A REVOLUTIONARY METHOD OF TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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Abstract

We have identified serious problems involving transliteration and phonemic teaching, and we then suggest that we do not make use of the IPA or transliteration when teaching English. We present a draft of a method that makes use of our ears and knowledge instead.

1. Introduction

Many methods of teaching English as a second language have appeared throughout the history of human kind, but none of them seems to be really efficient.

The process of acquisition of a second language is painful and defective in almost one hundred percent of the cases.

In ([3], p.58), we read:

"None of the methods is perfect in every respect."

The subprocesses involved in the learning of the English language seem to not only be time consuming, but also absolutely inappropriate.

The teaching methods are not liked by the students and teachers are mostly dissatisfied with the students' results (pp. 61 - 62, [18]). The students think that English is hard and like result-oriented activities (pp. 61 - 62, [18]).

If one thinks that we should learn a second language in the same way that we have learned our first language, then one goes for naturalism and philosophies such as that proposed by Dr. Prof. Stephen Krashen [1].

The problem with choosing a *natural approach* is, first of all, that the students will know what we are doing to them by the time they are receiving instruction, that is, they will know that we are trying to make them repeat the processes they went through in order to learn their first language.

If those processes were the best available, it would not take humans about five years [2] to simply communicate orally in their first language.

It is obviously the case that copying those processes is an irrational choice.

We should use all our knowledge regarding human capabilities and processes to think about language acquisition instead; therefore we should try to evolve from those chaotic natural processes to maximum that we can.

In going for rationality, we notice that what really counts for us is sound, since using human language is about one in three situations: making symbols become sound, making sounds become symbols, or using exclusively sounds.

Even though theorists disagree on how the sounds should be taught and learned, they agree that they are an important part of learning when we are adding a language to our spectrum of knowledge (the NSW Association

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of English Teachers [4] agrees that the use of systematic phonics at least in the first formal contact with the language helps people read better. They also say [4] that the National Reading Panel concluded that there is enough experimental data to support *intensive systematic phonics* (in general). The government of the United Kingdom [5] seems to support intensive systematic phonics for children, in particular those between the ages of five and seven).

The IPA (see [6]) is a complete disgrace not only because of the odd symbols it brings but because the concept does not make sense.

If the IPA made sense, lexicons would not diverge in terms of description of words in the English language, but they diverge in the most basic sigmatoids [7] all the time.

The Merriam-Webster's [9] brings \ˈa-pəl\ and The American Heritage Dictionary [8] brings (ăͬpˈəl) as transliteration of the sigmatoid *apple*. This could be a problem of symbology: For instance, one could be using the IPA and the other their own symbols. Both dictionaries seem to be making use of the IPA, however, since all symbols they use appear in the IPA. One of them is English (belongs to the Encyclopaedia Britannica) and one of them is American, what can then explain the differences in the transliteration.

We then say *ah, O.K., then the dictionaries agree if they belong to the same Country*.

No, not really.

The Oxford [10] brings (ˈæpl) for this word.

Both the Oxford and the Webster's are from the United Kingdom (The Merriam-Webster is an American company however). One can then tell that we need these dictionaries to specify what places of the world they are considering when transliterating.

We cannot really demand that our students use the IPA like we do because the researchers that deal with those symbols state that pronunciation is a personal matter; is something that is tailored to the occlusion patterns, voice, voice emission apparatus, and breathing patterns, for instance, of the person speaking.

The International TEFL and TESOL Training [11], p.5, states

"English is obviously an incredibly widely-spoken language. With different countries and regions within these countries using different accents and dialects, it may seem difficult to understand how there can be one uniform phonetic alphabet, but there is a relatively straightforward answer. Just as pronunciation differs from one person to the next, so will their phonemic spellings. Unlike a uniform written spelling of a word in English, there is no uniform way to say a word. For example, if you compare a British dictionary to an American dictionary, you will quickly see a difference in pronunciation."

Even though we could think of changing the occlusion patterns of our students, say through doing some speech pathologists' exercises with them, we certainly could not think of changing their voice emission apparatus.

