# *TRADITIONAL AND MODERN METHODS IN ELT*

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***Abstract:*** *The teaching process in its complexity is based on a series of methods and techniques meant to bring about improvement, evolution and recognition of language richness. All these methods make up a conglomerate whose elements oscillate between traditional and modern. Depending on the classroom needs and level of cognition, the methods are more or less valuable, but they are sure to correspond to the society requirements during a certain historical era. The present work is a didactic incursion aiming at the most widely used teaching methodologies. Both their advantages and shortcomings have been highlighted with a view to better guide teachers into selecting the most effective ones for the teaching learning process.*

***Keywords:*** *methods, language richness, didactic incursion.*

A foray into the history of language shows that knowing a language means acquiring that language system, with all its components: phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, etc.. Latin, the language of antiquity, was originally taught to organize the Roman Catholic Church and subsequently used in the cultural, political or social areas. This language was the starting point of all language teaching methodologies. Unfortunately, its importance was at one time minimized, Latin being reduced to the status of a dead language. Social evolution and education challenges with all their demands have launched languages such as French or German that were enriched with new forms and functions.

The linguists of the time (Claude Marcel, François Gouin) anticipated the changes that would affect teaching and learning, developing their theories on the mechanisms of cognitive activity of the student, and his intellectual capabilities. The latter argues that "a language will learn better if we use it to achieve a series of coherent actions." (François Gouin, *L'art d'enseigner et les langues d'étudier*, 1880)." (our translation)

Given the freedom of teaching and the numerous teaching methods, a great number of new ideas and techniques will definitely contribute to the effectiveness of learning and motivate students in their continuous attempt to acquire a foreign language at desirable standards. Here are some ways that oscillate between traditional and modern, but whose applicability is highly emphasized in the teaching-learning process.

### *Direct method*

The direct method of teaching was referred to as the Grammar-Translation Method in the 19th century. It is an analytical method that lays emphasis on the learner's target language. A text is analyzed in terms of vocabulary and grammar, with references to the learner's source language. The purpose of this approach is to show the learner that if he wants to say *poftă bună*, he should be placed in a similar context in a foreign language, where he can find the equivalent, with no need to translate or explain the phrase grammatically. This method is primarily concerned with developing oral skills. Texts are listened to, and priority is given to correct pronunciation. The teacher guides the activity by specific gestures, oral presentations, body language, whereas the

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student's role is to imitate and gradually assimilate knowledge. However, the method has its shortcomings and limitations. It is not difficult to handle a topic on environmental issues, but students are sure to meet difficulty in the acquisition of abstract lexical structures related to the causes of earthquakes or volcanoes.

In the early 20th century, diversity of the direct method was recognized in the German or French education systems, where vocabulary was taught using the mother tongue and the rational learning of grammatical structures was replaced by the imitative or repetitive acts of learning. The student's role was more clearly defined; he could make dialogues, interfere with his own observations and analyze linguistic contexts from various perspectives.

***Audio-lingualism***

This methodology is based on the selection of various linguistic elements, and the analysis of contexts in which they occur. Therefore, it is necessary to find some principles to organize and apply linguistic contents in order to present them in new communication situations. Based on behavioural psychology, the audio-lingual method helps learners to respond correctly to stimuli through shaping and reinforcement (Skinner 1957). According to this method, language skills become more effective if presented orally first.

The method was widely used by the U.S staff in the military operations, during the Second World War. Apparently, the method has been successful through exposure to the language and its use in various urgent or necessary situations of communication. Listening and repetition, drills and dialogues are part of the learning process and allow subsequent reiteration of information.

The contrastive approaches used in language learning have concluded that learners' errors can be explained by the differences between the native and foreign language, which may lead to an erroneous interpretation of the message. The two theories (structuralism, behaviourism) underlying this method aim both at a systematic and selective presentation of linguistic structures (structuralism), and the acquisition of behaviour, which inevitably becomes automated (behaviourism).

Although extremely useful in the above-mentioned contexts, the audio-lingual method recognizes its limits from two perspectives. On the one hand, it confines human imagination that does not benefit from a large insight in terms of speech acts, on the other, learners do not have a satisfactory degree of motivation in relation to specific activities, considering them tedious or inappropriate for the reality of the classroom. This is revealed by the fact that "perfect overlap between theory and materials (...) has led to a radical impoverishment of the issues taken into consideration and the educational practices." (Puren, 1994: 20)

***The silent way***

It is considered an innovative method, whose initiator, Caleb Gattegno, considers all the aspects of the language as highly developed through discovery, creativity and problem-solving. In terms of creativity, we, as teachers, have to cross-fertilize learners' imagination by helping them to explore ideas from other fields. Creativity requires time, reward, and allows mistakes. Problem solving is based on two facts. The first shows previous information and impressions made by the student, and the second highlights novelty that cannot be explained by previously accumulated



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knowledge. From a psychological perspective, the novelty effect renders the individual's strongest response to a potentially menacing experience.

