

2. The Direct Method

Towards the end of the late 1800s, a revolution in language teaching philosophy took place that is seen by many as the dawn of modern foreign language teaching. Teachers, frustrated by the limits of the Grammar Translation Method in terms of its inability to create communicative competence in students, began to experiment with new ways of teaching language. The appearance of the “Direct Method” thus coincided with a new school of thinking that dictated that all foreign language teaching should occur in the target language only, with no translation and an emphasis on linking *meaning* to the language being learned.

The direct method of teaching was developed as a response to the Grammar Translation Method. The basic premise of the Direct Method was that second language learning should be more like first language learning. The method would include lots of oral interaction, spontaneous use of language, no translation between first and second languages, and little or no analysis of grammar rules. This method is also known as Reform Method/Natural Method/Phonetical Method/Anti-grammatical Method.

Therefore, if possible, the teacher should try to create a natural learning environment within the classroom.

Direct Method is based on certain beliefs which are listed below:

- (i) Second language learning must be an imitation of first language learning, as this is the natural way humans learn any language, and so vernacular has no place in second language learning. (Baby never relies on another language to learn its first language).
- (ii) Printed word must be kept away from second language learner for as long as possible (same as first language learner, who does not use printed word until he has good grasp of speech).
- (iii) The written word/writing should be delayed until after the printed word has been introduced.
- (iv) The learning of grammar/translating skills should be avoided because they involve the application of the mother tongue (MT).
- (v) All above items must be avoided because they hinder the acquisition of a good oral proficiency.

Objectives

The sole and the most important objective of the direct method is to, *communicate* in the target language, partly by learning how to *think* in that language and by not involving L1 in the language learning process.

Principles of the Direct Method

The direct method is based on certain principles which are explained below.

1. **Inhibition of the vernacular:** Classroom instruction should be conducted exclusively in the target language.
2. **Limited vocabulary:** Only everyday vocabulary and sentences should be taught.
 - Concrete vocabulary should be taught through demonstration, objects, pictures
 - Abstract vocabulary should be taught through association of ideas
3. **Enhancing Communication Skills:** Oral communication skills should be built up in a carefully planned manner
4. **Descriptive Teaching Grammar:** Grammar should be taught inductively
5. **Practice:** New teaching points should be taught through modeling and practice
6. **Emphasis is laid on pronunciation:** Correct pronunciation and grammar should be emphasized.

Example

The teacher explains new vocabulary using realia, visual aids or demonstrations.

Steps Involved in Typical Techniques

Typical techniques of teaching involve the following:

1. Reading Aloud:—Reading aloud sections of passages, plays or dialogues.
2. Question and Answer Exercise:—Asking questions in the target language and having students answer in full sentence

3. Student Self-Correction:—Teacher facilitates opportunities for students to self correct using follow-up questions, tone
4. Conversation Practice:—Teacher asks students and students ask students questions using the target language
5. Fill-in-the-blank Exercise:—Items use target language only
6. Dictation:—Teacher reads the passage aloud
7. Paragraph Writing:—Students write paragraphs in their own words using the target language and various models

The Direct Method has certain advantages and disadvantages which are explained below:

Advantages

- (i) The understanding of English becomes easier due to the inhibition of the linguistic interferences of the vernacular.
- (ii) Direct association between word and meaning tends to improve expression in speech as well as writing.
- (iii) This method is psychologically sound as it follows the principles of education, e.g., proceed from particular to general, concrete to abstract.
- (iv) Direct association between the object and the English word and between the English word and its meaning facilitates understanding of English without using vernacular.
- (v) It is a natural method. It teaches English language in the same way in which the child learns his mother tongue.
- (vi) It makes more use of audio-visual aids.
- (vii) This method helps the teacher and the learner to cover-up more syllabi in less time.
- (viii) This method is an interesting method as it involves many activities.
- (ix) In this method cramming of words and their meaning are discouraged.
- (x) This method helps to bring the words of passive vocabulary to active vocabulary.
- (xi) It emphasizes on pronunciation of the language.
- (xii) This method helps in self-expression.

Disadvantages

- (i) The direct method promotes the oral aspect of language learning and undermines the significance of reading and written work.
- (ii) This method aims at directly associating word with meaning, it restricts the scope of vocabulary as all words cannot be directly associated with their meanings.
- (iii) E.g., Abstract nouns like 'honesty', 'integrity,' 'beautiful', 'truth', etc. cannot be directly associated with their meanings.

Implementation of this method requires a proper atmosphere which is conducive to learning English.

- (iv) Our schools do not have requisite audio-visual materials and/or equipment to facilitate proper teaching of English.

- (v) Lack of linguistically useful material and equipment because of its expenses hampers the progress of this method.
- (vi) Direct method suits those students who are linguistically oriented, as its basic principle is that the aural oral appeal is stronger than the visual in learning English.
- (vii) In this method teacher has to spend a lot of time for the preparation of the lesson.
- (viii) In this method grammar is not taught systematically.
- (ix) In this method much time is consumed in creating situations.
- (x) This method is not fit for the overcrowded class.
- (xi) The Direct Method was an important turning point in the history of foreign language teaching, and represented a step ahead from the Grammar Translation Method. This method is progressive and heading in the right direction.

According to Prof. Go Kalk, "*Direct association between the word and the thing gives better results than translation.*"

Some Practical Suggestions

In spite of the limitations of the direct method, it can be successfully applied in the lower and the middle classes. This method should be practiced to prepare a sound background of the oral work at the earlier stage and minimize his future difficulties.