Since that cannot be changed, we must drop the IPA-thing.

Once that all is forgotten, we are left with wondering about the practical value of methods that go letter by letter or syllable by syllable when teaching a second language, or even a first language, to people.

Those are not good choices either.

The letter-by-letter method will make students have the name of the letters by heart; will place a lot of emphasis on that. Yet, the name of the letter will rarely correspond to its sound in a word.

It is actually this discrepancy that justifies the creation of the IPA.

Rationality tells us that the name of a letter should correspond to its sound, so that this is one of the big mistakes of human kind in what regards language.

The International TEFL and TESOL Training [11], p.3, states

"Ideally, the letters used in a language's written alphabet would also represent their individual speech sounds. The idea being that anything written can be read aloud and pronounced effectively."

We then would think that the method that goes syllable by syllable is a better method.

The syllable-by-syllable method brings the sounds of syllables instead.

The problem is that *stenographer* and *stereo*, for instance, start with the same syllable (*ste*), but, according to the Merriam-Webster [9], stenographer (ste·nog·ra·pher) is \stə-ˈnä-grə-fər\ and stereo (ste·reo) is \ˈster-ē-ˌō, ˈstir-\.

We therefore must try to use exclusively the sound as our guide.

In this case, we will teach *lettuce* and *let* in the same lesson because the *let* in *lettuce* impacts in the same way on our ears that the *let* in *let* does. Notice that the Merriam-Webster's [9] team reads *let·tuce* as \ˈle-təs\ and *let* as \ˈlet\. We disregard that because the separation of syllables should command the way we speak and therefore the transliteration of lettuce can only have been made out of the laziness of ours when speaking, not out of the expected pronunciation.

As we write down this method, we will be producing work that is so delicate as to expose all possible true similarities in the English language and fix both speech and transliteration, or fix speech through adequate transliteration, which cannot be something to do with individual letters, since that is not how we form sounds in speech, but would be something to do at least with syllables instead.

2. The Method Itself

We will call this method *Acoustic Method*.

Assume that we are in the first day of contact and we have already been through presentation of both sides and some games to create familiarity with each other.

We have also talked about the objectives of the course and best joint strategies to achieve those.

At this stage, we have established some level of bonding and a common agreement on our set of rules.

Assume that we are now finally starting with our actual teaching.

Assume that our students have never had any contact with the English language before and we only speak English (cannot speak the language of the students), to make it all more exciting.

We will then go through a technique of mimicking with the students. This might be a game in which they have to copy body gestures. The objective of this game is to establish a common symbology, since, in principle, there is no common language.

After the students learn body gestures that mean *pay attention*, *copy*, and others, we may start introducing our sounds.

Some sounds are easier than others.

We should probably start with the easiest ones, the most natural ones, in order to, basically, create *goodwill* for *our brand* within the students.

We should do that also to effectively teach them, rather than just make efforts to teach.

Krashen and Terrell (p.67, [12]) suggest that we start with topics such as names, description of students, family, numbers, clothing, colours, and objects in the classroom (preliminary unit, what they call *learning to understand*).

Krashen and Terrell (p.76, [12]) also suggest that we think of Total Physical Response as a good way to start and choose the James Arsher's way when utilizing it (see [13]).

Arsher's way does not involve the production of sounds by the students, only mimicking of body gestures of the teacher or obedience to their commands.

He says that the students will repeat the commands after the teacher naturally when they are ready.

We would like not to make use of the TPR strategy beyond the time in which we are negotiating the *communication code* with the class.

We could then use it to establish a system of communication with the class right at the beginning of our course, by the time of the first contact.

After that, we would like to start teaching sounds, so that we would be demanding that the students produce sounds.

Why not waiting *for them to be ready*?

We learn how to teach *to make it happen*. It would not make sense to forget all that we have learned while acquiring our teaching credentials and *wait for the student to be ready on their own*.

We *make them be ready* instead.

