Chapter Four

The Audio - Lingual Method and the
Communicative Language Teaching Method

4.1. The Audio - Lingual Method

It was Nelson Brooks of Yale University who suggested the term “Audio - Lingual” for ‘Aural - Oral’. This method is called ‘Structural Approach’ in Britain. The method emphasised speech as the primary mode of expression and was based on some of the characteristic features of Bloomsfieldian linguistics and the Skinnerian model of learning, the basic tenets of which are:

i) Language is speech, not writing.

ii) A language is what its native speakers say, not what someone thinks they ought to say.

iii) Languages are different; they have similarities and differences which can be systematically studied.

iv) Language is behaviour and behaviour is a matter of habit.

Language learning is a mechanical skill and no intellectual process is involved in it. Because it is mechanical, the linguistic behaviour can be conditioned. So, in teaching a
language the teacher should follow the stimulus-response-reinforcement pattern and in language teaching there should be controlled, spaced, repetition.

v) Teach language, not about language.¹

Linguists described language in terms of certain levels: phonology, morphology and syntax. Audio Linguists believed in the separation of the skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing (LSRW) and the Audio Lingual Method used certain practical techniques like mimicry, memorization, pattern practice and the language laboratory; it encouraged the use of dialogues and substitution tables. The underlying theoretical assumptions like a scientific approach to the study and teaching of languages, preparing materials based on frequency counts of words and structures, emphasis on selection, gradation, and presentation in a systematic manner, belief in behaviourism etc. constitute the approach. Within an approach there can be several methods like the audio lingual and the audiovisual developed in France based on visual presentation of scenario etc. that emphasized the social use of language or even the ‘bilingual method’ advocated by Dodson (1967) which allowed the controlled and judicious use of the first language, the reading method, etc. They can all be brought under what has come to be known as the Structural
Approach. Presentation, establishment, and classroom cultivation are matters of technique. Thus, within the broad frame of the Structural Approach, which emphasized the teaching of vocabulary and structures in a graded sequence that has been arrived at on the basis of an objective description of the language to be learnt, several methods and techniques were advocated. The Audio-Lingual Method is in part a reflection of the availability of audio technology during the 1950s and the structural views on language. This makes it an improved version of the Direct Method.²

The most important aspects of the Audio Lingual Method are summarised by Richards and Rodgers (1986):

i) Language teaching begins with the spoken language; the material is taught orally before it is presented in written form.

ii) The target language is the language of the classroom.

iii) New language points are introduced and practised situationally.

iv) Vocabulary selection procedures are followed to ensure that an Essential Service Vocabulary is covered.

v) Items of grammar are graded following the principle that simple forms should be taught before complex ones.
vi) Reading and writing are introduced when a sufficient lexical and grammatical basis is established.³

Anthropologists and linguistic scientists have carried out various researches. One of their findings reveals that the native language is always learned by an infant in spoken form first and “this led to the theory that students acquire a Foreign Language more easily if it is presented in the spoken form before the written form”.⁴

This method was developed in the US during the II World War when the Americans realised the necessity of teaching languages to their army in order to have communication with their allies or with their enemy contacts. A quick method was developed, which involved “small classes of native informants, explanation of structure by linguistic experts, and long hours of drilling and active practice with graded materials based on this analysis of structure” to give a high degree of aural - oral skill to their army.⁵ This method which was known as ‘Army Method’ later came to be known as the Audio-Lingual Method or the Aural - Oral Method. An analysis of the principles laid down and summarised by Moulton reveals that a language is learnt in its spoken form first, even before the graphic form is introduced.
This, Rivers observes, is considering the fact that an early introduction of graphic symbols can have a negative impact on the pronunciation of the Target Language as they may have some correspondence to the native language sounds. Thus, it is observed that no language in its graphic form can be introduced to the learners before it is drilled in its oral form to a certain extent.

