The Difficulties of Teaching

"English for Iraq" from the Point of view of Teachers of the Preparatory Stage

Keywords: language teaching methodology, communicative method, the Course of "English for Iraq"

Asst. lect. Liqaa' Sadeq Ali Hassan
Ministry of Education / Al-Rusafa 2nd Directorate of Education
liqaasadeq2020@gmail.com

الصعوبات التي يواجهها المدرسون العراقيون للمرحلة الإعدادية في تدريس منهج "English for Iraq"

الكلمات المفتاحية: طريقة تدريس اللغة، الطريقة التواصلية، منهج "الإنكليزية لأجل العراق"

م. م. لقاء صادق علي حسن
وزارة التربية - مديرية التربية الرصافة الثانية
liqaasadeq2020@Gmail.com
Abstract

The process of developing foreign language materials has been in a state of flux. It is an on-going process. People who work in the field of foreign language teaching and syllabus design have often exerted great and unfailing efforts to develop techniques and procedures to ensure better results to master this human activity.

The emergence of communicative approach to foreign language teaching gave rise to a tendency to write textbooks based on the actual needs of foreign learners in order to make materials more motivating and appealing to them. Learning a foreign language, especially if this language is a world language, has become a necessity in our modern life.

Being a teacher in a secondary school in Iraq for about ten years, I have noticed that there are certain problems and difficulties faced by Iraqi teachers in handling courses depending on the new coming approach, that is to say the 'Communicative Approach'. The course being adopted now is the 'English for Iraq' and the one that precedes, which brings the change, both follow the same method in teaching English.

This, in short, has provided the background to the idea of this research. Hence, it is hypothesized; in part one of the study that teachers of the preparatory stage have certain problems with the new course. Part one is also allotted to the gathering of the data about the adequacy of the present English program taught in this stage. In addition to the previous tools, a questionnaire has been administrated to (15) teachers of English in preparatory schools to get at the problems they face in handling the new program taught in this stage.
The Difficulties of Teaching "English for Iraq" from the Point of view of Teachers of the Preparatory Stage

Asst. lect. Liqaa' Sadeq Ali Hassan  
Ministry of Education - Al-Rusafa 2nd Directorate of Education  
liqaasadeq2020@Gmail.com

Part One
1. Introduction
1.1 The problem

It is believed, from a personal experience as a teacher, that Iraqi teachers face certain difficulties in teaching the new course, i.e., the 'English for Iraq' that adopt the communicative approach.

1.2 The aims

The study aims at identifying the difficulties faced by Iraqi teachers in teaching the course of 'English for Iraq', and suggesting solutions to the problems stated.

1.3 Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that certain problems hinder the teachers of the preparatory schools in Iraq from handling the new course easily.

1.4 Procedures

In order to carry out the objectives stated above, the study is going to be divided into two parts. Part one is supposed to present the approach that was adopted for teaching English as a foreign language in our preparatory schools. The defects and shortcomings of this approach also will be accounted for as basic reasons that necessitate the change. The communicative approach will also be provided as the one being followed now in teaching English in Iraqi preparatory schools. Part two will contain a questionnaire, asking a group of teachers of this course, showing their attitudes concerning the problems they have in handling the course.

1.5 Limits of the study

The study will be restricted to a group of Iraqi teachers, they are supposed to be selected randomly from different schools in Baghdad governorate – Al Rusafa / 2.

1.6 Value of the study

It is hoped that the present work will:
1- specify some of the points of weaknesses in the current educational process of the preparatory stage, where and why?
2- outline certain remedies for such weaknesses so that the study helps teachers who are keen in teaching the communicative approach in their presentation for the development of their methodology.

2. An over view of the development of language teaching methodology

The following are the major developments in English Language Teaching up to the modern day.

2.1 The direct method

By the end of the late 1800s, many saw the 'dawn' of modern language teaching when a revolution in language teaching philosophy took place. Teachers started to try new ways of teaching language after they were almost frustrated by the limits of the Grammar Translation method because of its inability to create communicative competence in students.

It has techniques fit to address all the areas that the grammar translation did not, especially, the oral communication, the spontaneous use of the language and the development of the ability of thinking in the target language. Thus, we can say that the 'Direct Method' appeared to coincide with a new school of thinking that dictated that all foreign language teaching should occur only in the target language, without any translation and an emphasis on linking meaning to the language being learned. The method became very popular during the first quarter of the 20th century (A Publication of the Ministry of Education).

