DOI 10.31909/26168812.2023-(62)-25
УДК 372.881.111.1

ON THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH TO THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE CONTEXT OF BLENDED LEARNING

ДО ПИТАННЯ ПРО ВИКОРИСТАННЯ КОМУНІКАТИВНОГО ПІДХОДУ У ВИКЛАДАННІ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ В УМОВАХ ЗМІШАНОГО НАВЧАННЯ

Світлана Слободяк
викладач
E-mail: sslobodyak@gmail.com
Ізмаїльський державний гуманітарний університет, Україна

Svitlana Slobodiak
lecturer
E-mail: sslobodyak@gmail.com
Izmail State University of Humanities, Ukraine

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to give an overview of the most popular approaches to teaching English as a foreign language. The most traditional grammar-translation approach is described. In spite of its notorious emphasis on the grammatical structure of the language and its corresponding equivalents in the native language of English learners, this method is considered to have a number of positive aspects, the most important of which is the development of intellectual abilities of learners, because this method is based on the understanding of language as a system and relies on the cognitive approach to learning. The audio-lingual method of teaching is also paid a great attention to. It is emphasized that this method involves multiple repetition of language structures and speech patterns. It leads to their automation which is rather positive for mastering the sound and intonation system of the English language. The communicative method of teaching is admitted to be the most popular nowadays. It involves the change of priorities from mastering grammar and pronunciation to confident communication in the English language in all possible life situations. The proponents of this method highlight its numerous advantages including meaningful communication, student-oriented learning and speech fluency, though disadvantages are not excluded. The works of different modern linguists and methodologists in the field of communicative language teaching are considered. Special attention is paid to the use of the communicative approach to teaching English in the context of blended learning. It is concluded that the communicative method of teaching English in a blended learning environment can be combined with other methods of teaching languages through the use of modern information and communication technologies.

Key words: *teaching methods, grammar-translation approach, audio-lingual approach, communicative language teaching, communicative competence, pros and cons, blended learning.*

Problem statement. To communicate successfully people of different nationalities all over the world use several international languages. The English language is the most popular among them.

It is in English that international summits are held and important state documents are signed today. English is the language of modern international trade relations, with the help of which the world financial and transport systems work. Holding scientific conferences and discussing global world problems, sharing experience and important scientific information, writing scientific papers and works are also carried out in English. It is impossible to know the languages of all countries and peoples, but it is enough to know English to travel around the world without any problems and communicate with representatives of various nationalities.

The role of the English language in the modern world is really great. At the same time, English is not a language to replace other languages of the world. It is only an effective addition to all of them. Taking into account the fact that the world is constantly improving in all directions, English has become a must for every specialist in every field. Therefore, it is not surprising that nowadays English is taught everywhere: in kindergartens, schools, universities and other educational institutions.

Recent publications overview. The main problem has always been the question of choice of teaching methods which are the most effective for teaching English as a foreign language. To solve this question a lot of different teaching methods have been proposed. The most popular now is the communicative method of teaching the English language. The works of M. Canale, M. Swain, J.C.Richards, T.S. Rodgers D. Weller are of great importance in the domain of communicative language teaching.

Aim and objectives. The aim of this article is to give an overview of the most popular approaches to teaching English as a foreign language with an emphasis on the communicative method of teaching. Special attention is paid to the use of the communicative approach to teaching English in a blended learning environment. Achieving this goal involves solving the following tasks: to describe the way these methods work, to highlight their advantages and disadvantages, to discuss the possible methods to be used in the framework of blended learning.

Main research material presentation. There are many different methods of teaching English. The most traditional one is the grammar-translation approach. It is «a method of foreign or second language teaching which makes use of translation and grammar study as the main teaching and learning activities» (Richards & Schmidt, 2002: 231). Initially, it was used to teach dead languages, namely ancient Greek and Latin. The purpose of teaching with the help of this method was to learn how to read and to translate ancient literature.

In the twentieth century this method was also widely used. The students were offered a text that they had to read one by one. This was followed by its translation as close as possible to the text. Then grammatical structures from the text were memorized without taking into account the context and possible situations of their usage in real communication. Children memorized long lists of words and topics but didn't manage to speak a foreign language. As a result of applying this method, children had a huge language barrier and full confidence of their being unable to learn a foreign language.

Despite its shortcomings, the grammar-translation method has a lot of advantages. First of all, the grammar-translation method develops intellectual abilities of learners because it is based on understanding the language as a system and relies on the cognitive approach to learning. Secondly, the grammar of the language is studied as a way to understand the structure of a text, so it is given great importance and students learn it at a fairly high level. Most researchers agree that «verbal teaching methods do not describe the application of grammar and sentence structure as effectively as GTM does» (Gorski, 2019).Thirdly, translating a word is the fastest way to explain its meaning. At the initial level of learning a foreign language, it is rather useful to use learners' native language when explaining grammar rules. In addition, it saves a lot of time.