What we suggest here is not to forget all we know about education this far, but to simply change the techniques and the strategies to get to the same objectives, hopefully in a more efficient way.

Amongst the most primitive sounds of human kind, we would have to have those of deep pain, pleasure, and anger.

We then come back to the game we were talking about before deviating to discuss Krashen's approaches.

A good strategy would be pinching ourselves with all strength, and make the students copy us to see what sound they emit. We could also look angrier and angrier, make them copy, and observe.

This is just because Brazilians, for instance, will say *I* when in sudden, but deep, pain, but Americans will say *oh*, so that the most primitive sounds are actually attached to culture, as incredible as it may seem.

Suppose we are then teaching Brazilians and we are Australians, just to create a scenario with abstract variables that we fully control.

We would use the instinct of pain of the Brazilians to introduce our sound *I* from *Ice* and from *I see*.

A good teaching strategy would be teaching expressions that contain the same sound but bring opposite sensations to the student's organism, since that helps with motivation levels and retention strategies (Australian propaganda strategy in quite a few campaigns on TV in 2001. See, for instance, [14]).

Ice and *I see* are things that oppose nicely. One could be introduced with actual ice and another with an image of an eye and a person mimicking the action of seeing.

/p'ð/ is one of the most primitive sounds for *anger* in Brazil, so that the next class could be about this sound. We could then introduce *pole* (\ˈpōl\) and *poster* (\ˈpōs-tər\).

The chosen sound in English is not precisely the same: It is the best available approximation instead (pp. 1182-1338, [15]).

Pole and *poster* seem to oppose each other nicely (enough for our purposes).

Notice that we could have an *I see* mini-class inside of the previous class, so that we could say *I see ice*, for instance, and *I see (their names, one by one, together with the teacher's)*.

When we say their names, we already read them as they would be read in the English language, so that things are easier for all parties involved.

We should always spell out the version of the English language that we work with, since that seems to be of fundamental importance. Say that we are going to use the American way of saying things. We then would have to say *we teach American English*. Because there are different accents and pronunciations inside of the own United States of America, we also should have to mention that we are teaching the *New Yorkers'* version of the English language, for instance.

We decide for teaching the students new ways of saying their names because that will simplify communication quite a lot. When they have to open an account in Australia, for instance, and they are called *Patricia*, then they can say /p'a-t'rē-ʃea/ and they will probably be correctly understood the first time they say that, like the attendant will spell it right (Patricia). This saves them communication time, if nothing else.

Having already gone through the *I see* class, we can teach them to say *I see a pole* and *I see a poster* in the next class, for instance.

We worry about not introducing more than one sound per class and creating little units that make sense.

With time, say one week after the first class, we can then introduce more sounds per class, say four.

We will obviously need to do that in order to progress.

After we exhaust all the possibilities with the most primitive sounds, we could go for simple things, but simple things that be a bit farther from the instinctive sounds, say the *c* with more complex words, such as *calm* and *corner*.

We should always be associating all with symbols, pictures, images in general, and also gestures, since that all helps.

Colours and aromas may help too.

If we are teaching *coffee*, then it would be nice making coffee during the class and, after everyone has a cup in their hands, from which they may sip, introduce the writing of the word. The sound should be associated with the entire process somehow.

This helps with the affective (or emotional) filter (see Krashen and Terrell (p.26, [12])) to best if the coffee is of good quality and the entire process is the most pleasant and interesting as possible, that is, is something that can be appreciated.

We should be teaching all modalities together, like we teach how to write and read the words in the same class in which we introduce them orally.

We want the student to associate the sound of a word with the right way to read and write it.

The students should practice how to write, say, and read the words correctly in each and every class.

With time, we should ask them to write a few lines of composition using what they already know.

We should always formally assess the work of our students (and that is a very important part of the process). If it is a written task, we must write the right answer somehow to the side of each wrong answer of theirs and return their work to them at most in the following class, so that both groups (students and teachers) know of the progress of each student. This will help us fix wrong learning, or wrong processes, immediately.