An advantage of the written form introduced later is that sufficient emphasis can be given to correct articulation and intonation of the sounds of the Target Language. But this does not in any way convey the idea that writing is neglected in this method. In Rivers’ view, Moulton’s Second principle, ‘A language is a set of habits’, is a result of the development of the concept of habit formation accepted. Rivers observes further that the early exponents of the Aural - Oral Method were influenced by B.F. Skinner’s Operant Conditioning Theory. According to this theory, habits are reinforced with the proper reinforcement of acts. In the Aural - Oral Method, the same principle has been applied whereby learners respond to the language stimuli. Just as we respond in our native language unaware of the structure we are using, we can make the learner respond to the stimuli and then be made to focus on the structures used. Here also, giving appropriate stimuli necessitates responses in the Target Language.
The Aural - Oral or the Audio - Lingual Method, in contrast to the Grammar - Translation Method, does not involve the cumbersome task of learning Grammar rules and exceptions followed by a wide variety of written exercises. The method, instead, is very much concerned with the oral practices the learners get. In fact, where the Grammar- Translation Method is used, the learners are the least motivated because the very emphasis of the method is on cramming up rules of Grammar. Advocates of the Aural - Oral Method leave the study of Grammar for the more advanced group who show an inclination towards it.

One severe criticism against the textbooks is that they contain abstracts of Classic Literature that are of high intellectual value. This may sound trivial, but this is one of the major reasons behind the learners’ incomprehension of texts and inability to use the vocabulary they have learnt. The words and usages in these texts may not be of any relevance to the present day learner, but still they find place in the textbooks just because of their intellectual value. The learners are at sea when confronted with a situation where they are demanded of using any particular phrase in those texts. No retention of learning occurs simply because the learners are not able to associate them with anything concrete. They may rather be given dialogues and phrases that a native speaker would use and the very cliche`s and expressions that find place in a
native speaker’s dialogues. If a contextual explanation is added to this, the learners would know where they might use these foreign phrases or clichés, in what context and to which audience.

In contrast to the Direct Method, which finds no place for the Mother Tongue of the learner, allowances to a certain extent are permitted in the Aural - Oral Method. Rivers observers, “since ‘meaning’, factual or emotional, of segments of native language discourse is acquired in situations in the native culture, one - to - one equivalents for words in another language can be very misleading”.

Thus it follows that instead of giving word - to - word equivalents, versions of dialogues in the Mother Tongue, which contain idiomatic expressions similar to those in the Foreign Language can be given. This would enable the learners to assimilate their cultural significance and use equivalent expressions in the Foreign Language when situations demand. Rivers goes on to give a detailed study of the techniques of the Aural - Oral Method. The learners are given oral practice of dialogues, in groups and individually. When they are sufficiently trained in this, applications of the dialogues to the personal situation of the learners are made as they ensure more effective retention. Further, pattern practices are given to drill the structure in those dialogues. The learners are
then, only then, permitted to have a glance at the printed material, the oral form of which has been practised already.

Writing is introduced at a later stage, restricting it to short transcriptions at the initial stage and gradually moving to the recombination of what has already been heard and learnt. Graded reading materials are provided at the advanced stage, which are often discussed orally and played on tape prior to it. At all stages, listening and speaking activities are given paramount importance and are never neglected.

The Audio - Lingual or the Aural - Oral Method stands unique in its approach as it succeeds in gradual development of all the four language skills viz. listening, speaking, reading and writing. Even though reading and writing are introduced only later, the method makes sure that the learners achieve proficiency in all these. As the learners literally use the language at a very early stage the motivation on the part of the learners is very high, as they have the satisfaction that they are able to use the language, which provides further motivation in acquiring the other skills. The method provides ample room for understanding the foreign culture, which makes the learning all the more effective, and complete in its aspects.
The period between 1958 and 1964 is called by Stern (1974) the Golden Age of Audiolingualism. By the end of the decade its theoretical basis was found to be weak, particularly after the attack on Structural Linguistics and Behaviouristic Psychology by Chomsky (1959: ‘A Review of Verbal Behaviour by B.F. Skinner’); empirical research showed that the Audio-Lingual Method was not as sophisticated as it was thought to be and that in the long run the techniques used resulted in boredom among learners.8

