

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

#### **2.1 Translation as an Eclectic Method in English Teaching**

Among recent developments of second language teaching, communicative language approach is noticed as a major trend of contemporary methodology, and has caught widespread attention both in literature discussions and in classroom practice for nearly three decades. It has marked a drastic shift in pedagogical focus from the structural form and usage of language to the interactive, negotiating, and communicative use of language in social contexts. As Wilkins (1979) indicates, changes that have taken place over the last three decades has been restricted in methods of language teaching as opposed to content. As is explained more by Richard-Amato (1988), many language teachers agreed that language teaching is facilitated by focusing on grammar as content and / or by exposing the student to input in the target language that concentrates on one aspect of the grammar system at a time. She argues that grammar-translation, audiolingualism, cognitive approaches, the direct methods are grammar-based approaches in spite of their variations. Grammar-translation method was the most popular method of foreign language teaching in Europe and American from about the mid-nineteen to the mid-twentieth century. Lessons were grammatically sequenced and students were expected to produce errorless translation from the beginning. Little attempt was made to communicate orally in the target language. Directions and explanations were always given in the first language.

Throughout the early years of the twentieth century, the direct method is very popular. It is a reaction to grammar-translation and its failure to produce learners who could use the foreign language they had been studying. This method stressed aural-oral skills and rejected the use of the student's mother tongue at all. Lessons began with dialogues and anecdotes in modern conversational style. But gradation and sequence of materials were not based on realistic spoken speech, and some of the materials used in direct method classes have remained as classic example of artificially constructed sentences. Moreover, the topic for discussion was often the grammar itself. The students tried to perceive the rules of the language in an inductive way.

In 1950s, audiolingual method, influenced by structural linguistics and contrastive analysis, began to gain favor in teaching English as a foreign language. The structures of the target language were carefully ordered and dialogues were repeated in an attempt to develop correct habits of speaking. Mimicry and memorization are used based on the assumption that language is habit formation. Pronunciation was stressed from the beginning. Listening and speaking skills took precedence over reading and writing skills. Language was often manipulated without regard to meaning or context. Since the 1960s, cognitive approach was evident as a reaction to the behaviorist features of the audiolingual approach. Language learning was viewed as rule acquisition, not habit formation. Cognitive approach, in terms of the "cognitive-code" methodology, was "sometimes invoked to refer to any conscious attempt to organize materials around a grammatical syllabus while allowing for meaningful practice and use of language" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p.60). Lessons

were usually highly structured through a deductive process, and the “rule of the day” was practiced. Although creative language was used at higher levels during the practice, students generally had to produce correctly right from the beginning.

Communicative approach was originated from general doubt and dissatisfaction with the linguistic theory underlying the traditional approaches. As Brown suggested, one weakness of the structural syllabus was “its tendency to highlight a grammatical feature to the exclusion of practical application in real situations” (1994, p.247). The communicative approach in language teaching started from a theory of language as communication. The goal of language teaching was to develop what Hymes referred to as “communicative competence.” Communicative competence was “the ability not only to apply the grammatical rules of a language in order to form grammatically correct sentences but also to know when and where to use these sentences and to whom” (Richards, J. Platt & H. Platt, 1992, p.65). Many studies showed that numerous students fail to acquire communicative competence in spite of years of language instruction. It had prompted researchers, theoreticians, and teachers to question the effectiveness of traditional, grammar-based approaches. Even the potential notional / functional syllabuses are not without critics. The way to help the language learners to achieve communicative competence was to offer them “more opportunities to interact directly with the target language—to acquire it by using it rather than to learn it by studying it” (Taylor 1987, p.45). As Krashen and Terrel (1988, p.26) believed, for most learners, communicative competence can only be achieved by subconsciously acquiring the language through active participation in real

communication, which interests those learners. This process is similar to the way children acquire their first language.

