

Approaches towards Foreign Language Teaching and Learning from Area Studies to Immersion-Programme

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Abstract – Over last more than one and half century, the didactic of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning has been theorized. Departing from the assumption that the exposition and appropriation of facts and information about diverse aspects of the target culture and its institutions are the keystone of foreign language learning, the theoretical system of ‘Landeskunde’ [Area Studies] evolved from the end of 19th century towards the beginning of the 20th century. Perceiving the lacks in this approach in terms of the need to reflect upon the facts and information, the new approach of ‘Kulturkunde’ followed in 1920s. Appreciating the necessity to ascribe significance to the individual capability of the learner, which varies on account of several factors, the approach of ‘Learner Strategy’ was favoured. Some of the thinkers felt that a close relationship between the spoken word and the act plays a vital role in the acquisition of foreign language. Moreover, this insight brought to notice the urgency of recognizing the process of memorizing the foreign language through the acts cohering the spoken word. In appreciation of this exigency, ‘Total Physical Response’ [TPR] was proposed as a foreign language teaching/ learning approach. In our time, foreign language teaching/learning has to grapple with the before standing cultural and social issues. The current methodology of “Immersion-Programme” is trying to tackle the issue of ‘bilingualism’ as a cultural and social question while giving a fresh impetus to foreign language teaching/learning methodology.

Key-Words: Area-Studies [Landeskunde], Kulturkunde, Learner-Strategies, Total Physical Response [TPR], Immersion

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INTRODUCTION

Since 1990s a stock-taking regarding the propriety of methodologies of the Foreign Language Teaching is under assessment. The issues which have come to be discussed relate to as to how to make the learner equipped to respond to the learning environment. This has led to the re-examination of the teacher-learner relation in the classroom. It is being investigated as to which methodology/ approach can suit the purpose of awakening the creativity among the learners at the point of learning the foreign language. In my paper, I have sketched the systematic development of the Area-Studies (Landeskunde) approach, which underlines the effectiveness of the acquaintance of the learner with the target culture through facts about history, geography and culture, while learning a foreign language. The purpose of this paper is to explore in full the diversity which occurs among the learner, either on account of their individual abilities or their cognitive/ behavioural constitution. Making the paper relevant to the contemporary socio-cultural issues, it

undertakes to discuss the interrelation of language teaching/learning with the question of linguistic differences; i.e. bilingualism.

1. Input

The learning of the foreign language depends on the manoeuvring between the source language to the target language. This manoeuvring refers to the methods employed to generate and nurture the dialectical interaction between these two poles. It has been acknowledged by the scholars long since that this task requires a perfectly crucial way of employing the suitable approach to facilitate the acquisition of the foreign language by the learner to act in the space of relaxed and introspective involvement. Since quite some time now there has been theoretical debates going on regarding the environment that govern the acquisition of the SL [second language]. It has been pointed out that the ‘input’ plays a distinct role in this process and this process entails multiple layers of language learning; viz. grammar, facts and approaches

toward their cognition. As has been asserted regarding the relevant input-approach: “The primary factor affecting language acquisition appears to be the input that the learner receives. Stephen Krashen took a very strong position on the importance of input, asserting that the comprehensible input is all that is necessary for the second-language acquisition.” [1]

2. Area Studies or Landeskunde

Accordingly a host of methodologies evolved over the course of time to explore the practicability of acquisition and imparting of the foreign language. One of the earlier methodologies, which developed in the British curricula and the German curricula of learning foreign language was the Landeskundlicher Ansatz or the Area Studies. This methodology focussed on the employment of facts in the classroom. Broad coverage was ensured regarding the collection of the salient facts and figures on varied aspects of the target culture. Entire range of facts and information concerning culture, history, geography, daily life occupied the centre-stage which supplied the necessary source of guiding the foreign language teaching and second language acquisition [SLA]. In his essay *Target Cultures and Didactic Concepts of EFL Teaching*, Wolfgang Gehring writes: “The area studies approach still has its influence on German curricula of English. It offers thematic focuses on the target culture, varying from the teaching of geographical, historical, and institutional facts to providing information on everyday cultures.e.g. educational system.” [2] However, the significance of these facts and information does not lie in its one-sided and unedited form. The facts and information betray the character of being representative. They are taken to strengthen the context in which foreign language teaching is carried on in the class-room. Gehring goes on to argue: “Elements of history, geography, and social institutions are converted to contexts for language learning. This means culture-related topics are selected according to their value for teaching language and linguistic patterns.” [3] About the efficacy of the *Landeskunde* didactical approach toward the foreign language mediation, Kristin Lange writes: “*Landeskunde* aims to familiarize students with traditions and customs of the other country and to make sure they can communicate with native speakers. Communicative competence, i.e. skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, are the main focus in the lessons, spiced up with cultural content. According to the concept of *Landeskunde*, knowledge about the target culture is necessary to communicate successfully.” [4] This approach, nonetheless, suffers from the inadequacy. What is left apart in this practise is the ability of the learner to reflect and insinuate oneself to think over the facts. Lange points out: “Consequently, because of the focus on declarative knowledge only, language students often know more about the Culture (capital C) of the target countries than the actual inhabitants.