As we return the marked work to them, we should take some time to make sure they can say, read, and write the words properly, say speaking to them one by one.

Ideally, each student would have a recorder available to them at all times during the classes so that they can watch the tapes, if interested, and, for instance, compare themselves with others. That also helps them develop other talents and concerns, say concern with their own body image or behaviour and talent for working with media.

In our so modern, globalized world, we obviously would like to develop all that we can develop in terms of students' talents, skills, and concerns.

We could actually, in a computerized environment, have several cameras recording the class and allow the students to select the views that interest them for any particular moment of the class in their computers.

The teacher would then have access to the same sort of resource and we could extend this access to parents and managers, in case those exist, so that the students be on their best chances of learning quickly and effectively.

There is a range of techniques that could be tried to enhance learning in language.

One of them involves using music.

There has to be a way in which we create a melody that can only fit the human voice correctly (in terms of technique) if the words are said properly in the version of the English we teach (say the New Yorkers' version of the English language).

A bit of investment in research, and we can probably come up with a few dozens of those.

Any exercise that helps students correct other students will increase the chance of the students to learn properly, so that we could have games with balls, say the game in which we put a student playing *the fool* in the middle of a circle formed by students. We then only let that particular student stop being *the fool* if, for instance, they say the word we ask them to say correctly.

Several resources could be permanently available in the classroom space and inside of the learning environment to stimulate the students to learn on their own, say Speak Up magazines strategically positioned close to tape players and things like that.

We could run competitions in the advanced level to have the students transcribing the contents of a Speak Up interview and give some sort of prize, say a free snack or points on a board, for those who get the largest amount of time of the interview correctly transcribed.

We could run competitions of the sort *point out mistakes correctly* and *get points*, so that students compete against the own students and we watch them compete to add accuracy and fairness, but also to find out what else we could be doing to help them.

A sound should always be associated with at least one word, like it should never appear on its own.

We could have *word of the week* strategies in place as well.

We could have a word-of-the-week competition at our teaching establishment and make the students come up with the right pronunciation, for instance, perhaps through bringing a group of three words that have the same initial sound as the word of the week.

The chairs of the students could have a container at their back, so that the teacher could be preparing a *little surprise* for each student every week, for instance.

The students could be motivated to go through the challenge because of points or other rewards.

Playful materials, in a school with resources, could also be tried, say something that allows us to press the belly of the figure of an animal and hear its name in the New Yorkers' English.

We actually have plenty of resources that could be adapted to help students learn.

If this method were to be written up and published, and we were serious about it, we should have at least a phonologist, a speech pathologist, a philologist, a psychologist that specializes in subliminal messaging, and a lexicographer thinking together with an educator that specializes in teaching language at all times during the making.

We would be after not only words that start with the sounds we are introducing, but also words that rank in the same class in terms of occurrence in normal life (or in specific situations, depending on the course we are teaching) and degree of difficulty.

We would also be always after at least two contrasting concepts that start with the sound we want to teach, as explained before. We really believe in this propaganda strategy.

We want the attention of the students to the words without brain-washing them with any ideas, so that we can have a free student in at least what regards our course, therefore so that we act in accordance with the democratic thinking.

We should always worry about the messages we transmit during our classes in order not to create things that go beyond our contents in the mind of the students. We should perform maximum effort not to interfere with the students' upbringing if they are kids and are still depending on the parents and not to insert anything into the minds of our adult students that they have not consciously agreed were inserted into them.

We should never teach *black* and *white* in the same class, for instance, given that this will associate opposites to races in human kind if our strategy is contrast, which is what we suggest that it be here.

We should neither teach that homosexuality is acceptable nor that it is not.

It is time for the school to get out of the *soul* of the students, basically.

Let the students naturally choose what to believe and what to want.

Our task, however, should definitely be that of protecting the rights of the student, therefore their body integrity, their property, and their privacy, for instance, at almost any expense.

This way, we are definitely obliged to make the students be aware of possible danger, be fully alert in situations of danger, and have weapons to defend their rights when those emerge.