Rivers (46 - 48) visualises that the dangers of this method are not very serious if teachers remain alert. One danger, according to him, is the result of mechanical drilling of dialogues. The learners tend to mimic and ultimately result in their inability to apply their learning to unfamiliar situations. If this is foreseen by the teachers, they can give ample opportunities for a wider application of the learned dialogues and structures. Further, the monotony of the drill can be avoided if the teacher is imaginative and resourceful enough. By varying the drills and situations, the boredom could be avoided well. To make it more effective, the teacher should be sensitive to the reactions of the student. Danger also lies in the teachers’ manipulation of the pattern practice, which if not carefully done, would ultimately lead the learners to be inefficient to work outside the framework of the practice they have obtained.
The Audio-Lingual Method is also very much criticised for its “advocated time lag between the presentation of Foreign Language material orally and the presentation of its written form”. As discussed earlier in this chapter, if the written form is introduced at an early stage, there is the danger of associating the graphic symbols in the Foreign Language to the known sounds in their native tongue resulting in interference in the correct articulation and pronunciation of the foreign words. If this is to be avoided, teachers must make sure that the learners have obtained sufficient practice in the oral form of the material and also that oral practice is not stopped at all in any stage of development of skills. The method, observes Wilga M. Rivers, proves to be very successful with less intelligent learners and also young learners who benefit from oral drills. Learners who are very intelligent may soon get bored of these drills. They will even prove to be high achievers if they can resist the boredom and get actively involved in the drills and practices. According to Rivers, this method demands very competent teachers for its successful implementation. As dialogues are to be well articulated with a near-native accent and intonation, teachers must be phonetically well trained. In order to maintain a lively atmosphere throughout, teachers are to be intrinsically as well as extrinsically motivated. The method, as a matter of fact, sequences the teaching of four essential language skills in the Foreign Language in the
order that they are achieved in the native tongue. The presumption is that if an atmosphere similar to the learning of the learners’ mother tongue is provided to the learners, it will be conducive to the learning of the Foreign Language. Rivers affirms the view that a child learns his native language as his first language when he has not developed any language habits, and when there in no interference from any previous learning to occur. For a learner of English as a Second Language, the situation is different. The Target Language is his Second Language and there is always the first language to interfere, not depending on whether the first language has been used or not in the Second Language classroom.

Chomsky’s (1959: ‘A Review of Verbal Behaviour by B.F. Skinner’) argument is that the language cannot be learnt through habit formation. According to him, humans have a capacity that is innate in them, which enables them look for basic structures in language. People create and comprehend new utterances like ‘sleeped’ and ‘eated’ which they could not have heard from their teachers. This illustrates the fact that children do not just repeat what is said to them. These errors could be attributed to a kind of over generalization they make while learning.
Pit Corder (1967) in ‘The Significance of Learner’s Errors’ suggested that learners might naturally adhere to a learner-generated or ‘built-in’ syllabus. The language, the learners spoke was termed an ‘interlanguage’ by Selinker (1972) since it was intermediate between the First Language and the Second Language; interlanguage was considered to be a language in its own right and any point along the interlanguage continuum was held to be fully describable by rules.

As a result of the serious challenge thrown to Bloomfieldian and Skinnerian assumptions, a new set of assumptions came up:

i. Language is not behaviour; the use of language is more like writing a play than performing in one; language learning is a process of creative construction that involves cognition and interaction.

ii. Any behaviour is controlled by cognitive processes; skills are actions which are originally voluntary and which later became automatic.

iii. Practice without understanding the basic principles will be meaningless just as the description of a language without
meaning is meaningless; mere repetition tends to weaken understanding.

iv. Teaching is not conditioning but creating conditions for learning; to learn is to learn the valid generalizations, discriminations and relationships because language is a related system of categories and classes. And learning of any sort is largely a matter of drawing out what is innate in mind; it is a matter of growth and maturation of relatively fixed capacities, under appropriate external conditions.

v. Languages do differ, but they also have a great deal in common, and learning a Second Language is always in some measure repeating an old experience.

vi. Errors are not something to be avoided, but welcome signs that show learners are actively testing hypotheses; the first language is not a source of interference, but a source of hypothesis - formation about how the other language functioned.

