

## Chapter 6

### Learner-Centered Methods

**Book name : Understanding Language Teaching**

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#### **Learner centered Methods**

Theoretical principles and classroom procedures of the Language Centered pedagogy we discussed in the previous chapter shaped language teaching and teacher education for nearly a quarter century.

Researchers and teachers alike became increasingly skeptical about the effectiveness of the pedagogy to realize it's a stated goal of fostering communicated capability in the learner.

Newmark,s seminal paper “ How not to interfere with language learning” . He doubted whether language learning can be additive and linear as steadfastly maintained by language - centered pedagogists.

He asserted that if it's phonological and syntactic rule , each complex of lexical features, each semantic value and is stylistic nuance in short, if each item which the linguists analysis leads him to identify had to be acquired one at a time ,preceding from simplest to most complex, and then it had to be connected to a specified is similar or stimulus sets, the child learner would be old before he could say a single appropriate thing and the adult learner would be dead.

Newmark (1966) declared that language centered pedagogy with its emphasize on sequential presentation, practice and production of isolated linguistic items constitutes serious interference with the language learning process. It was certainly highlighted the inadequacy of language centered methods, and prompted the search for an alternative method.

Chomsky demonstrate to the nature of language system and hypothesized about the innate ability of the human mind to acquire it. Halliday provided a different perspective to language, highlighting its functional properties.

In sociolinguistics, hymes proposed a theory of communicative competence incorporating social cultural norms governing language communication.

Austin,s speech act theory elaborated on how language users preform speech acts such as requesting, informing, apologizing, and so forth.

In psychology, behaviorism was yelling it's preeminence to cognitivism, which believed in the role of human cognition as a mediator between a stimulus and response.

Sociologists for developing communication models to explain how language is used to construct social networks.

By deliberate policy , the EEC eased trade and travel restrictions within multilingual Europe, which in turn provided an impetus for greater interaction among the people of the Western European countries and, consequently, provided raison d,eter for developing a function oriented language teaching pedagogy in order to meet their

specific communication needs .

Learning from the shortcomings of language centered pedagogy and drawing from the newly available psychological and linguistic insights, Wilkins, a British applied linguist who was a member of the group commissioned by the Council of Europe, propose a set of syllabuses for language teaching.

### **Theoretical principles**

The conceptual underpinnings of learner centred pedagogy are truly multidisciplinary early in the sense that it's theory of language, language learning, and language teaching came not only from the feeder disciplines of linguistics and psychology, but also from anthropology and sociology as well as from other sub disciplines such as ethnography, ethnomethodology, pragmatics, and discourse analysis.

### **Theory of language**

In order to derive their theory of language, learner-centered pedagogy drew heavily from Chomskyan formal linguistics,, Hallidayan functional linguistics,Hymesian sociolinguistics, and Austinian speech act theory.

Criticizing the basic tenets of a structural linguistics, Chomsky pointed out that language constitutes not hierarchical structure of structures as viewed by structuralists, but a network of transformations.

He demonstrated the inadequacy of a structuralism to account for the fundamental characteristics of language and language acquisition,Particularly their creativity and uniqueness.

Whereas structuralists focused on surface features of phonology and morphology, Chomsky was concerned with deep structures, and the way in which sentences are produced.

Chomskyan linguistics thus fundamentally transformed the way we look at language as system.

Going beyond the narrowness of syntactic abstraction, Halliday emphasized the triple macro functions of language textual, interpersonal and ideational.

The textual function deals with the phonological ,syntactic, and semantics signals that enable language users to understand and transmit messages.

The interpersonal function deals with social linguistic features of language required to establish roles, relationships, and responsibilities in communicative situation. The ideational function deals with the concepts and processes underlying natural, physical and social phenomena.

It was this concern with communicative meaning that led Hymes to question the adequacy of the notion of grammatical competence proposed by Chomsky. Unlike Chomsky who focus on the ideal native speaker hero and an abstract body of syntactic structures Hymes focused on the ideal native speaker hearer and an abstract body of syntactic structures, Hymes focused on the real speaker -hearer who operates in the concrete world of interpersonal communication.

