Research Paper English

Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching: A Short Review

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ABSTRACT

The language of education, trade, government and religion has been changing in the Western world with the result of political and economic changes. This is why foreign language learning has always been a practical concern for these first world nations. Before English, Italian, French and Latin were the main languages of the first world. The centre of academic research and practice in the early 20th Century was how to teach and learn a foreign language. Various scholars responded through 'methods' and they claimed that if these methods were followed precisely, learning and teaching of a foreign language becomes more effective. In this review, an attempt has been made capture the different dimensions of The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching, its historical background, theoretical underpinning, teaching learning techniques, objectives, syllabus, learner's role, teacher's role, classroom activities and finally critical appreciation.

KEYWORDS Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching, FL learning, EFL methods

INTRODUCTION

'Method' refers to a theoretically consistent set of teaching procedure that defines best practice in language teaching. Methods give teachers a nature of 'language' and 'language learning' (approach), need based discoveries (design), and skills to implement (procedure) in imparting education. In other words, each method has come out from approach which has design (objective, syllabus, teacher and learner's role, and instructional materials) to be implemented and procedure (techniques and instructional patterns) to be adopted in the class (Richards & Rodgers 2001: 3-35). One of those methods was The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The evolution and growth of *The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching* is stretched across 1920s to 1960s. It emerged as an improvement over obsolete *Direct Method* which was monolingual, inductive, and demonstrative and pronunciation focused method. In 1920s and 1930s, the focus area of English language investigation was vocabulary for reading proficiency and developing teaching materials.

The founders of *The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching Method* were – Harold Palmer, A.S. Hornby, Michael West and other British applied linguists. During his stay in Japan, Harold Palmer tried to teach grammar through oral approach. While trying to base a more scientific and specific method, Harold Palmer (1917) constructed that a universal logic was applied in all languages of the world, and it was the teachers' responsibility to understand and apply those in the class. Michael West while examining the role of English in India in 1920s concluded that vocabulary was an important component for reading proficiency and foreign language learning. These findings led the scholars to propose the first ever 'principle of syllabus design' in language teaching. Palmer and Hornby changed grammar into structures of 'sentence pattern' (substitution table) which aimed to help learners internalizing the grammatical rules. They also prepared a list of 2000 words which aimed to help learners in the four skills of language learning. Thus, *The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching Method* shaped the design of EFL/ESL textbooks and syllabuses. Its presence is found still today and this why it is referred as highly used but rarely acknowledged method. *The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching* was anteceded by *Direct Method* and preceded by *Communicative Language Teaching* method. The important contributions which led to *The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching Method* may be summarized as under:

	BOOKS	AUTHORS	YEAR
1.	Streamline English	Hartley & Viney	1978
2.	Access to English	Coles & Lord	1975
3.	Kernels Lesson Plans	O'Neill	1973
4.	Alexander Textbooks	Alexander	1967
5.	A General Service List of English Words	Faucelt et al.	1953
6.	A Grammar of Spoken English	Palmer & Blanford	1939
7.	A Handbook of English Grammar	Zandvoort	1945
8.	Guides to Patterns and Usage in English	Hornby	1954
9.	Situational English	Pittman et al.	1965

(Richards and Rodgers, 2001)

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching method was an application of *structuralism* by combining and controlling lexical and grammatical content in the form of structure and applying the same, oral and situational in the language learning classes.

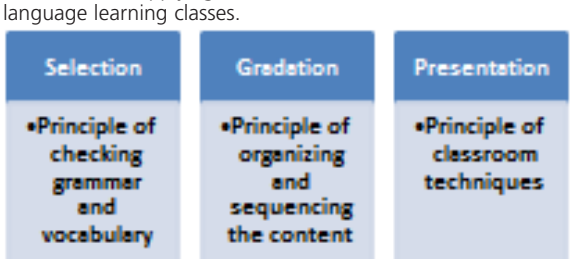

Figure 1: The Three principles adapted from Richards & Rodgers (2001)

However, it should not be confused with *Direct Method* – which was oral in procedure but lacked a systematic base of applied theory and practice. The characteristic principles of

this method were as follows:

- Language teaching begins with the spoken language. Material is taught orally before it is presented in written form.
- The target language is the language of classroom.
- New language points are introduced and practiced situationally.
- Vocabulary selection procedure is followed to ensure that an essential general service vocabulary is covered.
- Items of grammar are graded following the principle that simple form should be taught before complex ones.
- Reading and writing are introduced once a sufficient grammatical and lexical basis is established.

In *The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching* method 'speech' was the basis of language and 'structure' was considered as the heart of speaking ability. Hence, it was an oral practice of situational structure (Pittman, 1963). *The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching* method applies inductive approach to teach grammar. Meaning of a word or sentence is derived through situation, and not through translation into target/native language in order to strengthen the impression of the word originally and situationally (Billows, 1961). Explanation is discouraged and the learner is expected to deduce the meaning of a word/structure from the situation in which it is presented. The learner is expected to apply the language learned in the classroom to situations outside the classroom. This is how a child learns or a foreign language is learned.