What this approach neglects, however, is a critical phase of reflection and sensitizing.” [5]

3. Kulturkunde

Representing a turn, the Kulturkunde approach developed among the didactic scholars in 1915. Kulturkunde, a term reflecting the knowledge about the culture of the target country was far from the practise of the Second Language Learning [SLA]/ Foreign Language Acquisition merely through facts and information. Factually, the concept of Kulturkunde was institutionalized in 1933 at the Frobenius-Institute at the Goethe University in Frankfurt. The studies carried out under the domain of Kulturkunde pertained to the ethnographical studies; in particular that of Africa and other traditional folks. In the area of foreign language didactic practise it entailed the attempt to equip the language learners with the cognitive and interpretative skill to understand the other culture through acquaintance of the diverse areas of the institutional and socio-political life. Language learning was no more merely a receptive practise, instead it became a dynamic activity of being able to understand and interpret the other culture on the basis of the facts and information available. Perspectives of receiving the other culture and the other foreign languages differ and hence, Kulturkunde approach had also to take into account the possibilities of the differing perspectives and mentalities governing the acquisition of the foreign language. Christiane Fäcke writes that the Kulturkunde approach meant also “interpreting literary works and works of Fine Art from the perspective of differing mentalities.” [6] Elucidating the cognitive and interpretative aspects as the ingredients of the Kulturkunde approach, Wolfgang Gehring writes: “A fact-based approach as such was something supporters of the Kulturkunde-approach meant to counteract. Beginning in 1915, the desire was formulated to empower learners to develop a holistic perception of the target culture. Cognitive and affective approaches were thus conceived, that is structural understanding and admiration for the target culture in equal measure.” [7]

4. Learner Strategy

New advances in the didactics of the foreign language teaching focussed on the theme of the *Learner-Strategy* method. The point of departure of this methodology consisted in the validity of the assumption that the capability of the learners to acquire the foreign learning process largely varies. It would be a one-sided and not-rational approach not to accept this proposition. On the basis of the rationality of this assumption the methodology of the Learner-Strategy developed. The variability among learners with regard to their capability of foreign language learning may be studied in different angles. First one refers to the variability of memory. It has been proposed that two kinds of

memory continue determining the foreign language learning process. They have been classified into a.] Short-term memory, and 2.] Long-term memory. It has been argued that short-term memory has to dispense with relatively less important information. In other words, it relates to the realm of working with the fact and information which are not presumed to exercise the lasting effect on the acquisition of the foreign language learning. Contrarily, the long-term memory permits the interplay between personal experience and information received. This kind of memory becomes the base of imbibing the language and relating it to the use in consonance with the meaning which is continuously assigned to it according to the personal and social needs in which the learner stands. This kind of memory leaves the room open for the manipulation of the content which has been received in the class-room. Hence, this strategy principally; though also others, has been characterized as a conscious mental activity. Jirapa Abhakorn writes about the engagement of this conscious mental activity: "learner strategies are located in working memory as resources to aid the system of information processing. In order to manage these resources, the central executive [working memory] has to exert control over their deployment. Strategies for learning and using language then require conscious mental activity." [8] Learner-strategy is oriented toward the employment of different means for the acquisition of foreign language learning. This mode of seeking and imbibing knowledge involves the familiarization with host of activities accompanying the learning and imbibing. It leaves the space open for the use and manipulation of techniques on both sides, the teacher and the learner. The significant aspect about dealing with the technique pertains to the effort of the learner to direct the techniques of learning toward himself. Hence, this methodology acquires a dimension of self-directedness of learning by the learner. On account of this specificity, learner-strategy becomes the drive of the learner to lend his learning a perpetuation in the long range of maturity in the acquisition of the foreign language. It is the learner who gives longevity to his learning. It assumes the proportion even of a 'life-long' learning. Jirapa Abhakorn stresses: "The term learning strategies refers to techniques, behaviours, actions, thought process, problem solving, or study skills taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to a new situation." [9]