In addition to Hallidayan and Hymesian perspectives, learner-centered pedagogists benefited immensely from Austin's work. As we know, he looked at language as a series of a speech acts we perform rather than as a collection of linguistic items we accumulate, an idea that fitted in perfectly with the concept of language and

communication.

Austin argued we use language to put phone in large numbers of speech acts to command , to describe , to agree , to form, to instruct and so forth .

What is crucial here is the illocutionary force, or the intended meaning , of an utterance may take. By basing themselves on a speech act theory and discourse analysis, and by introducing perspectives of social linguistics, learner centered pedagogy attempted to get closer to the concreteness of language use.

### **Accordingly they operated on the basis of the following broad principles:**

- language is a system for expressing meaning
- the linguistic structures of language reflect it's functional as well as communicating in Port,
- basic units of language are not merely grammatical in a structure ,but also notional and functional.
- The central purpose of language is communication.
- Communication is based on socio-cultural norms of interpretation shared by speech community.

### **Theory of language learning**

Learner centered pedagogy derived their language learning theories mainly from cognitive psychologist who dismissed importance given to habit formation by behaviorists and instead focused on inside formation.

They maintained that, in the context of language learning, the learners cognitive capacity mediates between teacher and put a stimulus and learner output response.

The learner based on the data provided is capable of forming ,testing and confirming hypothesis, is sequence of psychological processes that ultimately contribute to language development.

Learner centered pedagogists looked at language communication as a synthesis of textual, in interpersonal, and ideational function .

It must not be overlooked that in foregrounding the communicative abilities of interpretation, expression, and negotiation, learner centered pedagogy did not neglect importance of grammar learning.

As a matter of fact, learner centered pedagogists insisted that language learning entails the development of both accuracy and fluency where accuracy activity involves a conscious learning of grammar and fluency activity focuses on communicative potential.

In a recent interpretation of the learning objectives of communicative language teaching , **Savignon In 2002 considers the five goal areas known as 5 cs,**

Communication

Cultures

Connections

Comparisons

Communities

### **They were agreed upon as national standards for foreign language learning in the United States as representing a holistic, communicative approach to language learning:**

- To communication goal area addresses the learner's ability to use the target language to communicate thoughts, feelings, and opinions in a variety of settings.
- The cultures goal area addresses the learners understanding of how the products

and practices of a culture or reflected in the language.

- The connections goal area addresses the necessity for learner's to learn to use the language as a tool to access and process information in a diversity of contexts beyond the classroom.
- The comparisons goal area are designed to foster learner insight and understanding of the nature of language and culture through a comparison of the target language and culture with the languages and cultures already familiar to them.
- The Communities goal area describe the learners lifelong use of the language in communities and contexts both within beyond the school setting itself.

### **Theory of language teaching**

**Learner-centered pedagogy took their pedagogic bearings from the theories of language and language learning outlined above .Consequently, they recognized that it is the responsibility of the language teacher to help learners:**

- A. develop the knowledge or ability necessary to manipulate the linguistic system and use it spontaneously and flexibility in order to express their intended message.
- B. understand the distinction, and the connection, between the linguistic forms they have mastered and the communicated functions they need to perform.
- C. Develop styles and strategies required to communicate meanings as effectively as possible in concrete situations.
- D. become aware of the socio-cultural norms governing the use of language appropriate to different social circumstances.

**In order to carry out the responsibilities, it was argued, language teachers must foster learning meaningful communication in the classroom by:**

- Designing and using information gap activities where when one learner in a pair work exchange knows something the other learner does not.
- Offering choice of response to the learner, that's, open ended tasks and exercises where the learners determines what to say and how to say it.
- Emphasizing contextualization rather than decontextualized drills and pattern practices.
- Using authentic language as a vehicle for communication in class.
- Introducing language at discourse and not sentential level.
- Tolerating errors as in natural outcome of language development.
- developing activities that integrate listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

Breen and Candlin In 1980 identified two main roles for the communicators teacher:

- the first rule is to facilitate the communicative process between all participants in the classroom and between those participants and the various activities and texts.
- The second rule is to act as an Interdependent participant within the learning teaching group.

