Chapter Three

The Direct Method

This method came into practice as a solution for the problems confronted by the teachers who used the Grammar-Translation Method in their classrooms.

As the name suggests, this is a method of teaching English directly through English. The advocates of this method believed that a language was best learnt when the learner was exposed to that language environment. Just as the children learnt their mother tongue by listening to it and speaking it, they could learn any language if they were provided with opportunities to listen to that language and speak that language. To be precise, if anyone wanted to teach English, they must be able to provide an English environment for the learners.

Prof. Gurey says:

But essentially it (the Direct Method) is a principle, not a teaching method, a system that operates through many methods; a way of handling the new language and of presenting to the class. It demands direct bond, that is, a direct association, between word and meaning and between sentence and idea (...) instead of an indirect one through the mother tongue.(qtd)
In contrast to the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method employs objects and actions to link with words in the Target Language. When these could not be made use of, teachers resort to miming, gestures, sketches etc. but never give mother tongue equivalents to make the process easy. The learners have the opportunity to listen to complete meaningful dialogues in the correct accent and pronunciation. Grammar is never taught inductively as in the Grammar-Translation Method, but is expected to be learnt deductively. One of the greatest disadvantages of the Grammar-Translation Method was that it allowed translation of thoughts from the mother tongue to the Target Language. In the Direct Method, this problem is seen to and is solved. As the mother tongue equivalents are not administered to the learners, they are habituated to link directly the words in the Foreign Language to the corresponding object, action or idea. Thus, they think in the Target Language and articulate their expressions in the Target Language itself.

The classrooms, in which the Direct Method is applied, are always activity-oriented and so a lively classroom atmosphere is created. Classes are usually developed around a picture, which depicts a situation of life in the country where the language is spoken. Conversations between the teachers and the learners develop in the Target Language. Thus the classroom is always filled with the speech sounds of the Foreign Language.
This method removed the inhibitions of the learners who had to speak in a Foreign Language at an early stage. But then, the learners’ needs to express in the Foreign Language even when they are not conversant enough often lead to inaccurate expressions and artificial structures. As these learners are already well established in their mother tongue, the structures they form are likely to be very similar to the structures in their mother tongue. Here, even though no mother tongue is used in the classroom to facilitate easy learning, interference occurs consciously or unconsciously from the part of the learners when they are confronted with a situation, which demands a Foreign Language expression. Thus, but for the infant learners, mother tongue interference is something that cannot be avoided. As the learners cannot get sufficient oral practice of systematic structures, their expressions in unexpected circumstances would lack clear ideas; hence a clear communication is impossible.

This vagueness in expressions did not go unnoticed by the advocates of this method. A conscious effort was made to counteract this vagueness by means of drilling in the form of substitution tables and teaching of a few grammatical structures. But sufficient care was taken to make sure that these structures were functional rather than theoretical. Wilga M. Rivers observes:
Since the students were required at all times to make a direct association between foreign phrases and situations, it was the highly intelligent student with well-developed powers of induction who profited most from the method, which could be very discouraging and bewildering for the less talented.²

According to Wilga M. Rivers, the average learners were soon distracted from foreign language learning. Also, the teachers had to be remarkably energetic if they were to maintain the same degree of interest and enthusiasm in all the classes throughout the day. Where it was possible for the learners to have exposure to the foreign language outside their classroom, the method was a great success. But when it came to the learners who had the opportunity of learning it or practising it only in the classroom, the method did not succeed fully.³

Many teachers in the English Language Teaching field, after employing the Direct Method for a while, drifted to other methods or made improvements to their fancy. This shows the impracticality of the method to some extent. Where the Direct Method demanded explanation in the foreign language itself, teachers gave short explanations in their mother tongue to save time and effort. “This modified form of the Direct Method is very similar to what has been called the eclectic method”⁴, observes Wilga M. Rivers. He opines:
The eclecticists try to absorb the best techniques of all the well-known language teaching methods into their classroom procedures, using them for the purpose for which they are most appropriate. The true eclecticist as distinguished from the drifter who adopts new techniques cumulatively and purposelessly seeks the balanced development of all the four skills at all stages, while retaining the emphasis on an oral presentation first.\(^5\)

The investigator feels that if all English Language teachers could adapt their method to the situations, the level of the learner and purpose of learning English as a Second or a Foreign Language, then they would be the best teachers in the field. For this to happen, teachers have to be energetic, imaginative, purposeful and all the more committed. They would not then be adamant on using a particular method or approach but would be willing to change when the situation demands.

