

INSIGHTS FROM THE PAST: THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH – A REVOLUTION OR A LOGICAL EVOLUTION?



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It is assumed in this article that language teachers should be firmly grounded with a good perspective of where the profession has been and where it is going. We cannot expect that they also become pedagogical historians, but there is a minimum acquaintance that should be a part of a teacher-training programme.

Once the need for a historical analysis is accepted, the question remains: how to go about it? As “*a history of language teaching*” is clearly a course topic which has a generally theoretical emphasis, the article suggests a slightly unusual and thus hopefully a more interesting training procedure – *a picture mock fairy tale of ELT*.

The article traces the historical development of the Communicative Approach (CA), which has been chosen for two reasons: (1) It is the most important advance in language teaching in the 20th century. Teachers cannot hope to comprehend the full force of CA and how to implement it without a historical analysis. (2) CA is – in its nature – an eclectic hologram enshrining, encoding, and “documenting” almost the entire history of language teaching to date, reminding us that the field of language teaching has had a long fuse and a cyclical past.

The aim of this article is in part to help (student) teachers to increase awareness and knowledge in “*a history of language teaching*” and, thus, to broaden their range of resources and enable them to evaluate contemporary methodologies more knowledgeably and honestly, and therefore more effectively.

Developing professional competence involves language teachers in examining and developing their “*experiential knowledge*”, and extending their “*received knowledge*”. Experience is thus necessary but insufficient as a basis for development.

Key words: historical overview of language teaching, teacher training course, training procedures, communicative approach, professional competence, experiential knowledge, received knowledge

1. INTRODUCTION



The field of second language learning and teaching has seen in recent years frequent and at times drastic changes. As we live in an age of information overkill it is increasingly difficult to keep up to date with methodological claims and counterclaims calling teachers to follow them. As a consequence of all this, there is much understandable confusion. For some teachers this steady bombardment of information is depressing; for others, however, is a stimulating challenge. Whatever our response, this is most likely the climate in which the next generation of language teachers will learn their trade. Emphasis in both pre-service and in-service teacher training should therefore be on helping equip the prospective and/or practising teacher as effectively as possible to survive and succeed in that climate.

Developing professional competence involves teachers in examining and developing their “*experiential knowledge*” (their opinions and beliefs about learning and teaching based on their own experience of language classrooms), and extending their “*received knowledge*” (for example, their knowledge of theories of language, of the psychology of language learning, and of opinions, beliefs and practices which are different from their own). The article, thus, subscribes to what Wallace (1991) calls a “Reflective” model of teacher education in which trainees engage both *received knowledge* and *experiential knowledge* in a process called the “reflective cycle”. Experience, then, is necessary but insufficient as a basis for development.

For two decades or so teacher training has been under a strong influence of the so-called reflective model which encourages teachers to explore their teaching in order to gain awareness of their beliefs and practices. Today, almost every ELT teacher training ‘textbook’ takes a holistic approach to teacher development built on the notion of the teacher as critical and reflective thinker. The usual argument is that teacher education needs to engage teachers not merely in the mastery of techniques, but in an exploration of the knowledge, beliefs and attitudes that underlie their teaching practices. Self-reflection as the route to self-development has become for many an article of faith, but there are also some signs that the dogma of reflection is receiving some critical reassessment as well (see Gibson 1997). Ur (1996: 6), for example, expresses her reservation as to the reflective model as follows:

[...] this model can tend to over-emphasize experience. Courses based on it have sometimes used the (student-) teachers themselves as almost the sole source of knowledge, with a relative neglect of external input – lectures, reading, and so on – which help to make sense of the experiences and can make a very real contribution to understanding. As I see it, the function of teacher reflection is to ensure the processing of any input, regardless of where it comes from, by the individual teacher, so that the knowledge becomes personally significant to him or her. Thus a fully effective reflective model should make room for *external* as well as *personal* input.

(Ur 1996: 6)

1.1. Principles and assumptions behind this article or Why a historical analysis of language teaching?

In their attempts to discover the Holy Grail, committed language teachers attend numerous seminars, courses and conferences in order to update their professional competence. Unfortunately, many teacher trainers, unintentionally or not, very often intimidate rather than educate teachers. Humiliating teachers is a very easy task as scientific knowledge is in a continuous state of development. But what language teachers really need are coherent strategies for handling the pressures exerted upon them by the *impression* of constant turmoil, change and uncertainty in methodology. Without a set of such strategies, teachers will continue, as Hammerly (1982: 142) puts it, *'to see themselves at the center of a whirlwind of dizzying confusion. Little in which they once believed is secure, stable, or sacred. For many this results in a sense of threat and a loss of equilibrium'*.

It is assumed in this article that the teacher should be firmly grounded with a good perspective of where the profession has been and where it is going. With the many demands on teachers, we cannot expect that they also become pedagogical historians. But there is a minimum acquaintance that should be a part of a teacher-training programme. Although the topic *"a historical review of language teaching"* is not one of the most commonly taught topics in the FL methods course (see Uber Grosse 1993), this perspective could help teachers re-establish a sense of direction and give them a principled orientation. It is this kind of reasoned synthesis based on the available facts that can help teachers map out their own survival strategies.

The aim of this article is in part to help teachers to increase awareness and knowledge in *"a history of language teaching"* and, thus, to broaden their range of resources and enable them to evaluate contemporary methodologies more knowledgeably and honestly, and therefore more effectively.

The article traces the historical development of the Communicative Approach (henceforth CA). CA has been chosen for two reasons:

- (1) It is the most important advance in language teaching in the 20th century. Teachers cannot hope to comprehend the full force of CA and how to implement it without a historical analysis.
- (2) CA is – in its nature – an eclectic hologram enshrining, encoding, and *"documenting"* almost the entire history of language teaching to date, reminding us that the field of language teaching has had a long fuse and a cyclical past.

CA was, of course, not born in a void. A historical review is, however, fraught with problems. Firstly, the field is immense. A drastic selection has had to be made, which besides being subjective, has also led to omissions and some degree of simplification. Given the enormity of the task and the rough seas we'll have to navigate, the present analysis has been limited to two global aims:

- (a) to draw a broad picture of historical development of language teaching and learning;



(b) to show how CA develops ‘logically’ out of the previous history of ELT. CA is thus not viewed as a revolution, but rather as a logical evolution in history’s big picture.



1.2 Who is this article for?

This article will be of interest to all teachers, or teachers-to-be, who need to extend their “received knowledge”, i.e. their knowledge of the history of teaching theory. The article can also be used by professional teacher trainers as a resource text in supplementing their courses.

1.3. How do you use this article?

Once the need for a historical analysis is accepted, the question remains: how to go about it? On most teacher training courses new input (i.e. the contents of the syllabus) is tackled in many different ways, such as task-based activities, lectures, seminars, demonstrations, in-class reading assignments, observation of teaching, »loop input«, etc.