This latter rule is closely related to the objective of the first role and it arises from it.

These rules employer set of secondary rules for the teachers:

- first as an organizer of resources and as a resource himself. Second, as a guide within the classroom procedures and activities.

### **Content Specifications**

In order to meet the requirements of the learning and teaching principles they believed

in learner centered pedagogists opted for a product oriented syllabus design just as their language centered counterparts did before them but with one important distinction:

Whereas the language centered pedagogists sought to select and sequence grammatical items, learner centered pedagogists sought to select and sequence grammatical as well as notional / functional categories of language.

It is, therefore, only natural that a learner centered curriculum is expected to provide a framework for identifying, classifying, and organizing language features that are needed by the learners for their specific communicative purposes.

Wilkin (1972) proposed a notional / functional syllabus containing an inventory of semantic-grammatical notions such as duration ,frequency, quantity, dimension, and location, and communicated functions such as greeting, warning, inviting, requesting, agreeing, and disagreeing.

The focus on the learner's communicative needs, which is the hallmark of a learner-centered pedagogy, has positive as well as problematic aspects to it. There is no doubt that identifying and meeting the language needs of specific groups of learners will be of great assistance in creating and sustaining learner motivation and the making the entire learning teaching operation is worthwhile endeavor.

Besides a need based learner centered curriculum will give the classroom teachers a clear pathway to follow in their effort to maximize learning opportunities for the learners. Yet another serious concern about specifying the content for a learner centered class is that there are no criteria for selecting and sequencing language input to the learners.

### **Classroom procedures**

The content specifications of learner centered pedagogy are a clear and qualitative extension of those pertaining to language centered pedagogy , an extension of those pertaining to language -centered pedagogy, an extension that can make a huge difference in the instructional design.

But from the classroom procedural point of view there is no fundamental difference between language centers pedagogy and learner centered pedagogy. The rationale behind this observation will become apparent as we take a closer look at the input modifications and interactional activities recommended by learner centered pedagogists.

### **Input modifications**

Unlike the language centered pedagogist who adopted an almost exclusive form based approach to input modifications, Learner-centered pedagogists pursued a form and meaning based approach. Recognizing that successful communication entails more than structures, they attempted to connect form and meaning.

What learner-centered pedagogy did and did successfully was to make this connection explicit at the levels of syllabus design text book production and classroom input and interaction.

In trying to make the form function connection explicit language centered pedagogists assumed that contextual meaning can be analyzed sufficiently and language input can be modified suitable so as to present the learner with a usable and useful set of form and meaning based learning materials.

Language input in learner centered pedagogy then can only provide the learner with standardized functions embedded in stereotypical at the history of topical contexts. It is almost impossible to present language functions in a wide range of contexts in which they usually occur.

### **Interactional activities**

To operationalize their important modifications in the classroom learner centered pedagogists followed the same presentation practice production sequence popularized by language centered pedagogists but with one important distinction: whereas the language centered pedagogists presented and helps learner's practice and produce grammatical items learner-centered pedagogy presented and helps learner's practice and produce grammatical as well as national and functional categories of language. It must be acknowledged that learner centered pedagogists came out with a wide variety of innovative classroom procedures such as., group work, role play, simulation games, scenarios and debates that ensured a communicative flavor to the interactional activities.

One of the sources of communicative activities widely used by English language teachers during the 1980s is communicative language teaching An introduction by Littlewood in 1981. In it he presents what he calls a methodological framework consisting of pre communicative activities and communicative activities diagrammatically represented as: in page 125

### **A critical assessment**

Perhaps the greatest achievement of learner centered pedagogists that they successfully directed the attention of the language teaching profession to aspects of language other than grammatical structures. by treating language as discourse not merely as system they tried to move classroom teaching away from a largely systematic orientation that relied upon in mechanical rendering of pattern practices and more toward a largely communicative orientation that relied upon a partial simulation of meaningful exchanges that take place outside the classroom.