Thus, the assumption that the Mother Tongue always played an interfering role in the Second Language learning process proves to be
misleading. Contrarily, in the new perspective, ‘Mother Tongue and its influence’ is also an aid in the effective learning of English as a Second Language as the learner consciously differentiates the structural differences between the two viz., the Mother Tongue and the Second Language.

N. Krishnaswamy, S.K. Verma and M. Nagarajan in their work Modern Applied Linguistics - An Introduction further observe that the focus shall now be changed.

Thus, language learning was seen as a cognitive, mentalistic process with learners ultimately responsible for their own learning. With this shift in focus to the active role of the learner, many factors that affected language learning were studied: social, motivational, affective, experimental, instrumental, biological, and cognitive and factors related to their aptitude and personality. Since Chomsky first proposed how language learning, which is solely a process of rule formation, takes place, even Second Language researchers working within the framework of Universal Grammar (proposed by Chomsky in 1981 as part of Govt. and Binding Theory) have shifted to exploring the idea that rule learning involves setting or fixing the parameters of principles of
the Universal Grammar in a manner consistent with the data of a particular language. Some other researchers like Schmidt (1983) feel that the role of imitation has been seriously overlooked and that a great deal of language acquisition is really brought about by learners having memorized sentences and phrases like How do you do? How are you? I beg your pardon, etc. There are others who argue that nonlinguistic processes are more important than linguistic ones.

4.2. Communicative Approach in English Language Teaching

The methods adopted in English Language Teaching did not primarily aim at developing a communicative competence in the learners and it was after Dell Hymes that the focus was really shifted to functional and communicative aspects. It was then that the approaches, methods and techniques in language pedagogy witnessed a change. “It was declared that there are ‘rules of use, without which rules of Grammar would be useless’; a distinction was made between grammatical rules of usage that enable users to construct correct sentences and the use of language to accomplish some kind of communicative purpose” (Widdowson 1978). ‘Sound socio-linguistic principles’ became the key phrase in language teaching.
The European Common Market played an important role in getting the applied linguists to prepare syllabuses and teaching materials. With increased need for teaching adults the major languages of the European Common Market for increased interaction, the Council of Europe started playing a key role in language education. Wilkins' advocacy of a notional - functional syllabus in his book *Notional Syllabus* (1976) was one manifestation of the shift from the Structural Approach to a more functional approach. This meant building a course around the uses or functions to which language is put, for example, one lesson can be planned on requesting information, another, on apologizing, and a third one on expressing gratitude, etc. The familiar structural patterns remained, but they were ordered differently, and organized around functional headings. Van EK and Alexander (1975) formulated concrete objectives including inventories of language functions, notions and structures; but they made no proposals for gradation of the material to be used since grading according to functional complexity did not make much sense for the simple reason that syntactic complexity and functions are two different parameters. Wilkins proposed that the functions
be recycled and that successive cycles be used to reintroduce more complicated structures. Thus, the first time learners can be taught how to introduce one person to another (‘This is ...’); sometime later, they can learn to say ‘I’d like you to meet ...’ and yet another, they can learn ‘Allow me to introduce you to...? etc.

Widdowson recognizes that the functional - notional approach has shifted the focalpoint in Foreign Language Teaching to the Communicative aspects of language, but does not recognize Wilkins’ claim that it ‘takes communicative facts of the language into account’. According to Widdowson: “Communication does not take place through the linguistic exponence of concepts and functions on self - contained units of meaning. It takes place as discourse, whereby meanings are negotiated through interaction (Widdowson 1979).

Hence, in this Communicative Approach, it is not the ‘response’ of the learner that counts, but the ‘process’ of arriving at the response. Krashen and Terrel (1983) advocated basic courses on topics like family, weather, clothing etc. Krashen’s Monitor Model of Second Language Development (1981) is an example where both ‘processes’ and ‘conditions’ meet because the focus is on the semantic dimension of language.
According to Krashen, the adult learner has ‘two independent systems ‘for developing ability’ in a Second Language - ‘sub-conscious acquisition’ and ‘conscious learning’. Here ‘acquisition’ means ‘picking up the language’ in a natural way; that is why Krashen Calls his method the ‘Natural Method’; ‘learning’ on the contrary, refers to ‘conscious’ grammar learning, which is ‘knowing about’ a language, rather than knowing to use the language. He adds that ‘conscious learning is available to the performer only as a monitor’ and the Monitor works some times before and some times, after the utterance is produced. In Krashen’s formulations, there are three conditions for the monitor to operate.

a) the availability to sufficient time,

b) focus of attention on language form or - correctness as against meaning, and

c) knowledge of relevant grammatical rules.