However, under the guidelines of Communicative Approach in the Junior High School English Curriculum, secondary school teachers in Taiwan are slow to follow the trend and to change their teaching styles. Teachers would consider the suitable methods to benefit students in passing the entrance examination; therefore, most methods adopted are limited to the traditional ones like grammar translation, audiolingual method, etc. Following is a brief record from my random observation in the junior-high-school classroom:

Time: June 10, 1999

Class hour: The first class on Thursday

Teacher: An English teacher with 10 years of experience

School: A middle-sized junior high school in Taichung County

Students: 38 students in the second grade

Class schedule: "Readings" in Lesson Nine—Mother's New Glasses

#### I. In the Classroom

The teacher is able to take notice of every student in the classroom. She keeps a good eye contact with the students. She also checks whether the learning environment is comfortable for the students or not. Her teaching method is teacher-centered. She does not arrange the seats of the students and divide students into groups for activities.

She uses flashcards and situational charts, which are clear to students in the classroom, but she does not utilize them for activity in a creative way.

The teacher's handwriting is legible for students from all locations in the classroom. She speaks loudly enough. She has a good logical thinking to help students to frame the ideas of grammar. But some students who do not understand are falling asleep on the table. Sometimes, she tells a joke to students. She pays attention to culture differences, explaining them to students and reminding students to obey the social decorum when they go abroad.

Her teaching style is traditional. She is apt to explain the content in the textbook in details rather than using activities in the classroom. She praises students for doing a better job in the mechanical drills. But she does not motivate students with meaningful drills or communicative drills. She is confident with herself in teaching, but she is too dominant to know what the learners need, no mentioning about consideration of individual indifferences.

## II. Interview with the teacher

*Question 1:* Why don't you use activities in the classroom?

Answer:

I tried to use activities in the classroom but it wasted a lot of time in the teaching process. Also, before activity, I have to spend more time to prepare the teaching props. If the activity is not conducted well, I don't know how to keep the class go on. So I would rather use the way I was accustomed to.

*Questions 2:* Using an activity can motivate the students' interest in learning English. This is a tendency. Won't you try to overcome these difficulties?

Answer:

I think that it is quite hard for me. First, few English teachers in our school try to use activities except for teaching demonstrations. Generally, we do not share this acknowledgement. Second, we lack the knowledge and training enough to guide an activity. Besides, my personality is not the type to do this.

*Question 3:* How can I help you if I need you to try this?

Answer:

I need a reference book, which includes a variety of activities for selection to use. Each activity should have a clear guidance and offer the teaching props for use. Your institute should offer in-service-program about the curricula of doing activities in the classroom.

III. Interview with students

*Question 1:* What have you learned in this class? Are you interested in this class?

Why?

Student 1 A:

I have learned the usage of the possessive pronouns. I am interested in this class. I understand what the teacher says and always do a better job in examination. But I worry the problem of listening comprehension, which lacks training in class.

Student 2 A:

I don't like this class, because I don't understand what our teacher said. I don't like to memorize vocabulary. Besides, there are so many rules in English grammar. Learning English is difficult and painful.

Student 3 A:

I learned a little. I only understand part of what the teacher said.

*Question 2:*

Would you like your teacher to do some activities in the classroom?

Student 1A:

I don't think it is necessary. I can understand what the teacher said in the classroom. Activities make me feel nervous, for the teacher tends to speak English and we have to express in English, too.

Student 2A:

I don't like that. I cannot understand English and it is embarrassed for me to express. English is boring.

Student 3A:

I hope so, for it will make the class more interesting and I won't feel so tired in class. I like the English teacher in the cram school, because he conducts activities very well in the classroom and I enjoyed them.

#### IV. Suggestions

In comparison with the old edition of English textbooks, the newly-compiled textbooks have been simplified in their contents. The teachers should spend more time

enhancing students' listening and oral abilities for corresponding to the practical needs in daily life. The good command of the four skills would help students in their passing the entrance examination of recommendation.

The use of activity serves as a technique to motivate students to learn English. But some of teachers for some reasons related to their personality lack the training of using activities in the classroom. They need teacher handbooks or other reference books with clear guidelines for an activity so that they become more confident with using activities in the classroom. What is more important, activity is not for its sake and the teacher should evaluate the students' abilities according to the goal of the activity.