Certain topics on teacher training courses lend themselves to a more theoretical orientation than others. And “*a history of language teaching*” is clearly a topic which has a generally theoretical emphasis. Such topics are usually handled via some ‘established’ or ‘conventional’ training procedures along the lines of lectures or the like. There are things which trainees have to learn, but which are not, in themselves, particularly interesting or capable of being made interesting. This does not mean they should not be done.

This article is an attempt to show that theory *can* be made interesting and relevant to (student) teachers. What is suggested below is *A picture history of ELT*.

How is the article organised? It is comprised of four steps:

Step 1: WHERE WE’VE BEEN: INSIGHTS FROM THE PAST

Step 2: METAPHORS FOR THE HISTORY OF LANGUAGE TEACHING

Step 3: A PICTURE HISTORY OF ELT

- Picture 1: The Earls of Form and the Earls of Nature
- Picture 2: Modern languages become part of the school curriculum
- Picture 3: The Reform Movement
- Picture 4: The growth of the human sciences and the new methods
- Picture 5: The post-methods era

Step 4: The Post-communicative Era: Current Trends

For student teachers studying in a trainer-led course, a recommended basic approach to the material is the following:

- Student teachers work on each step, either individually, in pairs or in groups. The steps are designed to be used in sequence. It is recommended that the trainer elicit feedback on each step from pairs/groups before moving on to the next. Alternatively, the trainees

can be asked to read through the complete article in advance of the session, in order to familiarise themselves with the content.

- *Step 1* and *Step 2*: The trainer will have to establish the topic by using the commentaries in “*Background for the trainer*” which follow the article. Alternatively, the trainees can be referred to these commentaries if the trainer makes them available in the form of a handout. It should be emphasised, however, that plenty of published material is available on the topic being investigated here. This means that the trainer doesn’t have to use the texts in “*Background for the trainer*” but can, instead, select his/her own extracts from key articles or books focusing on the topic.
- *Step 3*: From here on, the trainer has two options: (1) Give trainees a copy of the series of drawings in *Step 3* (Pictures 1 – 5) without the mock fairy tale, and tell them the story. (2) Give trainees both the pictures and the accompanying captions, and talk them through the story, interspersing it, if necessary, with the commentaries in “*Background for the trainer*”. The picture mock fairy tale in *Step 3* is meant to be self-contained, i.e. it should be understood without background information. If this is not the case, then any assistance during reading and feedback afterwards will have to be provided by the trainer as necessary. Similarly, any background input will need to be supplied either by the trainer or by having the trainees’ read the literature or the commentaries in “*Background for the trainer*”.
- Abbreviations used in the article:



AL	Applied Linguistics
ALM	The Audio Lingual Method
AVM	The Audio Visual Method
CA	The Communicative Approach
CD	Curriculum Development
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
DM	The Direct Method
ELT	English Language Teaching
FL	A/The Foreign Language
FLL	Foreign Language Learning
GT	Grammar Translation
GTM	The Grammar Translation Method
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
LL	Language Learning
LT	Language Teaching
MT	(The) Mother Tongue
NM	The Natural Method
SLT	Situational Language Teaching

Step 1:

WHERE WE'VE BEEN: INSIGHTS FROM THE PAST



The Aimara Indians [...]

are said to represent man's relationship to his world of space and time by visualizing a human figure facing the past with his back to the future. The past he knows; the future is still a mystery which he cannot see.



In contrast, the technologically oriented western society

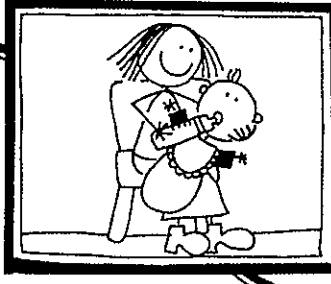
would represent man facing the future, because that's the direction he moves in while making his plans for subduing the earth.

From: **Bowen** *et al.* (1985: 1)

**Step 2:
METAPHORS FOR THE HISTORY OF LANGUAGE TEACHING**



THE 'SWING OF THE PENDULUM' METAPHOR



FORMALISM • RATIONAL

- Learning rules and grammar
- Language as formal system
- Written word and analytical skills
- Textual analysis

ACTIVISM • NATURAL

- Language for communication
- Informal & practical way
- Spoken word and oracy skills
- Resembling L1 acquisition/immersion

The Middle Ages

The Classical Period

The Age of Reason
(18th & 19th c.)

The Renaissance

The Modern Period
(beginning of the 19th c.)

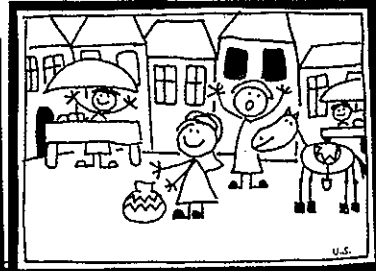
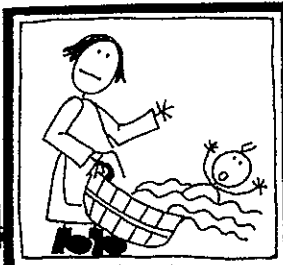
Major objectives of LT over centuries

'philosophical' and 'artistic' objectives of LT

'social' objectives of LT

THE 'MONASTERY TRADITION'

THE 'MARKETPLACE TRADITION'