PRACTICAL TEACHING LEARNING TECHNIQUES

4.1 Objectives

The objectives under *The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching Method* are:

- To command over four skills of language;
- To achieve skills through structures;
- To emphasize on accuracy of grammar and pronunciation; and
- To introduce speech at the first place followed by reading and writing.

4.2 The Syllabus

The syllabus under *The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching Method* is the list of words and list of structures arranged according to situations. Let us see on this example conceived from Frisby (1957):

Lesson	Sentence Pattern	Vocabulary
First Lesson	I am hungry	thirsty, poor, alone…..
Second Lesson	He is lazy	prompt, slow, clever, …
Third Lesson	You are crazy	bold, mad, intelligent, ….
Fourth Lesson	Am I hungry? Yes, I am.	strange, old, blind, ….
Fifth Lesson	Is he lazy? No, he is not	sick, rich, busy, ….

4.3 The Learners' Role

- Initially, the learner has to listen and repeat what teacher is saying;
- He has to respond the questions asked by the teacher;
- The learner has to situationalize the structure and meaning;
- The class is teacher controlled and hence, pupil has to do chorus repetitions, dictations, drills, oral based reading and writing exercises, pair practices and group works.

4.4 The Teachers' Role

- The method leads to threefold activity for a teacher-setting the stage for a new structure, presenting the model structure, and finally drilling and correction.
- The teacher strictly checks the pronunciation, grammar and structural errors during drilling.
- The instructor is highly demonstrative through different teaching aids like wall charts, flashcards, posters, pictures, stick figures and so on.
- The teacher is supposed to have mastery over prescribed textbook.
- The instructor is classroom controller like a director of orchestra music.
- He sets the pace of the lesson; skillfully manipulate the situation to elicit correct sentences from the learners.



Figure 2: Threefold function of a teacher adapted from Byrne (1976)

Pittman (1963) illustrates oral drilling on a pattern using a box full of objects to create the situation. The pattern being practiced is "There is a *noun* + of + (*noun)* in the box." The teacher takes objects out of the box and the class repeats:
There is a bottle of ink in the box.

There is a packet of pen in the box.
There is a reel of cotton in the box.
There is a book of story in the box.
There is a pair of shoes in the box.
There is a jar of rice in the box.
There is a cable of television in the box.

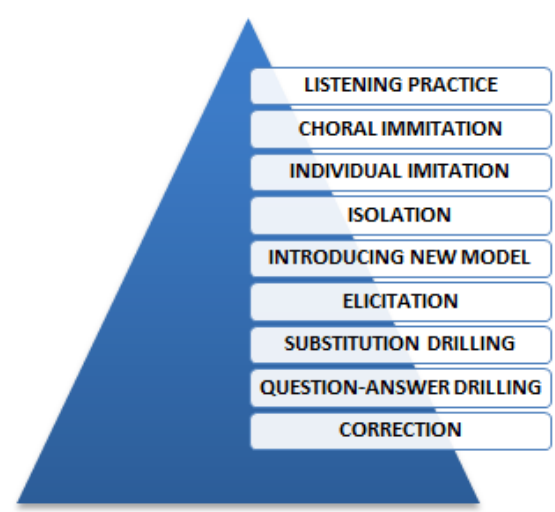

Figure 3: Sequence of activities in the classroom adapted from Davies et al (1975)

5. CRITICISM

By the end of the sixties it was clear that the situational approach had run its course. The British applied linguists began to call into question the theoretical assumptions underlying *Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching* method. Howatt (1984) criticized that there was no future of predicting language on the basis of situational events, rather sentences carried meaning in themselves and expressed the meanings of the speakers and writers who created them. Chomsky (1957) in syntactic structures has criticized the method by saying that it is incapable of accounting creativity and uniqueness of individual sentences-which is a fundamental characteristic of a language. British applied linguists observed *Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching* method as inadequately addressed in terms of functional and communicative potential of language—which is another feature of language. According to them, the process of language teaching/learning should be targeted to communicative proficiency rather than mastery over structures. Wilkins (1972) criticized that a language learner needs to understand and express communicative meanings to describe the core of language rather than grammar and vocabulary.

6. CONCLUSION

Throughout the 20th Century methods after methods were evolved as per the need of the then time. Each new method provided better, effective and theoretical sound basis for ELT than the methods that preceded it. Same happened with *Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching*. It survived for four decades (1920s- 1960s), contributed a lot in the ecosystem of ELT and finally came to an end. The British applied linguists began raising fingers against the underlying theoretical assumptions of *Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching* method. Consequently a fresh approach started germinating over the surface of ELT/SLT which is referred as *Communicative Language Teaching* approach.

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