When we teach *attack*, we could then teach *react*, for instance, since that is a necessary response (to defend their rights).

With this, we obviously could be adding people from criminology, self-defence, human rights, and a few others, to the group of people that should be involved in the making of our method.

The natural response to love is not necessarily love.

A person may choose not to go with someone else who shows love to them and wait to find someone better, for instance.

It is important that we teach options to our students, therefore freedom, even during a *simple English course*.

Because of that, we do not show a couple with little hearts above it. No couple is in love 24/7.

That would interfere with the processes of decision of our students and may lead to, for instance, surrealistic expectations in an intimate relationship.

We show a couple solving things together, or doing things together, for instance, and associate that with marriage instead.

We also show them arguing and splitting, and then restarting and finding other matches, since one of the most serious problems in human kind, which generates an incredible amount of violence in the world of 2001 is separation, not marriage (first and last world, communist and capitalist, and etc. See [16], for instance, to have an idea).

We show both sides doing that, not only one, and we teach through images how the rejected party can overcome those feelings of hate and end of life.

We do not use the figure of the Catholic Church or any other Church to talk about marriage.

Marriage is simply a faithful and declared couple.

One needs neither a ring nor a piece of paper to be married.

One also does not need to live together to be married.

We need to put emphasis on the spiritual commitment of each party and forget everything else.

We would like to emphasize the *human* in *human beings* and the freedom in democracy if we are from democratic countries that sign for human rights, we believe.

Showing a couple having sex in a card and talking about that in the class as if that couple were a married couple for all purposes is just adequate, not mattering how the sex is happening.

Such topics however should be avoided, so that if something like that comes up, it is best if the student brings that to class, not the teacher.

This is because all inside of this topic is very controversial and may shock students from different backgrounds, say the Islamic ones.

They are also not used to seeing the body of women, for instance.

Images of any sort, including sigmatoids, should be very carefully selected in order for us to claim to have respect for the people we teach and the context where we are inserted in society.

Everything hits our subconsciousness in unbelievable levels.

Once they ran an experiment in the USA with a message saying *Drink Coca-Cola* being displayed at the background in an imperceptible manner during movies and verified that a certain amount of people would buy Coke after being subjected to that [17].

We believe that teaching and learning having been receiving very little attention of society and that is why things are so catastrophic in the world of the 2000's.

Teaching and learning are two of the most important things in our society and could never have been reduced to the levels of importance that they have these days.

One may take twenty years to reach a certain conclusion empirically, but a good teacher will teach us that conclusion in one day, what obviously means that lives could be saved through good teaching.

It is very important passing a sense of responsibility with that of competition, so that we do not create monsters ourselves. It is extremely important teaching that *the how matters* more than anything else and therefore never rewarding people who cheated or lied to someone else in order to get to us with the answer first, and etc.

We also need to know the most used words for the niche we target and how many we can deal with in our course before we lay down our method.

We have programs that count the occurrences of particular words available in the Internet, so that we could specify locations and activities and get the information we need to create a method to teach London English, say, or Sydney English.

3. Conclusion

We have here presented a revolutionary method of teaching English as a second language. This method tries to make use of our senses, especially that of hearing, to teach. It considers, for instance, the Affective Filter hypothesis proposed by Krashen et al. and strategies of propaganda in Australia.

There is a part of this method that demands serious work in terms of research in order for us to be able to teach specific groups of students to best.

We have here proposed that nobody teach English using the letter-by-letter method or the IPA because of the conflicts generated in the minds of the students, for instance, when such methods are used.

We have here proposed that very serious investment be made in teaching and learning in general, which includes investment in *teaching English as a second language*.

We have here proposed that all educational establishments, therefore also those that teach English, worry about not interfering with the personal space of the students beyond what is necessary to teach the contents and philosophy they have openly declared to society they support.

We have here proposed that any educational establishment, therefore also those that teach only English, worry about preparing the students for life and helping them grow inside of the democratic values if they are located in democratic countries.

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