Novelty-seeking term has received little attention in the creativity literature. To be innovative is to be able to think differently from the already established line of thinking. It has been stated that novelty-seeking personality is modulated by the transmission of the neurotransmitter dopamine (Cloninger, 1994). This is also known as *novelty-seeking genes* (Benjamin et al., 1996, Prolo & Licinio, 2002).

Students seek for the novelty element from various reasons: a state of boredom or the need to solve their insecurity towards perceptual representations. They do not put up with repetitive experiences of any kind, on the contrary, they respond positively to exploratory, stimulating environments. In a high-tech based society dominated by a huge flow of information, precocious students are always in search for novelty and their neural connexions work at high levels to discover new meanings and convey various interpretations for the world. New elements arouse their curiosity but everything that is new for a moment becomes obsolete the very next second.

During the silent way, the teacher challenges the learner to be active and highly involved in the classroom activities. The use of different physical objects to introduce the new lexicon and syntax is also of great importance. The teacher, as conductor of the orchestra remains silent most of the times, thus allowing his students to strive to solve problems about the language and get a grasp of the way it works.

Creativity, intelligence potential and long-term memory are among the advantages of the method. In other terms, the silent way approach creates barriers in communication, since learners are somehow isolated in their work. Materials will also fail to render all aspects of language.

***Suggestopedia***

The very name of the method leads to the idea that it mostly explores the power of suggestion, generally granted by musical pieces. It is valuable to the extent to which it creates a stimulating and relaxing environment in which harmonization of musical notes becomes the perfect impetus for creativity in learning.

The Bulgarian psychologist G. Lozanov, the promoter of this innovative method claims that human beings permanently respond to non-rational influences. He lays emphasis on the importance of relaxation of mind and the creation of a comfortable learning environment. The lesson based on suggestopedia explores art and music and teaching is designed in a playful manner.

The method has also faced critical remarks, since language acquisition is less about the power of the mind, and more about understanding, interacting and producing new enunciations. Nevertheless, no one denies the usefulness of the state of relaxation which is valuable at times in the classroom.

***Total physical response***

The method consists in the harmonization of speech and action in the language processing and was supported by J. Asher who inserted psychology, learning theory and pedagogy into his theory. In psychological terms, Asher claims that children get language through a series of commands from their parents to which they react physically. There are certain assumptions lying at the basis of the method. First, grammar and lexicon can be acquired from the skilful use of the imperative form.



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Secondly, abstractization does not help beginners to know how language works. Thirdly, language can only be understood as a whole.

The characteristics of the method include teaching grammar logically, prevalence of meaning over form and the teacher's dynamic role. Activities include drills, role plays, slide presentations etc. TPR is a useful technique that benefits from impressive results, especially when associated with other methods. It focuses on comprehension, lays emphasis on meaning and reduces the level of stress.

The shortcomings of TPR encompass the lack of communicative relevance of the utterances, repetition and boredom.

***The communicative approach***

The area of communication and its nature have become essential requisitions of the society since the 70s, based on the urgent need to create a communication plan that meets the European requirements. Heterogeneity of groups (students, tourists, immigrants, professionals in a field, etc.) claiming to learn a foreign language was the main reason that led to the development of communication strategies, without neglecting, however, factors such as individual personality, degree of motivation, age etc.

The communicative approach gradually departs from the traditional method of learning grammar or vocabulary, bringing to the fore a varied social reality, with needs specific to each individual. Notions become important depending on the explanations and their adaptability to various linguistic contexts. Categories such as gender, number, noun inflection or verbal tenses vary depending on the characteristics of each language.

The speech act was formulated by Searle's philosophy of language (1969) and illustrates that language helps us to interact with others, create our own imaginative world, express our attitudes to different situations and communicate different information. A word receives new meanings depending on the speaker's intention and the act of communication becomes more complex depending on the nature of communication.

For example, a business meeting assumes acceptance, refusal, negotiation, tolerance, proposals etc. In the act of communication, the two partners in the dialogue possess a common code that they decipher without difficulty. Any obstacle in understanding subject-specific concepts automatically generates a communication deficiency. The same goes for the educational process, in which the student expresses the need to communicate through speech acts and lexical-grammatical structures.

Modern foreign language methodology has brought about fundamental changes in the perception of the communication act, creating *communication skills* as an integral part of learning a foreign language. Grammatical rules are not sufficient to outline a language, since we also need communication or the contextual use of language. Therefore, we needed to trace a line that gave meaning to the communicative approach. Therefore, we understood the need for a grammar of ideas and notions and some type of interactive exercises. Emphasis was laid on the student as the main actor of the education act and the harmonization of the lesson objectives with real-life situations.