The ‘time’ condition is a necessary one, not sufficient without ‘focus’ which is an all important necessary condition. The ‘comprehensible input’ of Krashan implies that sufficient quantity of exposure is the condition for the process of acquisition to take place.
Conscious memorization is completely rejected by Krashen and his model makes use of ‘processes’ like habit formation, induction, inferencing, hypothesis-testing, generalization, etc. and conditions like, human and physical conditions that are conducive for language learning to take place.

Some of the Communicative Syllabuses proposed are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllabus type</th>
<th>Name associated with it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>Jupp and Hodlin (1975)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structures plus functions</td>
<td>Wilkins (1976)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notional</td>
<td>Wilkins (1976)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learner - generated</td>
<td>Candlin (1976)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional</td>
<td>Widdowson (1979)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Functional - Spiral around a structural core</td>
<td>Brumfit (1980)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural, functional, instrumental</td>
<td>Alen (1980)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency - based</td>
<td>Grognet and Crandall (1982)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task - based</td>
<td>Prabhu (1983)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the emphasis in all these is on ‘language for communication’, this approach is called ‘Communicative Approach’.
The following table (from Fiuocchiaro and Brumfit 1983 : 91 - 93) gives the major differences between the Audio - Lingual Method and the Communicative Approach.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audio-Lingual</th>
<th>Communicative Language Teaching</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Attends to structure and form more than meaning.</td>
<td>Meaning is paramount.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Demands memorisation of structure-based dialogues.</td>
<td>Dialogues, if used, centre around corrective functions and are not normally memorised.</td>
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<td>3. Language items are not necessarily contextualised.</td>
<td>Contextualisation is a basic premise.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Language learning is learning structures, sounds or words.</td>
<td>Language learning is learning to communicate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Mastery, or ‘over-learning’ is sought.</td>
<td>Effective communication is sought</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Drilling is a central technique.</td>
<td>Drilling may occur, but peripherally.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Native-speaker like pronunciation is sought. Comprehensible pronunciation is sought.

8. Grammatical explanation is avoided. Any device which helps the learners is accepted varying according to their age, interest, etc.

9. Communicative activities only come after a long process of rigid drills and exercises. Attempts to communicate may be encouraged from the very beginning.

10. The use of the student’s native language is forbidden. Judicious use of native language is accepted wherever it is feasible.

11. Translation is forbidden at early levels. Translation may be used where students need or benefit from it.

12. Reading and writing are deferred till speech is mastered. Reading and writing can start from the very first day, if desired.
13. The target linguistic system will be learned best through the overt process of learning to communicate.

14. Linguistic competence is the desired goal.

15. Linguistic variation is a central concept in materials and methodology.

16. Sequencing is determined by any consideration of content, function, or meaning which maintains interest.

17. Teachers help learners in anyway. Teachers help learners in anyway.
18. Language is habit; so errors must be prevented at all costs. Language is created by the individual often through trial and error.

19. Accuracy, in terms of formal correctness, is the primary goal. Fluency and acceptable language is the primary goal: accuracy is judged not in the abstract but in the context.

20. Students are expected to interact with the language system, embodied in machines or controlled materials. Students are expected to interact with other people, either in the flesh, through pair or group work, or in their workings.

21. The teacher is expected to specify the language that students have to use. The teacher cannot know exactly what language the students will use.

22. Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in the structure of the language. Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in what is being communicated by the language.
In short, in Communicative Approach a learner is motivated when he knows that he is working on communicative skills. He learns to communicate by communicating, by interacting with his teachers and peers.