Discussion and mutual interaction between teachers in the specific time benefit them in the professional growth. Time should be arranged for teachers to share their teaching ideas for improving quality in teaching. An English teacher should be flexible to modify the teaching style to help most of the students becoming good learners.

As the above description suggests, the pragmatic trend for teachers to choose their own teaching methods is common in secondary schools in Taiwan. CLT has not yet substituted the traditional English teaching methods at the secondary school levels. According to Tseng's observation of teaching demonstrations in secondary schools in the past, English teachers try to adopt diverse methods or techniques, which they think are able to facilitate learning for specific purpose. Therefore, an eclectic approach has



been formulated and it may combine traditional methods with CLT. Tseng indicates that no one single approach, method, or technique can fit all types of teachers and students. Teachers should familiarize themselves with different TEFL approaches, methods, techniques, and procedures and then vary their teaching methods to arouse students' curiosity and motivation (1993). According to Brandal (1987), Tseng has summarized seven factors contributing to the occurrences of such eclecticism in TEFL methodology as follows (Tseng, 1993, pp.130-131):

- 1) There is no single method that suits every program, because different language programs have different goals. These goals gear the teacher to select the most effective ways or methods in class.
- 2) No method is adequate for the scope of all learners' personalities, including their different needs. In an eclectic method, teachers can use any method that meets the needs of the learners, provided the desired performable outcomes are reached.
- 3) No single method is suitable for all teachers. Since teachers vary in their personalities, professional training, and moralities, choosing one common single method turns out to be difficult. Under such circumstances, no single method can meet all teachers' needs.
- 4) Each method has its own advantages, ie., points of strength, as well as disadvantages. Usually, one method's strengths may be another method's weaknesses. Teachers are forced to jot down the strengths of one method in combination with another method's in order to create the sky.

- 5) The eclectic approach could make use of all previous methods, leaving the door open for new methods and new devices, and welcoming all sorts of new innovations.
- 6) It provides the cumulative effect of approaching the problem of language teaching from different angles, securing a higher probability of success.
- 7) It provided teachers with the stimulation of a new approach from time to time to encourage them in reading, discussions with colleagues, and classroom experimentation.

From the above points, an eclectic method in English teaching would be the safest way for teachers to adopt. There is no absolute method and procedure in language teaching. A humanistic teacher should be creative and open-minded to integrate the advantages of various teaching methods to suit the learning styles of students. In the words of Brown, to practice "enlightened" eclecticism is to "engage in an intelligent use of selected approaches built upon and guided by an integrated and broadly based theory of second language acquisition" (1994, p.291). The way to specify a method and a procedure should not be dogmatic; taking into account the students' mental operations and personalities would be more practical and effective. As Lin (1997) points out, learning English as a foreign language in Taiwan is confined to the aspects of faculties, instructional materials, equipment and learning environment. For promoting English learning as a national education, we should offer students meaningful learning activities, meaningful materials and comprehensible input. In his opinion, cognitive approach

and communicative approach are useful to make substantial modifications of English teaching in Taiwan. The practice of translation could be a cognitive method and a meaningful activity to English learning. As Jones (1995, p.491) indicates, translation could be said to play three distinct roles in language learning:

1. as a key to the meaning of new items;
2. as a means of practicing, learning and testing production or comprehension;
3. as a skill worth acquiring for its own sake.

## **2.2 Translation as a Communicative Skill in English Learning**

Language is the representation of reality. In terms of Aristotle, it is a mimesis of the world. Ordinary language is like a metaphor, through which the writer and the reader share the meanings. Reader interaction depends on schemata for knowledge representation. Language translation demands the translator to fit ideas into the schemata of the readers to make them understand better. In other words, translation aims at being close to the unveiled reality by translating the source language (SL) into the target language (TL). Confucius said, "If names be not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth of things. If language be not in accordance with the truth of things, affairs cannot be carried on to success" (Legge, 1968, pp.263-264 ) The goal of translation seems to fairly rectify the names of SL and convey the true messages of SL to the readers; otherwise, citizens in the global village are unable to do business or manage relationship very well.

The way people look at the world is determined wholly or partly by the structure of