Admittedly, learning a language involves not only the ability to handle grammar and vocabulary in an efficient way, but also openness to cultural dynamics and formation of a set of values and attitudes towards the formal and informal environments. From this point of view, the communicative approach has made a significant contribution to modern teaching. Classification of linguistic elements is correlated with



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the immediate need for communication. This brings to the fore the learner, who becomes independent, conscious and familiar with the mechanisms of language. Communication takes place in dynamic groups that shape the meaning of concepts. Learners learn to communicate better, develop self-confidence and increase their self-esteem and creativity. Increasing the variety of ideas helps to stimulate groups and the term *to know* is outperformed by such notions as *know how to do* and *know what to do* in everyday contexts.

The teacher's role changes radically in the sense that he coordinates and organizes the educational activities, and gives it new values depending on the style of the work groups. He carefully monitors the group, draws up the necessary tasks and creates an appropriate climate in the classroom. The communicative dimension of the language, the high degree of the class motivation and the focus on self-learning are only a few of the positive aspects of the communicative approach.

The disadvantages of this method are explained by the lack of a systematic presentation of the language structures, prioritization of meanings to the detriment of grammatical structures, the permanent change of the syllabus according to the student's needs, and heterogeneity of the groups in approaching various acts of communication.

***The lexical approach***

Unlike other approaches, the lexical one gives priority to vocabulary and is based on the key principle that "language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalized grammar." In other words, learners should spend more time developing their fixed phrases and less time on grammatical structures.

According to the promoters of this approach, our mental lexicon processes meaningful chunks which generate cohesive texts. A large number of memorized sequences in our brain help us to speak our first language fluently. Collocations are useful for us to form a cognitive representation of a set of contexts in which a given form can be employed to express a given meaning. Instead of conveying grammar explanations, the method focuses on exploring grammar. In order to render a better understanding of the words, learners use corpora, lexical databases and dictionaries. These tools provide information about nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, as well as of the word's uses in different contexts. Except for being sources of information, dictionaries are also useful aids to learning. Among their purposes one can recognize encoding (spelling, pronunciation, meaning, grammar, collocations), decoding (confirmation of meanings, guesses from contexts), learning (vocabulary enrichment, including etymology). Dictionaries are generally used in conjunction with reading, listening, speaking and writing. A word occurring in a context follows a complex direction: deciding on the part of speech, selecting the general meaning, choosing the right entry, relating the meaning to the context and deciding if it fits etc. Therefore, words are learned in relation to their form (spoken, written, common affixes), their meaning (underlying concept, specific associations), and their use (collocations, grammatical patterns, constraints on their use). Apart from dictionaries, learners can also benefit from the use of concordancers. They are employed to search, access and analyze language from a corpus and provide accurate information about the authenticity of language. Such an elaborate resource open wide perspectives in the following directions: exploring collocations, detecting errors, comprehending different meanings, finding genuine examples etc.



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The usefulness of the lexical approach lies in the fact that it opens a realistic perspective about language. Lexis has supremacy over grammar, since learners use it in real contexts. Multiple contexts provide rich information about collocations, grammatical patterns, related meanings and homonyms.

***Brainstorming***

As a group creativity technique, brainstorming is meant to generate a large number of ideas during the discussion. Its effectiveness lies in the fact that the learner can develop and train his creative skills, will and courage to express himself freely. As an approach, brainstorming involves choosing more or less common ideas, which give rise to different solutions. These ideas are not criticized by the members of the group, but stimulated by association and cleared up in the group. Although partially effective, the method has its shortcomings, in that it promotes inequality of the group or monopoly on certain ideas. This can lead to mental blocks and inefficient tasks.

***Choosing a random word and coining terms***

In modern times, this method has attracted specialists' attention, due to its usefulness in improving creativity and spontaneity. Choosing a random word from the dictionary and making the right associations may help us to enrich our imagination and lexicon. A random word opens tens of ways of interpretation in terms of its aesthetics, literal or metaphorical usage, combinations with other terms etc. How can a word be used? Does its literal or metaphorical meaning prevail? What does the word collocate with?, How many synonyms does the word convey? These are natural questions that put our imagination at work. All the associations we make tell us how productive our brain is.

Coining terms is another worth mentioning procedure which follows certain directions. The criteria for the selection and creation of terms must include transparency, consistency, appropriateness, linguistic correctness, and preference for native language. When meanings are visible in their morphology, the term is transparent. The new terms must integrate into and be consistent with the concept system. The language community requires terms that adhere to familiar patterns of meaning. In terms of linguistic correctness, a term shall conform to the phonological and morphosyntactic norms of the language. Preference for the native language is justified by the acceptance of native language phrases instead of loans.