Language testing is as important as language teaching. For that matter, any technique, a dictation exercise, a translation task, a cloze, a reading assignment, a question-answer session, a writing chore, a dialogue, role-play, an oral interview - any tool for evaluation will serve the purpose. But, tests of any type, should be for assessing the level of the learner in the learning process, not for justifying marks or grades. In fact, tests have to be an integral part of classroom management. “Good Language tests are instructional, managerial, motivational, diagnostic (focussing attention on specific - teaching - learning problems), curricular (defining curriculum as a whole) in function”.¹¹

The conventional language tests are just ‘surface tests’ as they test only surface problems in language. For instance, the learners are asked to supply correct verb forms in blanks. These tests test only the learner’s ability to recall what he has memorized. In the Communicative Approach, we have numerous possibilities, as it aims at testing the learner’s ability to communicate. Framing a story from an outline, or from a given episode, or based on a picture, continuing a conversation, writing a reply (response) to a letter, reporting a piece of news - all these can test the learner’s ability to communicate.
In fact, it is not a single method or approach that a teacher of English adopts in his classroom, but an eclectic method on the whole. Mackey in ‘Language Teaching Analysis’ (1965) points out:

Such terms on ‘the Direct Method’, ‘the Simplification Method’ ‘the Situation Method’, ‘the Natural Method’, ‘the Film Method’, ‘the Conversational Method’, ‘the Oral Method’, ‘the Linguistic Method’, can only be vague and inadequate because they limit themselves to a single aspect of a complex subject, inferring that that aspect alone is all that matters.

The same stands true even now. Michael Swan in ‘A Critical look at the Communicative Approach’ twenty years later (ELT Journal 1985) says:

During the last few years, under the influence of the ‘Communicative Approach’, the language teaching seems to have made great progress. Syllabus design has become a good deal more sophisticated, and we are able to give our students a letter and more complete picture than before of how language is used. In methodology, the change has been dramatic. The boring and mechanical exercise types which were so common ten or fifteen years ago have virtually disappeared, to be replaced by a splendid variety of exciting and engaging practice activities. All this is very
positive. And yet.... a dogma remains a dogma, and in this respect
the ‘communicative revolution’ is little different from its
predecessors in the language teaching field. Along with its many
virtues, the Communicative Approach has most of the typical vices
of an intellectual revolution; it over-generalizes valid but limited
insights until they become virtually meaningless; it makes
exaggerated claims for the power and novelty of its doctrines; it
misrepresents the currents of thoughts it has replaced; it is often
categorized by serious intellectual confusion; it is choked with
jargon.

Post - Structuralist thinkers like N.Krishnaswamy, S.K.Verma and N.
Nagarajan in their ‘Modern Applied Linguistics An Introduction’, have made
a critical look at the distinctions maintained in the teaching of language. They
have subverted all the binary distinctions and dichotomies that are found in
the field - language and literature, speech and writing, reading and writing,
context and text. They say:

Phonocentrism and logocentrism have been under attack; Derrida
has argued that speech is a form of writing and that the text is a
gas. In post-structuralist thinking there is no question of reading
the text objectively; since meaning sleeps beneath the circularity
of signifiers, there is no determinate comprehension of a text. According to Barthes (1987): “Reading is the projection and fulfilment of individual desire in the interpretation of the text”. Reader Response Theorists have argued that we are meaning-breathing animals and that we breathe meaning into the text. It is also argued that ‘reading and writing join hands, change places, and finally become distinguishable only as two names for the same activity’. (Atkins and Johnson 1985); in other words, language teaching / testing must take place as an integrated process and not in terms of segregated skills like LSRW.\(^\text{12}\)

This is where the investigator’s point of view comes in unison with the Reader Response Theorists. There is no single method or technique the teachers of English can adopt in their classrooms. But, the teachers may explore the possibilities, devise new methods, combine the existing ones, constantly engage in building up their resources, lead the learners to a language laboratory where they interact, play games, enact role-plays, create situations, respond to stimuli, and communicate in every way they can. This is the new Integrated Approach where all existing methods join hand in hand, eliminate their demerits, exploit their advantages and transform their classroom into a lively one where the actual learning process takes place.
Notes


5. Rivers 35.

6. --- 41.

7. --- 42-43.


9. Rivers 47.


11. --- 216.