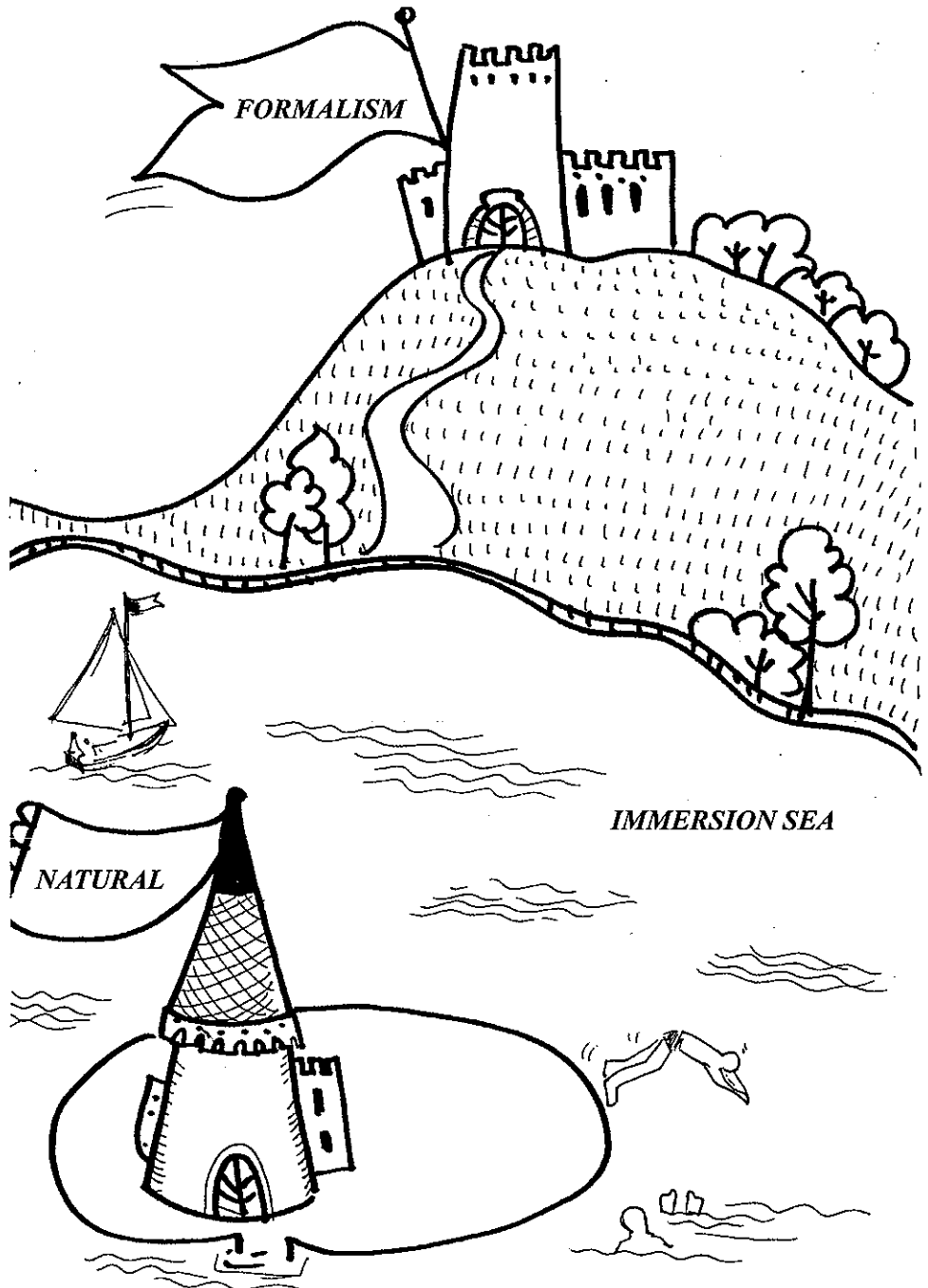


THE 'BABY AND THE BATHWATER' METAPHOR

Step 3:

A PICTURE HISTORY OF ELT

Picture 1: The Earls of Form and the Earls of Nature



Long ago, the language teaching world was divided into two kingdoms: the kingdom of FORMALISM, and the kingdom of NATURE (Naturalism). The *Earls of Form* and the *Earls of Nature* played important roles in the development of language teaching and learning: on the battlefields in Europe and elsewhere language teaching issues were decided, Kings made and unmade.

In both kingdoms, the kings had mighty castles built to impose their authority. Castles also helped them maintain their rule over the lands around the castle, and spread their power to new lands.

The Formalist Castle was located on the flat top of a hill, towering over the lands around the castle – a highly dramatic site. The dominant feature of the castle was its round tower. This mighty tower strengthened what was already considered an impregnable fortress. Living in the castle could be exciting at times, but there were also long periods during which the missionaries and their students had no communication with people from the outside. The Formalist Castle has been the seat of the Earls of Form over the last 2,000 years or so. Two thousand years of history are contained within its walls. It's really worth visiting! Within its massive walls it boasts magnificent (Class)Rooms, splendid collections of formal language teaching techniques: translation, text analysis, grammatical paradigms, rule learning with lots of exceptions, etc. The title 'Formalists' was well earned.

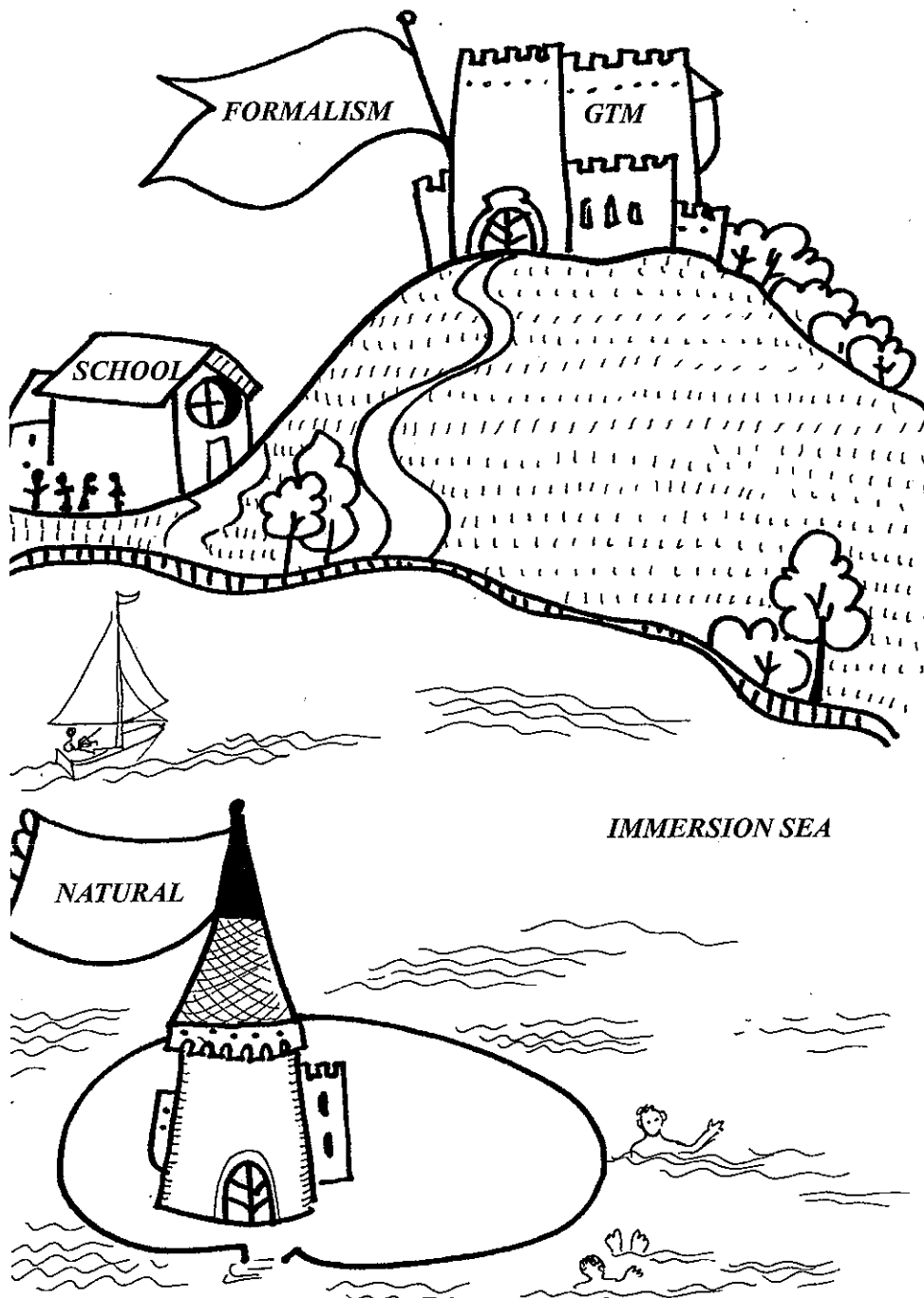
Surrounded by the sea, the Natural Castle occupied a perfect setting on an island in the Immersion Sea. The most impressive tower was that of the Natural Method. It may well be as old as civilisation. The castle was a centre for the Immersion fans who gathered for great immersion lessons taught by wandering native-speaking 'teachers'. This attractive island was visited by many tourists every year. They really enjoyed their stay there, happily 'immersed' *in language sans grammar instruction* (or, indeed, any instruction) and plunging into the chaotic richness of the target language. The title 'Natural' was well earned as well.

