwait

Until the early 1970s there was little mention, if any, of the communicative approach in Kuwait or perhaps anywhere else in the Arab World. Until then, the approach was still under academic discussion in post graduate courses in the universities. However, the dissatisfaction with the structural approach, in particular with its mechanistic attitude to foreign language learning was world-wide. Syllabus planners, course book writers and teachers began to introduce more situational and contextual teaching materials (cf. Robert O'Neill's *English in Situations*, 1970, OUP, and the Schools Council Publications: *Scope*, 1969, Longman).

In Kuwait, before the formal introduction of course books based on the communicative approach, there was a growing awareness of the limitations of the structural approach and the need for change. It has become clear that the structures and lexical items are not an end in themselves but only a means to help learners use the foreign language communicatively. Sentences normally convey various messages / meanings / functions. There can be different organization and grading of teaching units: not structural or lexical but, for example, on the basis of the functions of language (Hajjaj 1973). The revision of the course books of the Intermediate stage mentioned earlier (see 3.3. above) was only one manifestation of this growing awareness. Another was that of increasing secondary school teachers' sensitivity to the functional nature of the language: for example how language forms can convey various functions and how the one and the same function can be conveyed in various linguistic forms.

In 1976/1977, an English Language Teaching Curriculum Development Committee was established. The main task of the committee was to review the existing ELT situation and to suggest ways of developing it. Being aware of the limitations of the structural approach and informed of developments in EFL methodology, the committee outlined a new

syllabus based on the communicative approach (1977). Coincided with this, there was an interest in the use of English language teaching materials for intermediate and secondary schools which adopted a communicative view of language teaching and learning. In the event, a new course book series, namely **Crescent English Course** was adopted. The course was introduced in 1977 first experimentally in a limited number of schools and in one class (1st year, 2nd year and so on), and later in all schools and classes. Since its first adoption, the course has been under constant revision, in the light of teachers' experience in teaching the course and the views of the English Language Teaching Curriculum Development Committee.

The course is based on the current appreciation of the communicative nature of language and its implications for teaching and learning. In particular, the course adopts the following views:

- (1) Language is first and foremost a means of communication. Therefore, we must teach the language itself, not the grammatical rules.
- (2) The use and learning of a language is that it is an individual process. Therefore, the learning should take place in as natural a situation as possible.
- (3) Language is used, and should therefore be learnt, in a social context, so the materials have been designed to provide socialization through group work and role playing.
- (4) Language use, in its natural form, is something we enjoy. Therefore, enjoyment as an essential motivating factor becomes central. (cf. **Crescent English Course**, Teacher's Book, Introduction 1977-1984, and Bratton, 1984).

With this philosophy in mind, the main features of the course content and teaching / learning techniques could be summed up in the following:

- (1) Getting pupils to communicate using language which is natural outside the classroom. Lessons are developed around activities of interest to the learners (some of which are songs, games and comic strips).
- (2) Presenting pupils with a variety of language in written form, in addition to practice in listening and speaking (as well as reading and writing) with the help of recorded materials.
- (3) Providing pupils with ample exercises with the help of work books.
- (4) Providing assistance for the teacher in the form of class cassettes, visual aids and teacher's books.
- (5) Adopting a flexible approach to the teacher's role in the classroom, by which he/she exercises a varying degree of control at different points in the lesson. In presenting new materials and later in providing feedback and correcting mistakes, the teacher is in control. When the pupils are using language for communicative purpose, then fluency is more important and the teacher's role is more passive but he/she should be providing help to pupils.
- (6) Using Arabic (translation) is to be kept to the minimum, e.g. giving the meaning of a difficult word.
- (7) Maintaining a close link between classroom work and home/independent study, through extension practice and transfer to English use outside the classroom (cf. **Crescent English Course**,

Teacher's Books -Introduction).