2.2 The Audiolingual Method

The other 'revolution' in language teaching methodology came with World War II, when America became aware of the fact that people need to learn foreign languages very quickly as part of its overall military operations. That came in combination with some new ideas about language learning, which had come from the psychology of the descriptive linguistics and the behavioral one. To become what is known as the Audiolingual Method (ALM).

This new method had many of the features that were typical to the earlier Direct Method, but the disciplines mentioned above added the concepts of teaching linguistic patterns in combination with habit-forming (ibid).
2.3 Suggestopedia

In the late 70s, Georgi Lazanov introduced the contentions that students naturally set up and which form their psychological obstacles to learn, based on the fears they may have and the idea that they will be unable to perform and that they are limited in their ability for learning. Depending on the psychological research on extrasensory perception, Lozanov began to develop a language learning method that focused on 'suggestion' of the limitations that learners think they have, and to provide a sort of relaxed state of mind that could facilitate the retention of material to its maximum potential. This method became to be known as 'Suggestopedia'. A name, which shows the power of 'suggestion' to the field of pedagogy. (ibid)

2.4 Total Physical Response

By the late of 1800s Francois Gouin, who was a teacher of Latin and originally French, was working hard to devise a method of language teaching that clearly explained the way children naturally learn their first language by the transformation of perceptions into conceptions and then the expression of those conceptions using language. This approach became to be known as the "Series Method", involving the use of 'series' of inter-connected sentences that are easy and simple to perceive and this is of course the direct conceptual teaching of language because the language being used can be directly related to whatever the speaker is doing at the immediate time of utterance.

In the 1960, James Asher began his experiments with a method which then he called Total Physical Response, and its basic premise had a lot in common with Gouin's. (ibid)

2.5 The Natural Approach

In the early 1800s, Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell developed the 'Natural Approach' (Krashen and Terrell, 1983), based on Krashen's theories about second language acquisition. The approach shared a lot in common with Asher's Total Physical Response method especially in advocating the need – for a 'silent phase' to wait for the spoken production to 'emerge' of its own accord, and to emphasize the need that make learners as relaxed as possible during the learning process.

The critical underlying sonic principles are that as opposed to language 'processing' there should be a lot of language 'acquisition', and that to a considerable amount there are needs of 'comprehensible input' from the teacher. Here, Meaning is the essence of language while its heart is 'vocabulary' and not grammar. Certain similarities are clear with
the earlier Direct Method, with an obvious exception that students can use their native language alongside with the target language as a part of process of language learning. (ibid)

2.6 The Communicative Language Teaching Approach

All the already described methods are symbolic of the progress, which the ideology of foreign language teaching under went in the last century. These methods came and went, and they either influenced the following methods or gave birth them, in a cyclic movement that could only be seen as 'competition between rival methods' or 'passing fads' in the methodological theory underlying foreign language teaching. Finally, by the mid-eighties or so, the industry was in its growth and moving quickly towards the concept of a broad 'approach' to language teaching that included various methods, motivations for learning English, different types of teachers and the needs of individual classrooms and students themselves. To be fair, it would be said that if there were any approach working as an 'umbrella' approach to language teaching, and in the field it has become the accepted norm, of course this would have to be the Communicative Language Teaching Approach, which is also known as CLT.

Brown (1994: 77) appropriately described the 'march' towards CLT by saying that we are experimenting the nature of social, cultural, and pragmatic features of language in all the grammatical elements we use in communication. In addition, in our classrooms, we are exploring the pedagogical means for real-life communication and we are of course trying to help our learners to develop their linguistic fluency, not only the accuracy that has consumed our historical journey. What is concerned here is how to clarify and facilitate lifelong language learning with having the look that learners are partners in a cooperative venture.

3. The previous situation

The syllabus that was in use in our schools is one based on the structural approach to language teaching, drawing on the Behaviorist view of language and the learning process: it is necessary to discuss this approach first. (Alwan, Abdullatif. 'The EFT in Iraq: problems and solutions' Al–Aa’daab, 2002. P.31)

The mere structuralists’, definition of language as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by which people of a given community communicate and interact summarizes their attitude towards language. The salient features that we stress are that the language is a system, i.e., one system: that is arbitrary, made of vocal symbols, vocal with no
mention of written and finally it is used for interaction and communication.