Both kingdoms, despite big differences between them, managed to live quite happily side by side for centuries. Only occasionally, there were some local conflicts. They both thought they were in the right as far as language teaching (not so much learning) was concerned.

In this continuing battle for supremacy, first one kingdom asserted itself, then another. Over the centuries, the lead in language teaching passed to the Formalists, and then back to the Natural camp.



Picture 2: Modern languages become part of the school curriculum



Then, in the 19th century, something crucial happened. With the rise of the middle class and its clamour for education, the number and types of schools rose rapidly. In many European countries, modern languages became part of the school curriculum. Essentially, it was all inspired by such practical matters as greater international trade and travel.

Both language teaching camps, the Formalists and the Naturalists, responded to the large-scale need for language learning in a new world of industry and international trade and travel, each in its own way. And what did they offer?

The Formalist Kingdom with its monastery tradition was certainly not at a loss and was ready to take up the challenge. Their general methodology – nowadays referred to, often pejoratively, as ‘the grammar-translation method’ – reigned largely unchallenged for over two thousand years, with its heyday from the Middle Ages into the 18th century.

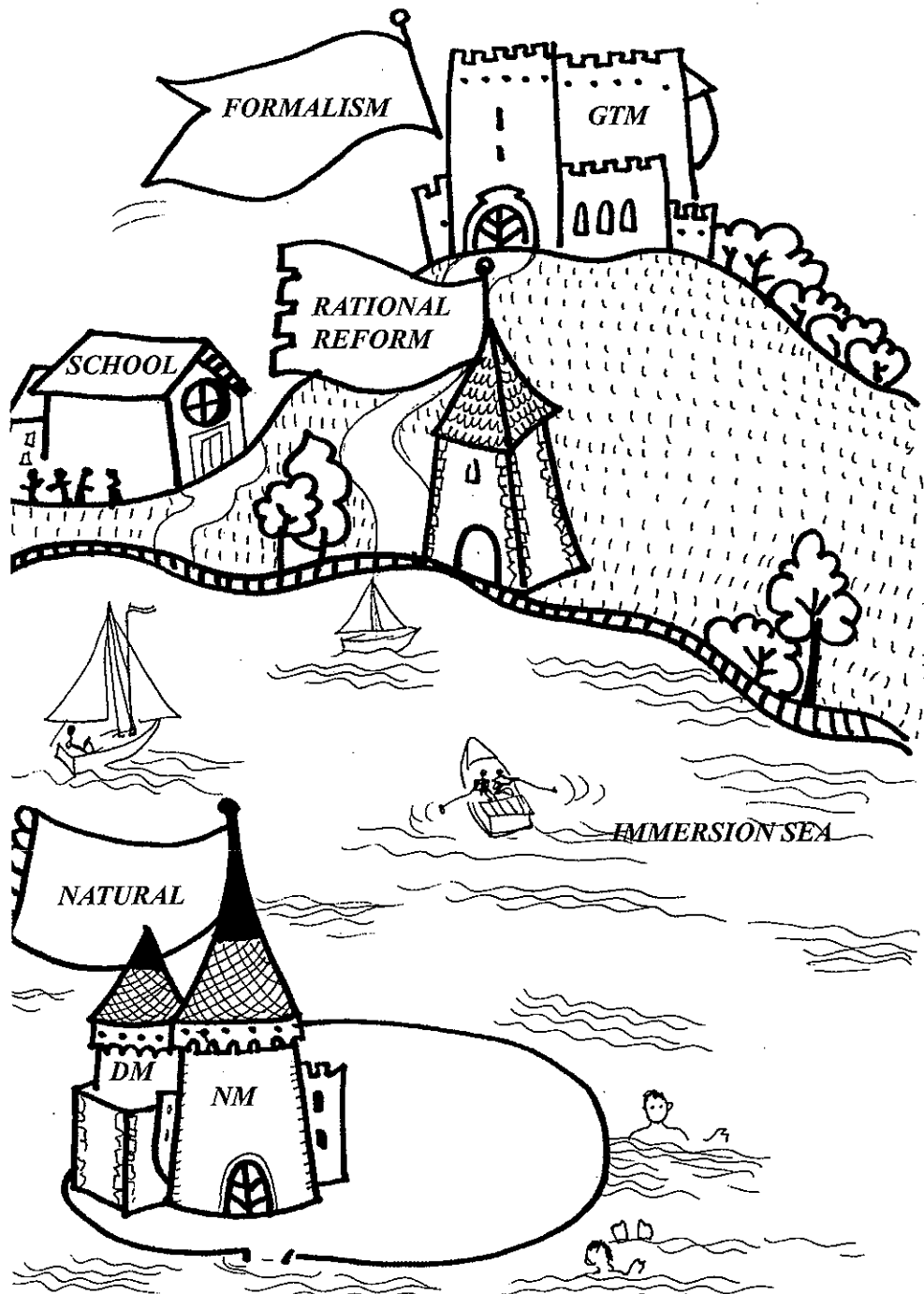
Through the years, and in the light of an emerging need for more FL classroom instruction, the Formalist Rulers of the 19th century added more (Class)rooms to the castle, and at the beginning of the 19th century an additional tower rose from the walls surrounding the castle. This mighty tower was called the GTM. Huge crowds of students were sent there to take foreign language instruction. They believed they would be equipped with language for communication, which would help them survive and succeed in a new world of international trade and travel. But instead, what they got was learning rules and grammatical paradigms, learning by heart selections from the ‘best authors’. Spoken language was irrelevant, and accuracy was elevated to the status of a moral imperative. Students would grin and bear it, pretending they were pleased.