Since the adoption of the approach and the **Crescent English Course**, many modifications have been introduced at the recommendation of the English Language Teaching Curriculum Development Committee in the light of inspectors', teachers', and pupils' experience. Some of such modifications were the following :

- (1) The content of the materials was considerably reduced or re-cast. This coincided with a reduction in the number of weekly contact (teaching) time given to English.
- (2) The earlier version of the materials tended to emphasize oral skills at the expense of reading and writing. The balance is now maintained through more writing and reading exercises in both the classroom and home study.
- (3) At the beginning teachers were advised not to correct pupils' mistakes, on the assumption that they should be encouraged to gain confidence in using the language and that the important thing was the conveyance of messages in communication even in faulty language. However, it was found that very often pupils ended up with a "false" proficiency. Currently, teachers are advised to pay attention to correcting, at least, major or frequent mistakes.
- (4) In the early versions of the course and in the actual classroom teaching there was a clear omission of teaching of grammatical structures. The idea underlying this attitude was that pupils should be allowed to make their own grammatical generalization. But since what we have is a foreign language learning situation rather than a first language acquisition situation, a degree of grammatical information should be provided to students, at least after the presentation and practice of new items. Today, there is a clear and useful balance between structures and functions in the materials.

The introduction of the communicative approach has certainly been a major step towards better English language learning and teaching. Although there are so far very few independent reports (see Part IV below) to confirm this, observed teacher and pupils' reaction indicate an increasing awareness toward what to teach and what to learn. The issue is not what grammatical structures to teach and learn but how to use these in communicative situations. The teachers, as a result of intensive teacher training involving native speakers of English and the use of spoken and written materials, have improved their own English language teaching techniques.

Pupils, on the other hand, have shown an increased confidence in using the language in its spoken and written forms. Bratton (1984), in evaluating the use of English by Arab students taught through a course (**Crescent English Course**) based on a Communicative Approach says that "One has noticed a perceptible improvement in pupil attitude: less fear of making mistakes and therefore a greater willingness to participate in classroom activities".

Bartton, however, adds that

... it must be admitted that, though obviously a move in the right

direction, the new syllabus has not, and cannot by itself bring about the marked improvement in general standards that we all seek to achieve.

Finally, in this section it should be mentioned that the approach and materials described above have been in use in other Arab countries such as Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, some schools in the Lebanon, and on an experimental basis in Bahrein. Other countries have continued their reliance on a structural grading for the organization of materials. However, many communicative exercises have been introduced (cf. The Final Report of the Seminar on English Language Teaching in the Arab Gulf States, 1983, Al-Manama: Bahrein, and Zughouli, 1983).

PART V: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5. 1 Conclusions

In this way we have examined the three main trends in foreign language teaching and learning methodology and their implications for English language teaching in Kuwait. I have disregarded less prominent approaches such as the direct approach, reading approach, the situational and topical approaches because they are only variations of the three major approaches. Each approach has its own advantages as well as disadvantages. Each approach served the purpose in the time when it was considered the best one available. There are learners of English, for example, who learnt the language through any of these approaches and could master the language.

However, it should be borne in mind that no one approach is or can be used while disregarding the approaches that appeared before it. All approaches draw upon previous ones and take insights from them. When the structural approach was in its heydays in the 1950s and 1960s; it did not neglect translation for example. Teachers were told to use translation for difficult/abstract words as a short-cut, and translation of texts and sentences has continued as a desirable and even needed activity in foreign language learning. Where a communicative approach is adopted, teachers cannot do without sometimes using repetition exercises, substitution, memorization and even the explanation of certain grammatical rules.

It should be reiterated, however, that the choice of an approach is related to two main issues: selection and grading of materials. Selection is concerned with the content of the foreign language teaching and learning programme. As far as foreign language teaching and learning is concerned, let's take English for example, the selection of content should be appropriate and authentic. By appropriate I mean suitable to the level of the learners. Beginners need a different type of material from that suitable to those students who are in their final school year. By authentic

I mean that the content should be that the native speakers use when they communicate with each other. To write sentences and longer texts solely to illustrate a grammatical point such as "Is this a pen or pencil" or "Am I here?" is totally unacceptable.