To shed more light on the structuralists' stand towards language it is useful to quote the three basic principles of this view as stated by Hutchinson (personal communication). These, in order of importance, are:

1- The whole is equal to the sum of the parts. In order to understand language you have to reduce it to its most basic form and then build it up again. Hutchinson uses the analogy of a machine. In order to understand it, it has to be broken down into its minimal segments then reassembled. Thus if the sentence is taken as the basic unit of language a structuralist will look at it in this way:

This means that a sentence consists of at least one clause: a clause consists of at least one phrase; a phrase consists of at least one phoneme that is identified as the smallest meaningful unit of language.

This is the reason why Hutchinson prefers the term 'segmental' to refer to this school of language description. The same principle is held to be valid towards language teaching on all its levels from syllabus design to assessment, i.e., in order to learn language it is necessary to break it down into its minimal parts. (ibid: 32)

2- Speech is the primary form of language and linguistic analysis should be based on a corpus of collected examples of language use. The argument for this is that speech existed long before writing and some languages even do not have a written form. We learn to speak before we learn to write. Thus, while for the traditional prescriptive grammarian, speech is the basic form of communication while writing is held to be a refined and artificial use of that basic form. This primacy of speech led to the adoption of the Adioliingual method and to the order of the four skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing. (ibid)

3- Linguistics should concern itself with form and substance not meaning. It is thought that in order to provide a scientific basis for the analysis and description of language, meaning has to be excluded because it does not yield itself easily to scientific analysis. It sufficed to concentrate only on form (syntax) and substance (phonology and lexis). (ibid).
4- **The Inadequacies of Structuralism**

Structuralism came under attack as long ago as the late fifties. Here are some of the arguments against the principle outlined above:

1- Language is more than just the sum of the parts. We cannot understand how language works by just breaking it down, in the same way as we cannot understand how any machine works by merely taking it apart and assembling it. This is why transformational generative grammarians analyze language through the use of tree diagrams. They adopt Chomsky's conclusion that language is organized hierarchically and not segmentally.

2- The second important thing that structuralism fails to account for is the fact that some sentences may seem structurally different while they actually have similar meaning and on the other hand seemingly similar sentences may have different meanings, e.g.:

**The dog bit the boy.**

**The boy was bitten by the dog.**

Although these sentences are structurally different, they actually explain the same situation where 'the dog' does the biting and 'boy' is on the receiving end. In order to account for such a phenomenon Chomsky introduced the idea of surface structure and deep structure. Thus although the two sentences above have different surface structure, they both have the same deep structure. On the other hand, if we consider Chomsky's frequently quoted examples:

**John is easy to please.**

**John is eager to please.**

We can state that both of these sentences have the surface structure:

N, V, Adj, to + V

However, it is easy to detect a basic difference in meaning. While in the first sentence someone other than John has to do the pleasing in the second one John is the person to do it. (ibid: 36)

3- Chomsky also argues that structuralism neglects the principle that language is rule–governed behavior. The words and phonemes of a language can not be simply thrown together in an arbitrary sequence. The structuralists take the language machine apart and then put it back together again. The mistake is to assume that taking the machine apart and giving learners the individual bits until they get the whole machine is an effective way of learning. The systemic view of
language contradicts this assumption, since it stresses the importance of the interdependence of language items. (ibid: 37)

5- Why the change

The previous series of books New English Course for Iraq (NECI) were first put into use in the early 1970s. The philosophy adopted for the setting up of the syllabus is the behaviorist approach, the syllabus is structurally organized and so are the materials, the recommended method is naturally the audio – lingual method which makes the best to fit in with this particular structure of the material. This change was made when the behaviorist approach to language learning was in vogue and the structural basis to syllabus design and materials production was the most common.

It was all done in good faith and with the belief that the approach was the best for that time. However since then a great deal of research and theoretical development in the field of language and language learning carried out during the last two decades led to new insights and a new understanding of the three aspects that crucially influence the building up of the syllabus, the writing of the materials and methodology used. These three aspects are:

1- The nature of language.
2- The nature of language learning process.
3- The context in which learning takes place. (Alwan, Abdullatif. The ELT in Iraq: 'Problems and Solutions' . Al–Aa'daa'b, 2002, p. 30)

The need for syllabus reform thus stems from developments in our knowledge about the nature of language and the learning process. These developments, however, indicate that learning a foreign language is an immensely complex and rather untidy process.