The Natural Kingdom was gloating over the Formalists’ failure. They believed that their ‘method’ was much more efficient.

The Natural Learning camp, as its name suggests, tried to adapt the way MT is acquired to the learning of the FL or L2. This involved living, working and interacting with native speakers of the target language. This situation came about ‘naturally’ in the case of immigrants or visitors to the island. In the case of learning FL in schools, ‘natural conditions of learning’ did not operate. However, in this form, NM was not really a method as it was not based on any systematic theoretical or methodological foundation (a collection of ideas). It was not suitable for large scale classroom use (an emerging need) because it was based on idiosyncratic techniques and charisma of brilliant teachers. Their well-laid but over-ambitious and highly impractical plan failed too, to the Formalists’ satisfaction.



Picture 3: The Reform Movement



Towards the end of the 19th century, an educational sect, called the Rationalists and holding a dualist view of rational and natural language learning, decided to break away from the Formalist tradition. This vigorous reform movement arose in Western Europe and spread to most countries in which modern languages were part of the school curriculum. This movement focussed on classroom teaching and initiated a century of debate on teaching method. An independent school of thought emerged to occupy an influential position – the Reform Movement (1880–1900), a rationalist movement *par excellence*. In that period a distinctive teaching style called ‘the Rational School’ developed.

While most changes come about gradually, the Reform Movement took off suddenly with the publication of Viëtor’s pamphlet, *Language Teaching must start afresh!* (*Der Sprachunterricht muss umkehren!*) in 1882. This is the most famous manuscript of the Rational School.

To impose their power and independence the Reformers built their own castle. The site they had chosen was strategically very significant. The castle was built on the seashore (the sea stands for immersion, the natural way of language learning). Work began in about 1880 under the direction of many famous architects from different European countries: Viëtor, Passy, Sweet, Jespersen, and later Palmer and Hornby. It was not a coincidence that most of them were famous phoneticians. Between 1880 and WW I, the first major linguistic discipline that influenced LT was phonetics. It gave the language teaching reform around 1900 its characteristic shape.

The Natural-Rational Overlap

In some respects these two approaches overlapped or complemented each other, while in others they differed.

Its strategic location between the kingdom of *Formalists* and the kingdom of *Naturalists* implied that they advocated a more ‘natural’ way of teaching languages. This didn’t mean, however, that the Rationalists supported natural methods unquestionably. No, the Rationalist camp attacked the GTM on many important fronts, but they also opposed natural methods since the latter were held by the Rationalists to reduce students to childhood status, i.e. students cannot use their literacy powers, the ability to use grammar, and their general language knowledge to help them learn. Furthermore, nothing like the conditions operating in L1 acquisition can be reproduced in the classroom. *Reason* has therefore to be applied to the task of language learning in order to produce the method best suited to the psychological and social conditions governing classroom learning. They had no wish to plunge unsuspecting students straight into real-life foreign-language conditions, and therefore emphasised the need for careful and appropriate selection, gradation and presentation. Language learners were allowed to take an occasional swim in the Immersion Sea, but they were given lifebelts and were not allowed to swim too far offshore.

The Natural camp, the traditional enemy of the Formalist Kingdom, was extremely interested in everything that was going on in the new kingdom by the Immersion Sea. They found many of their ideas very interesting and powerful. Well, they knew the Rationalists

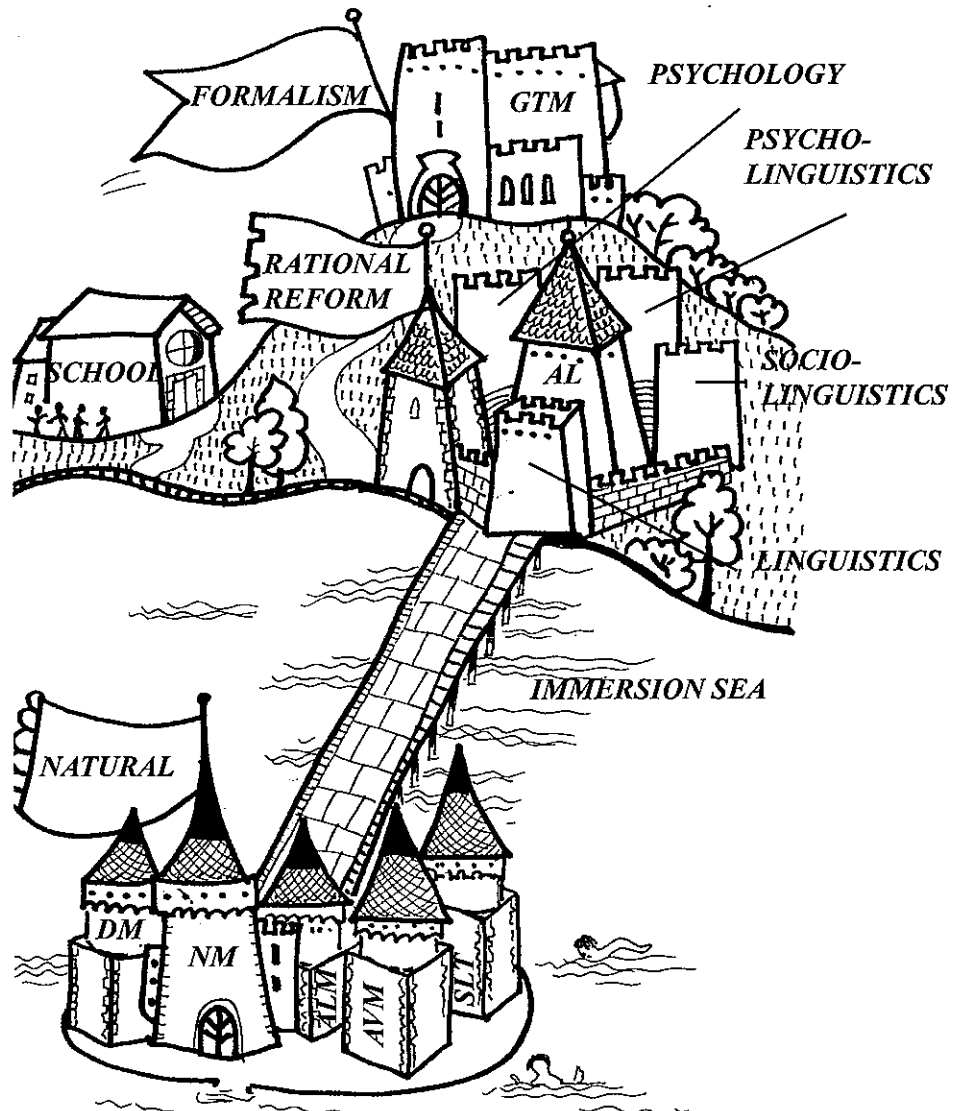




opposed them on some issues, but they didn't attack them on the most important front, i.e. their controversial hypothesis that FLL should come about in the 'same' manner MT is acquired, relying on a monolingual approach. That was why the Natural kingdom began to see in the Rational camp a trustworthy ally.