Grading, on the other hand, is related to the organization of the content of the foreign language teaching and learning programme. We have seen how the structural approach and also the grammar-translation approach grade this content on the basis of grammatical structures, present tense, past tense, active and passive, affirmative and negative types of sentences, and so on. The communicative approach, on the other hand grades the content by focussing on communicative functions. The structural approach, teaches one structure at a time thus assuming that the learner will learn all or most of the structures of the language and be able to communicate in it. The communicative approach teaches learners how to function effectively in language encounters. Each assumption is related to yet another assumption concerned with the process of learning. We do not know exactly what happens in the human mind and all that we possess is mere theories or hypotheses about learning. And since our aim is to have our learners master the foreign language, no matter what approach we adopt, I am going to suggest that the approach we adopt should be closely linked with the above mentioned aim: mastering the foreign language in listening, speaking, reading and writing with understanding. Such an approach is not only structural or only functional but conjoins both.

In this respect, this suggested approach could have:

- (a) either a structural grading as its backbone but not the type of structural grading that prevailed in the Forties through the Seventies, purely grammatical with mechanical drilling, through a neutral language nobody uses in real life. Rather, the language used to drive home the grammatical patterns should be authentic, the language used by the actual users of the language. This is the weaker suggestion.
- (b) or a communicative grading but without losing sight of the structures of the language and its accuracy. This solution is what I like to call the "common-sense" approach and it makes my stronger suggestion. In this case, it becomes possible and at the same time necessary to analyse the needs of the learners and specify the syllabus in terms of the language they are likely to need. It is then necessary to develop materials which take account of the ways in which people use language. With this orientation in mind teachers can be trained to use group and pair work so that learners have opportunities to work intensively on their own. Materials and techniques will have to be devised to individualize work so that all learners in a given class will work at their own pace. An enlightened view to correcting mistakes will also have to be adopted so that the teacher does not always interfere with the learning process and learners are given the opportunity to experiment with language (cf. Brumfit, 1982). In addition, the following steps should be taken:

- (1) Ample opportunities for the learners should be provided by the teacher so that they can extend the process of learning the language to outside the classroom: making use of the foreign language they meet in mass media, and free reading suitable to their level, and attempting to use the language whenever the opportunity arises.
- (2) The learners should be encouraged to transfer the language they learn in class to non-classroom situations: e.g. writing letters, talking to people, describing places, people and situation similar to those they come across in their text books.
- (3) Optimal use of educational aids available should be encouraged by the teacher.
- (4) At the early stages, learning the language should be seen by both the teacher and the learners as fun: something that is interesting and motivating to do.

5.2 Recommendations

- (1) Evaluating as objectively as possible the effectiveness of the two currently prevailing approaches, the structural and the communicative. This evaluation should include students' competence, teacher's attitudes, testing, and educational media employed (or may be employed), as well as in-service training. the evaluation should also take place in the light of the actual need for English for the purposes of study or jobs and other forms of communication seen as necessary for the learners. Such a study could be conducted in the context of the Gulf Arab States Educational Research Centre which, among its other educational activities, has already issued four documents on TEFL: a survey of TEFL in the Arab Gulf States, Language Laboratories, a Suggested Formulation of Foreign Language Teaching Objectives, and a Suggested Syllabus. If such a study reveals that, for one reason or another, one approach is preferred, then insights and techniques from the other approach should be sought.
- (2) Exchange of ideas, feedback and expertise not only among educationists in Kuwait but also among the Arab Gulf States and other Arab States should be intensified. The Gulf Arab States Educational Research Centre in Kuwait provides a suitable context and forum for this exchange.
- (3) Experimentation including techniques of teaching, testing, writing materials, the use of instructional technology, curriculum development and syllabus design should be intensified.
- (4) A TEFL Documentation Unit should be established: among its functions should be monitoring, documenting and distributing research work conducted on the field in Arab (and by Arabs in foreign) universities, and in local research centres.
- (5) A TEFL conference could be held at least once every year, each time adopting a relevant TEFL theme, e.g. testing, techniques of teaching, etc. The First National Symposium on Language Teaching held by the

Language Centre in Kuwait University (May, 1985) is a step in the right direction.

- (6) Exchange of visits by researchers, inspectors and teachers, among others, at the local and Arab levels should be encouraged.
- (7) Closer links between English and Education departments in universities on the one hand and English language educators in Ministries of Education on the other should be maintained.

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