The design of a syllabus and teaching materials must reflect these developments in our knowledge. (ibid: 63)

Over the years, many methods of teaching English as a second language have been developed. While many have fallen down, and others have become widely used in today's classrooms. All those methods have provided a kind of "stepping-stone", towards an approach or a theory that has lastly aided the progression and the development of the teaching methods as a whole. An approach to teaching is a theory based on multiple assumptions about how people learn, and how they respond to new languages. It is the 'Method', of how those theories are put into practice, and sets objectives and presents an organized role for both

6- **English for Iraq**

This course has been specifically designed to show the fact that the students are young adults. It covers topics that drew upon their knowledge and experience of the world, as well as their personal interests. The course gives students the opportunity to increase their knowledge of English and to help them to become fluent users of the language. To help the students to become independent language learners, the course encourages them to develop their study skills by providing them with ideas on how to continue learning outside the classroom. (Teachers' books of the course designed for the preparatory stag).

7- **The Communicative Method**

7.1 **Definition**

It is an approach to foreign or second language teaching which emphasizes that the goal of language learning is the communicative competence. It is an approach, which has been developed by British applied linguists as a reaction away from grammar-based approaches. Teaching materials with this new approach often …..

1- Teach the language that is needed to express and understand different kinds of functions, such as, requesting, describing, expressing likes and dislikes, etc….

2- Are based on notional syllabus or some other communicatively organized syllabus.

3- They emphasize the process of communication, such as using language appropriately in different types of situations.

4- Use the language to perform different types of tasks, e.g. to solve puzzles, to get information and using language for social interaction with other people. (A publication of the Ministry of Education)

7.2 **Goals and purposes**

The purpose of language teaching should enable the learners to obtain:

1- Communicative competence, and

2- Linguistic competence

The first accounts for the rules of use, i.e., the extra linguistics factors governing the use of language such as: setting (place and time), purpose, mode, field, participants, and their relationships, etc….. Whereas, the second is concerned with the capacity for producing
grammatical rules, lexis, cohesive items, etc. ..... So as to create coherence in the produced chunks of language. (ibid)

The techniques used in this method are role – play, dialogues, language games, scrambled sentences, and some other techniques that are used to enable the learners to listen and respond to the spoken language and communicate efficiently. (ibid)

Within this method, the learner is given a main role as participant in the activity carried out in the classroom. He is a negotiator within the group, a language user, a learner seeking knowledge from his teacher and asking about the language problems he is facing in the learning process. (ibid)

For the teacher's role, this method minimizes the role of the teacher as a fountainhead of all knowledge who feeds his learners with what he knows and what he likes. Now, he is a controller, an organizer, a prompter, an observer, and an accessory, that is to access the learner's work to see how well he / she performs. (ibid)

Therefore, we can conclude that there are certain principles and characteristics for the CLT. Language use is an individual process in which the user expresses his individuality and interests. It is a social phenomenon in which communication takes place in a social context. Language use is enjoyable and interesting to learners using stories, games, poems, plays, etc. ....

Authentic language is used as much as possible in a real context. Truly communicative activities have three features. Those are information gaps, choice and feedback. The target language is seen as a vehicle for classroom communication, not just the object of study. Errors are permitted and are seen as a natural outcome of the development of communication skills. The teacher's role is an advisor during communicative activities; and he is facilitator of the learners' learning.

The cornerstone of this approach is the concept of communicative competence that refers to the knowledge of the functions language is used for. Consolidation is of vital importance in teaching because language learning requires constant review and reinforcement. Evaluation is accomplished by using an integrative test. Finally, the most evident characteristics of the communicative approach is that everything is actually done with an intent, which is obviously communicative.
Part Two
8- The Questionnaire

McDonough (1984: 42 – cited by Alwan, 1989: 84) sees that 'The principal tools for analysis are the questionnaire and the interviews.'

Dubin and Olshtain (1986: 16 – cited by Alwan, 1989: 84) think that questionnaire have the advantage of being easy to interpret and evaluate, but they have their disadvantage. Their disadvantage is that respondents are not always completely frank and open. They may choose what they think the investigator would like to hear from them.

To make use of the positive side of questionnaire and to avoid their disadvantage, the respondents who are included in the questionnaire, are interviewed and invited to write what they really think to be really true or actual.