So messengers (spies) were sent across to Rationalist Castle, who brought back lots of new and exciting ideas with them. The Earls of Nature applied them immediately to their NM and the result was a modified Natural Method termed the DM. A new mighty tower with this name was added to the castle. Work was done under the direction of Charles Berlitz.

Picture 4: The growth of the human sciences and the new methods



The Rationalist Castle attracted many scientists and researchers from far and wide to work on the mysteries of language teaching and learning. The project began in the early 1940s and is still going on. The premises of the Rational castle have been enlarged several times, and four other towers rose from the walls surrounding the castle. This period is usually referred to as the period of the growth of the human sciences: linguistics, psychology, sociology, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and related disciplines. The most important towers were called: Linguistics, Psychology, Psycholinguistics and Sociolinguistics, while the dominant feature of the castle was the tower, sticking out from the middle of the walled city, called Applied Linguistics. It is important to recognise the influence of these parent or feeder disciplines on the development of LT as they have produced an amazing amount of new insights into the process of language learning and thus the teaching profession.

The Natural or Monolingual Kingdom realised that its future success depended on close co-operation with the Rationalists. They were, in fact, much attracted to the Rational camp whose 'scientific-ness' provided them with an excellent social alibi, which would not have been confirmed by their results. The same was true of the Rational camp – they somehow had to justify their existence and they wanted to share the heavy responsibility.

Thus both the Natural Kingdom and the Rationalists invested a lot of money in constructing a strong stone bridge, whereby the Natural Kingdom ceased to be an island. There was a good deal of interchange between the two kingdoms.

The Natural Kingdom drew on the body of the Rational camp's research extensively. In the light of these scientific findings, several new (salvation) methods were developed: the ALM, many structuralist and audiovisual methods, Situational Language Teaching, etc. - all firmly anchored in the monolingual tradition.

Unfortunately, the new methods did not produce spectacular results. The high hopes of this period were gradually eroded. The researches were less and less conclusive. Around 1970 theorists were acutely aware of the loss of direction. This was the time of confusion, disorientation and uncertainty. The search for the 'right' method was obviously over.



Picture 5: The post-methods era



In the kingdom of the blind he who promises sight is king.

Some, disturbed by the constant shifts in methodological prescriptions, argued that the importance of teaching methods had been exaggerated; they thought that the focus should be on other more important aspects of language learning. In the period of recovery, several new directions were pursued in the 1970s: (1) improvements through *curriculum design*; (2) an emphasis on the *human aspect* of language teaching and learning; (3) a *method renaissance*; (4) an emphasis on language learning *research*.

In order to successfully pursue these directions, the area outside the walls began to develop in the 70s. The site chosen for the new buildings was again highly dramatic. The new buildings, called Curriculum Design, Humanism, Method Renaissance, and LL Research, were built on concrete piles, linked to the bridge half-way between the Rationalist and the Natural camp. This architectural achievement is of great symbolic significance. It shows language pedagogy as a residence after years of fortresses.

Eventually, a flat pile terrace was added to the bridge structure. Work on this terrace began some thirty years ago and – as you can see – is still not finished. The terrace is called the CA.



Step 4

The Post-communicative Era: Current Trends

Communicative Language Teaching has spawned a number of off-shoots that share the same basic set of principles, but which spell out philosophical details or envision instructional practices in somewhat diverse ways. These CLT spin-off approaches and crossover educational trends include The Natural Approach, Cooperative Language Learning, Content-Based Teaching, Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP), Multiple Intelligences, and Task-Based Teaching.

Looking forward: What's Next?

The future is always uncertain, and this is no less true in anticipating methodological directions in second language teaching than in any other field. Some current predictions assume the carrying on and refinement of current trends; others appear a bit more science-fiction-like in their vision. Rodgers (2003) outlines ten scenarios that, in his opinion, are likely to shape the teaching of second languages in the next decades of the new millennium. These methodological candidates are given identifying labels in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek style, perhaps a bit reminiscent of yesteryear's method labels. The methodological predictions are as follows:

1. Teacher/Learner Collaborates
2. Method Synergistics
3. Curriculum Developmentalism
4. Content-Basics



5. Multintelligencia
6. Total Functional Response
7. Strategopedia
8. Lexical Phraseology
9. O-zone Whole Language
10. Full-Frontal Communicativity

CONCLUSION

We do not as yet have a respectable and comprehensive theory of either how people learn in general or how they learn languages in particular. Until we get such a theory (if ever), the accomplished teacher will work as much by ‘feel’ as by the rational application of well-researched methods.

BACKGROUND FOR THE TRAINER and/or TRAINEES STUDYING ON THEIR OWN

Step 1: WHERE WE’VE BEEN: INSIGHTS FROM THE PAST

Procedure:

Show the trainees the drawings and the accompanying quotes in Step 1, and invite comments. Prompt discussion and try to establish the importance of a historical analysis of ELT by saying something like the following:

There is a long and notable history in the profession of language teaching. We are the beneficiaries of many hundreds of years of experience in teaching and learning languages. There are specialized studies of our collective experience over the centuries, but they are not widely known or consulted, and not much has filtered down to the working level of current practitioners. For that reason I have devoted part of this presentation to a quick summary of this tradition and effort.

References to language methodologies of the past often seem intended to serve as a foil for today’s innovation. It is fashionable to criticize the ‘mindless pattern drills’ in yesterday’s audio-lingual method. In retrospect, the shortcomings of various earlier methodologies are quite obvious, as those of today’s methods will certainly be to future generations. The purpose of this presentation is not to review the failings of certain teaching practices of the past. Nor is it to chronicle past methodologies simply because, like Everest, they ‘are there’. The aim is to broaden the language teacher’s range of resources and enable them to evaluate contemporary methodologies more knowledgeably and honestly, and therefore more effectively.

Step 2: METAPHORS FOR THE HISTORY OF LANGUAGE TEACHING

Procedure:

Show (student) teachers the worksheet/diagram in *Step 2*. Describe briefly what is highlighted in the diagram, using the sample text in *Commentaries* below:

(1) Languages can be studied and practised deliberately (i.e. FORMALISM – RATIONAL) or acquired intuitively through use in the natural environment (i.e. ACTIVISM – NATURAL).

(2) The language teaching profession has been characterized by two main metaphors: (a) ‘*swing of the pendulum*’ and (b) ‘*baby and the bathwater*’.

Ask (student) teachers to reflect for a few minutes and comment briefly on what they have learnt.

**Commentaries:****FORMALISM -RATIONAL (the ‘monastery’ tradition) vs. ACTIVISM-NATURAL (the ‘marketplace’ tradition)**

It has always been part of folk wisdom that languages can be deliberately studied and practised or acquired intuitively through use in the natural environment.