5. Total Physical Response (TPR)

In 1970s a new methodology of foreign language teaching was asserting itself in American and British models of foreign language didactics. This new methodology had taken its thrust from the studies in Psychology. This methodology was brought to didactics by the pioneering effort of the American psychologist and linguist James Asher. In its comprehensive scope, this methodology was

seeking to establish the relevance of the Total Physical Response [TPR] methodology by placing emphasis on some key aspects of the environment in which foreign language is acquired. It advocated principally the stress-free learning and it referred to the significance of listening as the core component of foreign language learning. Total Physical Response (TPR) is based on the idea that when action is combined with language, teaching is boosted. TPR approach emphasizes the importance of input in the initial phase and modelled on the stress-free way that children learn their mother tongue. It is hypothesized that by listening to the target language and converting it to action, speaking will eventually manifest spontaneously. This methodology has developed on the assumption that the 'response' to the 'listened words or sentences' constitutes the basis of learning. Whatever is heard is nothing but an effective and generative stimuli. It generates the response in the perception or psychology of the listener. Thus, communication in the foreign language is a mentally and physically motored practise, which is exclusive vis-à-vis the *Landeskunde* and *Kulturkunde* approach which insist on the deployment of the facts and information. The construct of listening-response mechanism involved in the TPR methodology has been named to be *Sv-R type Learning*. Sv represents the stimuli component of the act of learning and R refers to 'response' to the stimuli. This construct coheres with the behavioural psychological theory, in which the emphasis is laid on the comprehension and development of the cognitive faculty of the individual. Stephen Seifert says in his essay *TPR for ESL: How Total Physical Response Can Shake Up Your Classroom*: "The behavioural Psychology of the stimulus-response methods still stands strong. Stimulus-response remains a simple and effective way to elicit action from your students as they build the cognitive map essential for language retention." [10] Another aspect of TPR is related to the trace-theory, which Dr. Asher refers to in his pioneering work. Trace-Theory maintains that the psychological principles can help connect memory with action. The assumption underlying this theory is that the memory is prone to be stronger when it is related to group of words commanding or indicating an injunction for action on the part of the learner. Stephen Seifert writes: "The idea behind the trace theory in language is to develop a more intense memory of a word or set of words, which in turn creates more intense imagery and is connected strongly to an action." [11] In so far as the practise of learning the language develops from the naturalization with the cluster of words, this method has also been called the 'lexicological approach' of learning a foreign language. This approach places much less emphasis on the isolated words while imparting or learning a foreign language in the class-room. Giving an example of this approach in the TPR methodology of foreign language teaching, Stephen Seifert writes: "For example,

instead of telling your student what an apple is by showing a picture on a board and saying “apple”, you will say “Juan, stand up, find the apple and place it in the fruit bowl.” [12] This will have that student stand up, remember what an apple is and locate the item itself, then recall what a “fruit bowl” is and place the item inside it.” The sum of the TPR methodology for foreign language teaching consists of the following aspects: 1.] Students listen before speaking 2.] Students learn through commands 3.] Student’s target language speech evolves from listening.

6. Silent Way

Another approach of teaching and learning of the foreign language developed in 1960s. This approach is known as the “Silent Way” approach. This approach was formulated by an Egyptian didactic Caleb Gattegno. In this approach the learning is chiefly dependent on the explorations by the learner. The learner, in a foreign language class-room encounters the foreign language signs. He attempts to ‘find’ the meaning of those signs (words) on his own. This process of learning becomes a participatory and collective one as well. Gattegno pointed out that the inability of a learner to find the meaning of a word becomes a ‘gift to the class’, in that the puzzle (words difficult to be understood) is distributed among the group. At that point, the teacher brings in further inputs to help explore the possibility of understanding the meaning of those difficult words. Thus, there occurs a situation which would permit a teacher to give students step-by-step input as required by their learning. The cornerstone of this approach is constituted in so far as the teacher works as a facilitator. He takes up the onus of awakening the inbuilt, yet uncovered abilities of the learner. In her essay “The Silent Way”, Roslyn Young writes about this aspect of this approach: “New words were introduced when necessary by being said once, and the students could explore the language using their natural gifts. The teacher could remain almost silent, giving the students the time and space necessary to practise the language, the teacher’s silence indicating to the students this attitude to learning and the learners, and placing the onus for learning squarely on their shoulders.” [13] Few salient benefits of this approach lie in the fact that

- 1.] “Learner receives the encouragement to produce as much language as possible.” [14]
- 2.] “Learning is facilitated by discovering/creating rather than remembering.” [15] One of the principal score which this method has over other methods is the appreciation of the potency of learning, which is increased on the side of the learner. In another way, this approach has been characterized as a shift from extrinsic to intrinsic rewards.