8.1 A Description of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire was submitted to some teachers of English who are familiar with or are actually teaching one of the three books of the preparatory stage. It was assumed that those teachers would serve as a good source of information about the subject in question as teachers 'regard themselves as practical people and not as theorists' (Stern, 1983:23 - cited by Alwan, 1989: 85). McDonough (1984: 140 – cited by Alwan, 1989: 85) also agrees with Stern on the value of depending on teachers as a source of reliable information ' it is the teacher on whom most demands are made.'

The questionnaire consists of five items that are stated as proposed problems faced by teachers in teaching the course of English for Iraq. The teachers have been asked to point out any item they are convinced to be a problem and to add any other items they may view as problems and have difficulty in dealing with.

The questionnaire is intended to account for problems faced by teachers in their teaching process. Students are excluded as it is thought that they have no experience in matters of course design and their answers might be unreliable in evaluating the course – books under investigation.

8.2 Specifications of the Participants

The questionnaire is submitted to (15) teachers of English who teach the 'English for Iraq' course in preparatory schools in Baghdad governorate. All the participants are Iraqi teachers who have been graduated from Iraqi colleges and universities.
All of them are with B.A Degree in English language and literature. None of them has been sent to an English speaking country. So, they are supposed to be homogeneous in their professional qualification. They teach English in preparatory and secondary schools in different locations in the governorate. These teachers have different experiences in the field of language teaching ranging from a two-year experience up to thirty-year experience. Some of the schools are for boys and some are for girls.

The teachers of English in these schools were interviewed before they were asked to respond to the questionnaire and asked to avoid subjective answers and to state things as they saw them. Enough time was given to the participants to do the questionnaire to avoid hasty unreliable responses. They were also asked to skip any item that they were not sure of. It was hoped that the teachers would be co-operative and helpful in giving a representative picture of the situation.

8.3 The Results of the Questionnaire

All the responses to the items of the questionnaire are collected and sorted out. An analysis of those responses is started. Five proposed problems are put in the questionnaire and the teachers are asked to put a tick in front of the item they decide to be a problem. Enough space is left for the teachers to add any other negative aspects that may hinder their work.

Eighty percent agreed that the first item in the questionnaire is really a problem. It is about the time of lessons in most of our schools and how it is insufficient to cover the whole materials.

One hundred percent agreed on the second item to be a problem, i.e., the huge number of students in each class that affects their chance to participate in the activities of the lesson.

Eighty six percent of the teachers viewed the third item as a problem, i.e., which is the point that some students avoid participating in the lesson.

Sixty percent agreed on that the fourth item is a problem that need to be considered. The item has stated that the few training courses for the teachers to improve their abilities and skills is a problem.

Seventy three percent of the participants saw that the last fifth item of the questionnaire is a real problem. This one is related to the way by which the new course states or shows its material. Teachers find that the way is unclear and thus it may impede them in their teaching process.
Fifty percent added that there is a need for specific laboratories for students to improve their abilities in the production of certain difficult words. Twenty percent saw that the new, difficult and sometimes complicated words in the new course as a problem faced by students and therefore teachers.

8.4 The conclusion

Each of the different methods, that have been developed along the history of foreign language teaching, has contributed with new elements and attempted to deal with some issues of language learning.

However, those methods have different theoretical considerations and were derived in different historical contexts, and above all stressed on different social and educational needs. Therefore, in teaching practice and in order to apply these methods in effective and efficient way, practitioners should take into their minds these questions: who the learners are, what their current level of proficiency is, what sort of communicative needs they have, and the circumstances in which they will be using English in the future, and so on.

In a word, no single method could come up with successful results. The communicative approach, in our primary, intermediate, and preparatory schools really forms a radical change in the current educational process. Logically speaking, any change is usually accompanied by certain problems even if that change is originally intended for better results.

As it is clear, from the results of the questionnaire, the fact that teachers suffer from certain aspects hinder their performance and it is something for sure that teachers' problems will affect the students who, in their turn, are the aim of the whole process.

Being a teacher, the researcher's intention to point out those problems is a simple real attempt to put a hand on those aspects that may impede our teachers from going on with a better and clear understanding of the course.

A look at all what is going on with the new situation, is necessary from those who authorize the subject and have the upper hand to change, adjust and reform things related to our educational process.

Bibliography

2- Alwan, Saad Auda (1989) *Towards a better program for teaching English in fifth and sixth secondary classes.*

3- Publications of the Ministry of Education.