From the very beginning, there was a split between those whose interest in language was the study of its **form** and those whose aim was to describe its **function**.

In the teaching of foreign languages, we can detect two ancient traditions: ‘*the monastery tradition*’ and ‘*the marketplace tradition*’.

The ‘monastery’ tradition

The systematic teaching of certain languages to certain kinds of foreigners has a venerable history. It may well be as old as civilisation, but we have a clear view of it only as far back as the ancient Greeks, whose basic approach was adopted by the Romans and passed on to the modern world via the medieval states of Europe.

Formal language instruction within the monastery tradition was firmly based on the written rather than the spoken word, used a system of paradigms, rules and exceptions, encouraged reading and textual analysis.

This general methodology – nowadays referred to, often pejoratively, as ‘the grammar-translation method’ – reigned largely unchallenged for over two thousand years, with its heyday from the Middle Ages into the 18th century.

The marketplace approach to language

This is not to suppose that there were no other ways in which people learned languages. The other major ‘method’ was not, however, in serious competition with the GTM. It was non-academic and unstructured, the method of the marketplace rather than the monastery.

The marketplace approach to language has always been dictated by simple necessity. If you want to barter, buy or sell, then you need to be able to communicate – somehow, anyhow – with your potential contacts. In the great cosmopolitan cities of history – Babylon, Alexandria, Rome, Marseilles, London, New York, and so on – the procedures of the marketplace (and the riverfront, harbour, etc.) have required practical answers to language problems. Anything that works is welcome: a go-between if possible, or gestures, pictures, your words or his words, your grammar or his grammar, in order to strike a bargain.

THE METAPHORS: (a) the ‘swing of the pendulum’ metaphor; (b) the ‘baby and the

bathwater' metaphor



The language teaching profession has been characterized by two main metaphors: (a) 'swing of the pendulum' and (b) 'baby and the bathwater'.

Applied linguists are those purveyors who, being largely doctrinaire in their proposals, usually advocate the abandonment of all that went before thus validating the relevance of the metaphors 'swing of the pendulum' and 'baby and the bathwater'.

Baby and the bathwater

The second language teaching profession has a tendency to ignore its history; it keeps 'rediscovering' what had been discovered earlier.

An improved historical perspective can help in coping with the notion that 'newer is better' and that accepting one method implies an automatic rejection of all that preceded it. As a result, innovation is sought for its own sake. This long-standing bias in favour of **newness** has discouraged cumulative development in the profession, necessitating our discovering anew and refining once again abandoned techniques and methods which should never have been eliminated.

The swing of the pendulum

This approach to the history of language teaching is chronological. The thread of development is seen as revolving around an eternal conflict between **formalism** and **activism**. Broadly speaking, formalism may be identified with learning the rules, the grammar of the language (i.e. language as formal system) in a formal educational setting. Activism consists in learning a language by using it to communicate, in an informal or practical way, with an emphasis on oral skills, resembling somewhat the way one learns one's mother tongue. In this continuing battle for supremacy, first one trend asserts itself, then another. Thus from the active oral use of Latin in Ancient and Medieval times, the pendulum swings to the rule learning of the Renaissance grammars, then back to oral activity with Comenius; it then returns to grammar rules in the 19th century, and finally swings back to the primacy of oral practice with DM.

Both metaphors have been counterproductive.

Language teaching has pursued **three major objectives** over the centuries:

- **Social** (language as a means of communication)
- **Artistic-literary** (language as a vehicle of culture, artistic creation)
- **Philosophical** (linguistic analysis).

Step 3: A PICTURE HISTORY OF ELT

Picture 1: The Earls of Form and the Earls of Nature

Procedure:

From here on, the trainer has two options: (1) Give (student) teachers a copy of the series of drawings in *Step 3* (Pictures 1 – 5) without the mock fairy tale, and you tell them the story. (2) Give (student) teachers both the pictures and the accompanying captions, and you talk them through the story, using the *Commentaries below*.

Commentaries:

See above (the swing of the pendulum metaphor, and the two traditions)

Picture 2: Modern languages become part of the school curriculum

Commentaries:



GTM has dominated the teaching scene right up to modern times.

Much of the ‘blame’ can be laid at the universities’ doorstep. Public examinations were controlled by them. Modern languages manifestly did not train the mind, as teaching Latin by GTM did. The modern language teacher had little choice but to adopt a severe GT approach. Thus *‘French had to be made as demanding as Latin, and German as intellectually disciplined as Greek, textbooks had to be thorough (i.e. exhaustive in their listing of exceptions). All this so that the rigorous study of modern languages could claim to develop intellectual prowess on a par with the classical languages and thus escape from the educational ghetto.’* All that permitted GTM to do untold damage.

Natural methods go back a long time and are attempts at recreating the ‘method’ with which MT is acquired. The underlying philosophy of the Natural Method in its various forms is that learning to speak a new language is not a conscious, rational process which can be organised in a ‘systematic’ fashion, i.e. built around a syllabus which breaks the language down into component parts. Thus the radical hypothesis of NM is that FLL should come about in the ‘same’ manner MT is acquired.

Picture 3: The Reform Movement

Commentaries:

Towards the end of the 19th century there came a considerable change of attitude, a genuine revolution in the teaching of languages (in formal, non-marketplace terms). With the rise of the dream of universal education, large numbers of educators began to propose serious alternatives to ‘education for its own sake’.

The controversial hypothesis that FLL should come about in the ‘same’ manner MT is acquired led, historically, to two solutions. The first is **immersion learning** where the use of FL is not limited to the FL classroom but is extended to the teaching of other curricular subjects and/or for conversation on the school premises. This supposedly recreates ‘natural learning conditions’. Where immersion learning does not operate and FL use is restricted to FL lessons, then the ‘didactic principles’ that may be inferred from natural learning are applied in the FL classroom.

With the rise of a mass market for FL instruction, attempts were made on the part of the Natural camp to systematise the various teaching techniques or ‘ways’ NM had produced and to create a more ‘rational’ (i.e. ordered and scientific) ‘method’ by applying ‘reason’ to the task. These attempts at systematisation led to the transformation of NM into the ‘Formalism’ of DM with Berlitz in the 1880s and 1890s.

Modern Direct Methods began to flourish in the 19th century and were basically an attempt to adapt natural methods to the conditions imposed by large scale (i.e. classroom) teaching. The impact of the needs of teaching large classes, entire schools and school systems on NM led to the application of



‘reason’ and ‘scientific’ analysis to NM, which resulted in DM. Thus DM may, in one sense, be seen as an offshoot of NM, as a ‘rationalised’ natural approach.