When the Direct Method demanded a strict Foreign Language environment to be created in the classroom, the eclecticists brought forth changes to meet the challenges it created. They believed that mere exposure to Target Language would not facilitate effective learning. They felt the need for pattern practice and drill, as the learners often ended up constructing
‘unnatural’ sentences. This new focus on pattern practice and drill was the result of emphasis on listening and speaking skills, which were thought to be primary skills in comparison with reading and writing skills.

As said earlier, the Direct Method or the Natural Method, as the term implies, makes use of a direct link between the words and objects of the Target Language, thus refusing the native language or the mother tongue to act as mediation. The method necessitates a strict Target Language atmosphere, which means the conversation, discussion or reading, whatever is used to teach the Target Language will be in the Target Language itself. The words will be taught by linking them to objects or pictures and not by relying on translation under any circumstance. Moreover, formal grammar is not taught as in the Translation Method.

To be precise, in the Direct Method, emphasis is on the actual use of the Target Language and not just on memorising paradigms or practising forms. This is in great resemblance with learning one’s native language. The native language, as we know, “is learnt by listening to a great deal of it and that they learn to speak it by speaking it”. If the native language could be learnt in this way, the advocates of active classroom methods thought that if children were exposed to similar Foreign Language environment, they could learn the Foreign Language too without any apparent difficulty.
As speech precedes the other forms of language skills in any language, even while teaching a Foreign Language, the skill of speaking must be developed first. When it was advocated, the method aimed to develop the ability to think in the Target Language or in the Foreign Language. Therefore, it follows that ample practice must be given to ensure correct pronunciation too. Here lies the importance of introducing the system of speech sounds in the syllabus. Once the correct accent and pronunciation have been developed in the language learners, they will be able to articulate the Foreign Language words and sentences without being influenced by their respective native languages.

In contrast to the classroom in which the Grammar-Translation Method is used, the classroom where the Direct Method is adapted needs very energetic, enthusiastic and very resourceful teachers. In addition, these teachers need to have a near-native accent and pronunciation. For this, the teachers need to be given opportunities to participate in pre-service and in-service training programmes.

Even though grammar is not to be taught directly and formally, the learners should be encouraged to draw structural generalisations from what they have been learning. Thus, whatever grammar has been learnt, it must be at a functional level and that too, limited to what has been used in speech.
In the Direct Method, reading materials are introduced only after an oral presentation of the same has been done. Further, they are encouraged to seek direct comprehension by inferring meanings from the context. When this cannot help, explanations are given in the Target Language itself. No native language translation is given in any case. Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers, in their Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching (2001:12), summarise the principles and procedures of the Direct Method as follows:

1. Classroom instruction is conducted exclusively in the Target Language.
2. Only everyday vocabulary and sentences are taught.
3. Oral communication skills are built up in a carefully graded progression organised around question-and-answer exchanges between teachers and students in small, intensive classes.
4. Grammar is taught inductively.
5. New teaching points are introduced orally.
6. Concrete vocabulary is taught through demonstration, objects, pictures; abstract vocabulary is taught by association of ideas.
7. Both speech and listening comprehension are taught.
8. Correct pronunciation and grammar are emphasised.\textsuperscript{7}

In order to follow these principles and procedures strictly, teachers of extraordinary calibre, commitment and capability are required.

As the method is often criticised for having no thorough methodological basis, efforts can be made towards developing one to that effect. The investigator, thus, reaches at an integrated approach to English Language Teaching focussing on the exclusive use of the Target Language in the classroom, using materials that contain graded vocabulary and structures. The syllabus is to include materials to teach conversation skills. By including well-controlled grammar-based activities and by making the approach more inductive in nature, the method can be modified so as to meet the functional needs of the learners. Integrating the communicative approach would help facilitate communication between learners.