***The thinking hats***

The concept was coined by Edward de Bono (1985) and is highly useful to guide people's thinking in one direction at a time. The metaphorical meaning of the differently coloured hats highlights various styles of thinking. It has also been called *parallel thinking* and it helps us to analyse problems from different angles and to thoroughly explore all these angles. There is no specific strategy to leap from critical thinking to an optimistic perspective within this methodology. The thinking hats theory is useful for learners as they allow them to recognize any deficiencies in the way they approach problem-solving, giving them the possibility to correct such issues.

On the other hand, the method conveys diversity of thought, reduces confrontation, saves time and implements action plans.



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***Phillips 6-6***

Similar to brainstorming, Phillips 6-6 method involves 6 participants in 6-minute discussions. The main objectives follow the approach of various aspects of a problem in a limited time. Confrontation of perceptions and work group facilitate communication and stimulate creativity. The teaching procedure correlates the discourse and the decision-making game, and thus contributes to expressing the student's personality.

The methods and techniques mentioned above, sketch an authentic picture of the educational system, whose role is to diversify the educational process so as to correspond to the European requirements of competence and cultural values. The selection of methods must be based on a deep understanding of human learning mechanisms. Conceptualization of learning as an accumulation of information generates superficiality, because new knowledge assimilation is productive only through a real insight of the significance of learning.

Learning superficially means to automatically reproduce certain information received from the transmitter. On the other hand, when learning is comprehensive, the learner has the capacity to release new judges and offer a personal interpretation of the contexts addressed.

Any method must be in constant change and evolution and relate to the features of the one that assimilates it. Age, personality, education and level of adaptability to a learning environment are relevant factors in the educational process of each individual.

***The ludic method***

From the Latin *ludere* (to play), the game has an essential role in cognitive, emotional and social development of the student. It trains imaginative thinking, motivation and creates a good feeling in actions. The current educational environment by its technological-informational flow creates a state of permanent intellectual tension, a sense of burden, and feelings of boredom and exhaustion. From a psychological perspective, the game annihilates the state of monotony, and trains the student in simple or complex activities requiring mental creativity and dynamism. By playing, one explores a universe rich in meanings and beyond its seemingly comic nature, the game involves an escape from ordinary reality. It stimulates observation, spontaneity, self-esteem and improves speed of response. Among the supporters of the ludic learning method are: H. Carr who recognizes the game as a method of training instincts, Karl Gross, in whose conception the game has a role in preserving life and Konrad Lange, for whom the game is an adaptation to a new context. J. Piaget's contribution is also formative; the game is defined as a mental activity with a vast symbolism. Although the game is more prevalent at smaller age, adults alike can benefit from a deeper understanding of things by adopting this method. For example, in learning a foreign language, the stimulation of creativity through game could be determined by the ability to coin new terms. Although an apparently complex thinking exercise, adults can turn to combinations of words and obtain new terms that define states, actions or situations.

Here is an example of practice by which the ludic method is up to the mark. The teacher asks his students to pretend to be in an airport, where due to weather unfavourable conditions, the flight is called off. Passengers carry heavy bags and the inconvenience of waiting long hours for their plane to take off brings about impatience, frustration or anger. Each student in turn is required to coin a term to express their



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attitude towards the situation created. One suitable answer can be *bagonize*, a perfect combination of the words *bag* and *agonize*.

However, in terms of coining terminology, things do not seem so simple, since students must be familiar with certain word building mechanisms: composition, derivation, terminologisation (*memory – IT*, *memory – human*), abbreviation and new creations. There are also criteria to select and create new terms: morphological motivation (a term meaning is visible in its morphology), consistency (new terms must be consistent with the concept system), appropriateness (an appropriate term shall adhere to familiar patterns of meaning within a language community), linguistic correctness (a term shall conform to the morphological and morphosyntactic norms of the language in question).

The IT field and the media are prolific in newly-coined terms: *unplugged wedding* (no one is allowed to take photos), *digital dementia* (brain impairment due to overuse of screens), *electroceutical* (electrical stimulation that provides pain relief) etc. The creation of new terms (neologisms) is a modern linguistic device providing language with specific freshness and originality.

### *Conclusions*

Regardless of their nature, the teaching methods approached have a well-defined status in the curricula and are highly used in the education environment depending on the level of the class, the students' needs as well as degree of adaptability to new teaching contexts. The above-mentioned methods are interactive and propose learning by cooperation, brainstorming, expressing opinions and arguments. The partners involved take an active and direct role within small groups and the larger community they belong to. Implementing these methods requires a plurality of qualities: receptivity to novelty, desire for self-development, reflexive thinking and flexibility of opinions. Each method contributes more or less to shaping a balanced learning environment, in which all the parties involved play a more or less determining role. Improving traditional methods and adapting them to the cultural requirements of the 21st century is a bold approach with long-term positive results.

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