The early direct methods were highly experimental, and slowly began to shade into forms. Simple exposure to the target language in all its chaotic richness was seen as less valuable than appropriate patterning. Direct-method enthusiasts in Britain, including Palmer and West, were animated more by a pragmatic desire to teach efficiently than the implementation of any particular theory of language, psychology or education. They, therefore, emphasised the need for careful and appropriate selection, gradation and presentation.

The Reform Movement was founded on the following basic principles:

- The primacy of speech
- The centrality of the connected text at the heart of the teaching-learning process
- The absolute priority of an oral methodology in the classroom

Picture 4: The growth of the human sciences and the new methods

Commentaries:

Further developments were thus based on this fusion of the two traditions: the applied linguistic approach of the Reform Movement and the monolingual methodology of the DM. The second, very important, strand in the development of ELT derived from the role of English in the Empire (the way English was taught in colonial schools). All this has contributed to the promotion and maintenance of a monolingual approach to (English) language teaching.

During this period the teaching of languages became a service industry. More time, effort and physical resources were being directed towards formal work on languages than ever before in human history.

Lots of effort was being directed especially towards the controversial hypothesis that FLL should come about in the ‘same’ manner MT is acquired. This contention has prompted extensive research into L1 acquisition in the last 40 years and its relationship to FLL. This body of research is one of the sources CA draws on to justify the NM strands in its approach.

As we all know, the contact with various disciplines has been fruitful, but it has also presented problems. The constant shift in theoretical viewpoints has been confusing from the teacher’s point of view. Why? The period between 1940–1965 was characterized by the increasing influence of linguistics on LT. There was a constant shift from one teaching method to another, and the language-related sciences moved from one theory to a newer and better theory. Theories were so numerous and the data supporting them so convincing that one almost ‘*longed for the desert which had been replaced by the jungle*’.

The period from the 1950s to the 1980s has often been referred to as “The Age of Methods,” during which a number of quite detailed prescriptions for language teaching were proposed. *Situational Language Teaching* evolved in the United Kingdom while a parallel method, *Audio-Lingualism*, emerged in the United States.

For much of its history, and throughout the 20th century, language teaching has been obsessed with

a search for the ‘right’ method. It was felt that somewhere or other there was a method which would work for all learners in all contexts, and that once such a method had been found the language teaching ‘problem’ would be solved once and for all.

Picture 5: The post-methods era



Commentaries:

Language teaching theory over the decades since the end of the 19th century has advanced mainly by conceptualizing teaching in terms of teaching methods. During the 60s and 70s several developments indicate *a shift in language pedagogy away from the single method concept* as the main approach to LT. These developments wanted to overcome the narrowness and imbalances which have resulted from conceptualizing LT mainly through the concept of method. The very idea of a ‘method’ is becoming unfashionable.

By the late 1960s, radical changes in linguistics and psychology brought about the decline of audiolingualism. Some, disturbed by the constant shifts in methodological prescriptions, argued that the importance of teaching methods had been exaggerated; they thought that the focus should be on other more important aspects of LL. In the period of recovery, several new directions were pursued in the 1970s:

1. One was to look for improvements through *curriculum design* (a lead was given by the Council of Europe).
2. A second new direction was an *emphasis on the human aspect of language teaching and learning*. What matters more than teaching method, it was argued, is the interaction between teacher and learner, and the personal characteristics of the learner. This conviction led to various experiments, all designed to modify the traditional teacher-centred language class.
3. Another development during the 1970s, a phenomenon which, surprisingly, in some ways contradicted the ‘*break with method*’ concept, was a *definite method renaissance*.
4. Emphasis on *language learning research*.

Given this abrasive coming-together of the two traditions, it is not surprising that the Communicative Approach is so eclectic in its nature.

CA is viewed not so much as a radical departure from tradition but more as a ‘relatively’ gentle break, a set of additions and modifications, whose origins are deeply rooted in history. CA may be seen as an attempt to apply rationalism (reason and science) to DM in order to recover the principles of natural learning (unconscious learning, spontaneity, language as communication) which DM suppressed in its attempt to rationalize NM itself when, at the end of the last century, a method which would satisfy the classroom teaching situation was being sought and which transformed DM into the oral analogue of GTM.

CA has incorporated many of the characteristics of earlier language teaching innovations but it has avoided the narrowness and dogmatism of the method concept and covers a wide range of components. These qualities give CLT the potential for greater strength and durability. As for the CA, the reliance on a single overriding concept, ‘communication’, is a disadvantage which prevents CLT from being entirely satisfactory as a theoretical framework.

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OPAŽANJA IZ PROŠLOSTI: KOMUNIKACIJSKI PRISTUP – REVOLUCIJA ILI LOGIČNA EVOLUCIJA?



Sažetak

U ovom se članku pretpostavlja da bi učitelji stranoga jezika trebali imati dobru podlogu o povijesnom pregledu razvoja struke te u kojem se pravcu struka kreće. Od učitelja ne možemo očekivati da budu povjesničari pedagogije, no postoji minimum s kojim bi se trebali upoznati kroz program studija. Kada se utvrdi potreba za povijesnom analizom, ostaje nam tražiti odgovor na pitanje: što sada s tim? Budući da je «povijest podučavanja jezika» jasna tema kolegija koji uglavnom naglasak stavlja na teoriju, članak nudi pomalo neuobičajen, a samim time, nadamo se, i jedan interesantan pristup – prikaz podučavanja engleskoga jezika kroz imitaciju bajke u slikama.

Ovaj članak prati povijesni razvoj komunikacijskog pristupa (CA) koji je odabran iz dva razloga: (1) Predstavlja jedan od najvažnijih napredaka u podučavanju jezika dvadesetoga stoljeća. Učitelji se ne mogu nadati da će u potpunosti dokučiti, shvatiti jačinu komunikacijskoga pristupa i načina primjene bez povijesne analize. (2) Komunikacijski pristup je po prirodi – eklektični hologram, koji sadrži, šifrira i «dokumentira» gotovo cjelokupnu povijest podučavanja jezika do danas, podsjećajući nas da je područje podučavanja jezika imalo dugi fitilj i cikličnu povijest.

Svrha ovoga članka je i dijelom pomoći studentima, budućim učiteljima povećati osviještenost i znanje povijesti podučavanja jezika, te na taj način proširiti opseg izvora koji će im omogućiti da ocijene suvremene metodologije s više znanja i iskrenosti što je u konačnici i učinkovitije.

Razvijanje profesionalnih kompetencija uključuje učitelje jezika u preispitivanje i razvijanje njihovoga «iskustvenog znanja» te produbljivanje njihovog «primljenog znanja». Iskustvo je, dakle, potrebno, ali nedovoljno kao osnova za razvoj.

Ključne riječi: povijesni prikaz poučavanje stranog jezika, program podučavanja budućih učitelja, načini podučavanja, komunikacijski pristup, profesionalne kompetencije, iskustveno znanje, primljeno znanje