While implementing the new approach, it is to be ensured that the materials allow learners to progress at their own rates of learning and for different styles. Also, that they provide opportunities for independent study and use and for self-evaluation and progress in learning (Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers, 2001).
The syllabus and the material for implementing or adopting the new approach should also aim at making the classroom activities meaningful by relating them to the real world. They should also foster real communication among the learners. A good comprehension and resulting communication are expected of the learners, and the language, in all the forms it is used, must necessarily possess a link with objects, pictures or actions.

The teacher of the new approach could effectively use materials like advertisements, brochures, maps, graphs and books in addition to games like Charade, Mime, Word games and Role-Plays.

The principles of the Direct Method that could be well incorporated in the new approach are as follows:

- The process of learning is essentially one of forming associations: speech with appropriate action, words with concepts and objects. The associations have to be direct, concrete and definite, and cross-associations, which conflict with each other, have to be avoided.

- Repetition is essential if associations have to be formed and reinforced. The teacher should begin with a limited number of items.
Memory depends not only on repetition, but attention and interest as well. So, if a learner is motivated and wants to learn a language, she/he will do it.

The teaching materials namely texts, dictionaries and grammar should be interrelated and co-ordinated to make learning effective.

Formal teaching of grammar should be undertaken only after learners have intuitively absorbed it from the texts. There should be no memorisation of word lists, verb declensions etc. Grammar teaching should begin at the sentence level and not the word level, as syntax is the most important part of grammar.

Henry Sweet divides the learning of Target Language into five stages (quoted in Kudchedkar: 2002):

- Mechanical: Pronunciation of words and sentences is mastered thoroughly.

- Grammatical: The grammatical categories in the text are identified and taught. The teaching of grammar is graded from easy to difficult.
- Idiomatic and lexical: Idioms and new vocabulary in the text and other sources are taught systematically.

- Literary: Graded texts from contemporary literature are studied.

- Archaic: Older literature, with particular emphasis on its lexical and syntactic items, is studied.

Despite these, the Direct Method has its disadvantages. Demands made on the learners to express themselves too soon in a Foreign Language, that too in a relatively unstructured situation, were a serious set back as this resulted in a sort of pseudo proficiency in the foreign tongue. Besides that, it failed to take into account the fact that unlike an infant, the Foreign Language learner already possessed well-established first language patterns, so the first language situations could not be replicated.

The most serious disadvantage is that the learners are not given adequate systematic practice in structures and hence the progress in the Second or Foreign Language learning is haphazard. But, this is seen to, and corrected in the Audio-Lingual Method.

To be precise, the syllabus meant for teaching English as a Second or a Foreign Language through the Direct Method should be as specific as possible
in its design. It should also be more open in the sense that it acts as a source book in itself for the teachers to rely on. The materials need to be suggestive and graded with respect to their complexity. Moreover, they need to be tightly constructed so as to ensure uniformity in various classrooms in spite of the difference that exists between teachers. They must also cater to the needs of the learners simultaneously, not overlooking the learning capacity of the learners but providing enough scope for all types of learners. They must also support what has been learnt and lay foundation for further learning.

The investigator would like to highlight the fact that in the deteriorating situations prevailing in the English Language Teaching and Learning, it is high time the method of teaching revised and the New Integrated Approach incorporating all the merits of the methods discussed adopted. When the possibilities of the Audio-Lingual Method and the Structural-Aural-Situational Approach are taken into consideration, combining all these with the Direct Method easily evolve the New Integrated Approach. In order to materialise this, the syllabus and the materials are to be revised and redesigned so as to meet the needs of the present day. For the effective implementation of the ‘new’ method, the teachers need to be intrinsically motivated too. The prospects of Language Teaching and Learning are undoubtedly high if ample
room is given for teacher development, for resolving conflicts in the profession and recognising recommendation from research in language pedagogy.

The study of the sentences translated from Malayalam into English by the experimental group throws light on the fact that the errors made by the students taught by the Direct Method, while translating from Malayalam into English, are fewer and less serious when compared to those made by the students who were taught by the Grammar-Translation Method.

3.1. The Data

1. M.1. ninakkenta:nu ve:ntatu?
   E.  What do you want? (This is correct).

M.2. ninalenne sne:hikjunnunto:?
   E.  Do you love me? (This is correct).