7. Immersion

Since last forty years a new methodology of the foreign language teaching and learning has been in development. This methodology or approach is known as the “Immersion Theory”. It started from Canada and gradually it spread to USA, where it is now being widely practised in the didactic of the foreign language teaching. The necessity of the evolution of this approach has been circumstantial in nature. Canada was transitioning into a bilingual state over few decades, and this posed a challenge to the traditional method of language teaching in the schools. The need was felt that the school-going children must be equipped in two language so that they can integrate into the bilingual social and cultural sphere within the state when they grow into young citizens. According to this methodology, it is necessary to provide the inputs in two languages for a subject at the same time. The amount; i.e. the percentage of the input and its variations change according to the developmental need of the children. As a common circumstance, almost 100 percent of the children beginning at the immersion are English-speaking children. Their ‘immersion language’ first of all is English. So, they are taught at primary levels in K-5 or K-6 elementary schools in English. They learn to read, write and speak a subject in English. Gradually, there is a drop in the percentage of teaching medium; i.e. English while preparing the students to read, write and speak their subjects. This models refers to ‘full-immersion’. Jack Brondum and Nancy Stenson (1998) write about the immersion-method of foreign language teaching: “In a K-5 or K-6 elementary school, 100 percent of instruction is in immersion language. Children learn to read in this language first. The amount of immersion instruction then drops to 80 percent in Grade 2 and continues to drop gradually to about 50 percent by Grade 5 or 6.” [16] There is also another model within the immersion-program. In this immersion, right from the beginning the instruction is not aimed at 100 percent immersion in language. The immersion is kept at 50 percent; i.e. the student receives the input in a subject in two languages in equal measure. It is arranged that the class is taken by two teachers simultaneously mediating the same content within the class room in two languages. This is strenuous immersion, though the pressure on the learner might bring out the desirable familiarity with two different language in which one language is one’s own language; i.e. L1 and the other language is the foreign language; i.e. L2. This type of immersion is known as ‘partial immersion’. Jack Brondum and Nancy Stenson (1998) write about this partial immersion: “Another well-known model is partial immersion. Here, less than 100 percent of instruction (usually about 50 percent) is pro-vided in the immersion-language. This percent remains constant throughout elementary school. Reading is taught in both the first and the second language. When feasible, each class has two teachers, one teaches in the first language and the

other teaches in the second.”[17]The most intense effort toward addressing the bilingual issue is made in the ‘dual immersion’. In this program, the students from two linguistic nativities are placed together. They acquire a space for inter-lingual learning within the same class-room and ripen into the students with full mastery over two languages in reading, writing and speaking and thus fulfilling the task of the society to nurture mature bilingual adults. Jack Brondum and Nancy Stenson (1998) write about this dual immersion: “The last type of immersion is called two-way (or dual) immersion. This model was first developed in Florida’s Dade County schools and is still evolving. Children from each language group are mixed in the same classroom. The goals of two-way immersion are for both language groups to become bilingual, succeed academically, and develop positive inter-group relations.” [18]

The ‘immersion-model’ appears as follows in the tabular representation:

Immersion Models	Percentage of the instruction-language
Full Immersion	100
Partial Immersion	50
Two-Way or Dual Immersion	Mixing of two natives in the same class-room

As according to age also, the immersion can be classified:

Early Immersion: 5/6 years of age

Middle Immersion: 9/10 years of age

Late Immersion: after 11 years of age

More often than not the advantage of the immersion-program over other programs has been highlighted. “Studies have shown that bilingual immersion programs provide a strong foundation for fluency later in life and help students gain appreciation of languages and cultures that are not their own.” [19]

CONCLUSION:

Over last hundred years, the methods and approaches toward the foreign language teaching/learning traversed a continuous development with constant innovations. Foreign language teaching method involves the acquaintance with the target culture, which can be gained through receiving facts about the diverse aspects of the life and actual social and cultural sphere of the target culture. However, the information, being an input, remains to be reflected consciously by the learner.

This insight is relevant in today’s foreign language didactic, in which fact and reflection cohere mutually. Learning a foreign language preordains the intensification of the power of memorization, which is addressed by the TPR [Total Physical Response] method. This helps in activating the vocabulary in the concrete situations as needed by the learner at the beginner’s as well as at the advanced stage of learning/using the foreign language. Foreign language teaching/learning faces responsibility to address the issues which mark cultural and social fabric of our time. The contemporary “Total Immersion” method provides a way to adequately meet the problem of bilingualism in our age.

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