M.3. ninal vi:najalle?
   E.* You are Veena, no?
       Aren’t you Veena?

M.4. na:n marikjum alle?
   E.* I will die, no?
       I will die, won’t I?

M.5. ennotippo:rum de:sjama:nu, alle?
E. * You are angry with me, no?
   You are angry with me, aren’t you?

M.6. enta:nu ninte kannukalkitra saundarjam?
E. Why are your eyes so beautiful?
   (This is correct)

E. She loves roses. (This is also correct)

M.8. aval kalkattajil ta:masikjunnu.
E. She lives in Calcutta. (This is correct)

M.9. ka:tirippu enne bhra:ntu pitippikjunnu
E. Waiting makes me mad. (This is correct)

M.10. na:n madhurappalaha:ranal  isttappetunnu
E. I love sweets. (This is correct)

M.11. ninalenne sne:hikjunnunt u, ille?
E. * You love me, no?
   You love me, don’t you?

M.12. aval vara:mennu parannu.
E. * She said she will come.
   She said she would come
E.* She thought I like sweets.
   She thought I liked sweets.

M.14. avan parannatu na:n visvasiccu
E.* I believe what he said.
   I believed what he said.

M.15. mikka ro:gikalum ra:vile na: lumanikju alpam munpa: nu marikjuka
E. Most of the patients die a little before 4 a.m.
   (This is correct)

E. She sings well. (This is correct)

M.17. mansu:nil mara nanna:ji pejjum
E.* It rains well in monsoon.
   It rains heavily in monsoon.

E.* I was chanting Gayatri Mantra in order not to feel the pain.
   I have been chanting Gayatri Mantra in order not to feel the pain.
M.19. Kamala avalute a:tmakatha erutuva:n tutanijirikjunnu

E. Kamala has started to write her autobiography.

(This is correct)

M.20. muttassi oru maniku:ra:ji bha:gavatam va:jikjunnu

E.* Grandma was reading Bhagavata for an hour.

Grandma has been reading Bhagavata for an hour now.

3.2. Observations

The analysis of the data reveals that the group of students performed better when taught by the Direct Method and the errors identified were fewer and less serious. There found to be a marked difference in their spontaneity of expression which lacked in the students who were taught by the Grammar-Translation Method. When the students showed great confidence in the making of sentence structures and in word order, this in turn resulted in pseudo fluency as evident in sentences from M.3. to M.5. and in M.11. Nevertheless the errors in the use of auxiliary verb, word order, number etc. were negligible. Thus, the study necessitates more emphasis on pattern practice and drill along with exposure to a wider variety of situations. This would positively enhance the Target Language utterances and discourage the practice of translating one’s thoughts into the mother tongue. The much feared mother tongue interference could be thus tackled to some extent.
3.3 Findings

The study shows that in spite of the differences in the structures of Malayalam and English, it is possible to minimise, if not eliminate the errors by following an integrated approach. There still occur errors in the use of perfect tenses and in tense sequence which necessitate further intensive pattern practice and drill.

As it is evident in the analysis, errors in word order, subject-verb concord in number and person, plural endings, and the use of auxiliaries have been successfully eliminated by teaching in the Direct Method. Teaching structural items like modals would further enhance the conversing skills of the learners. Also, it is seen in the analytical study that the tags in all the translated sentences are erroneous owing to the fact that there is no such thing as Tags in Malayalam where the inflectional endings serve the purpose. Thus, a Malayalee learner tends to say ‘You love me, no?’ where he has to say ‘You love me, don’t you?’

Despite the exposure to a Target Language atmosphere, learners who have already mastered their mother tongue are still affected by the negative transfer or interference. This is a result of ‘fossilisation’ which, only to some
extent, can be dealt with, by conscious and persistent effort from the part of the learner.

In the light of these findings, it follows that the New Integrated Approach shall necessarily contain most of the attributes of the Direct Method. We shall see in the subsequent chapter what principles could be adopted or incorporated from the Audio-Lingual Method and the Communicative Language Teaching Method so as to evolve the New Integrated Approach to English Language Teaching.
Notes


3 Rivers 21.

4 --- 21.

5 --- 21-22.

6 --- 18.