However, in order to learn a foreign language, it is not enough to be able to read and master grammar rules. It is very important to acquire certain skills, which include, in addition to reading and writing, also speaking and listening. This problem was solved by the audio-lingual method of teaching. The objective of the audio-lingual method was accurate pronunciation and grammar, the ability to respond quickly and accurately in speech situations and knowledge of sufficient vocabulary to be used with grammar patterns (Rhalmi, 2009). This method involved multiple listening to and repeating language structures and speech patterns, which lead to their automation. The ultimate goal of this approach was the acquisition of speech skills which must be automated to such an extent that they were carried out without the participation of consciousness.

The sound and intonation system of the language was studied on a limited lexical material in the form of a dialogue. At first, students listened to the dialogue and tried to understand its content. Then the teacher explained the listened text, commenting on it with facial expressions and gestures. The students listened to the dialogue again but now with pauses, repeated it after the teacher, imitating the pronunciation and intonation, until the dialogue was remembered. Speech practice took most of the time, though demonstration, explanation and comparison of the studied language with the native one were also actively used.

Although the audio-lingual method is mainly based on mechanical repetition, it has a number of benefits. The most important advantage of this method is its emphasis on listening and speaking and, consequently, on pronunciation and intonation. «Teachers stress the importance of proper pronunciation, with special attention focused on intonation. By developing students' sensitivity to intonation, they become more readily acquainted with the functions of intonation, i.e., they recognize questions, statements or commands based on the intonation used. Because teachers make a deliberate effort to correct errors early in the learning stages, speech errors are corrected before they become persistent or fossilized» (Abu-Melhim, 2009: 42). Another advantage of audio-lingual method is the development of situational techniques for the presentation of new grammatical structures and a specific set of exercises to train them. Eventually, the use of this method greatly facilitates the mastery of a living language, ensuring clarity and integrity in the acquisition of practical speaking skills.

The audio-lingual and grammar-translation approaches were replaced by the communicative method of teaching, which involved the change of priorities from mastering grammar and expanding vocabulary to confident communication in the language being studied in all possible life situations.

The communicative method of teaching originated in Britain in the 60s, when the English language began to acquire the status of the language of international communication. It turned out that the traditional methods common at that time (audio-lingual and grammar-translation methods) no longer met the needs of most learners of English, who had a purely functional view of the language as a communication tool. They did not need a deep, systematic mastery of the language, but wanted to get the possibility of immediate practical application of their knowledge.

The Council of Europe took a number of measures aimed at intensifying the teaching of foreign languages on the continent. In the early 70s, a group of experts was commissioned to study the possibilities of creating a system for effective teaching foreign languages to adult learners. This was the starting point of a whole series of studies which had a significant impact on the development of the communicative approach in teaching foreign languages (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 154).

The communicative approach is based on the idea that languages serve for communication and, therefore, the goal of any language learning should be the communicative competence. The applied linguists M. Canale and M. Swain in their book «Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing» consider that the communicative competence «minimally includes three main competences: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence» (Canale & Swain, 1980: 28). The grammatical competence is associated with the ability to create grammatically correct utterances. The sociolinguistic competence consists of sociocultural and discourse competencies: the former presupposes the ability to produce utterances within a given sociocultural context; the latter is the ability to produce coherent and cohesive utterances. The strategic competence represents the ability to solve communication problems as they arise: paraphrasing when there is breakdown in communication, role-playing strategies, e.g. how to address strangers not knowing their social status (Canale & Swain, 1980: 28-30).

The communicative competence is aimed at developing the ability of students to spontaneously speak on various topics. In the classroom, the English language is mostly used,

though the teacher sometimes explains difficult language items in the students' native language. Grammar and vocabulary are not studied separately but in the process of communication. The teacher explains this or that rule and, together with the students, begins to work it out in practice, bringing the skill of its use to automaticity. No cramming, only repeated practical application in different communicative situations. Any communicative situation should provide students' need for verbal communication. This situation is a set of conditions that encourage the expression of thoughts in a foreign language. The effectiveness of teaching a foreign language depends on the ability of the teacher to organize the situational speech of students and skillfully manage it.

And yet it would be a mistake to assume that the communicative approach is exclusively conversations in English. The communicative approach is designed to develop oral and written speech, vocabulary and grammar, listening and reading skills. The teacher usually goes through three stages of learning with the student: engagement, study and activation. At the engagement stage, the teacher involves the student in the learning process: he initiates an exciting discussion, offers to discuss a picture, a problem, a film, etc. At the study stage, the student is explained the grammatical topic and the use of new words and expressions, that is, they work to expand vocabulary and master grammar. At the stage of activation of knowledge, the student performs various exercises to consolidate new grammar and vocabulary. This may be some continuation of the discussion of the topic under study, dialogue creation, debates, etc., but with the application of the acquired knowledge (Weller, 2022).

The main place in the process of communicative teaching of a foreign language is occupied by role-play situations, peer work, tasks for finding errors, which not only allow students to build up vocabulary, but also teach them to think analytically. Many proponents of the communicative approach support the use of authentic materials in the classroom. These can be various linguistic realities such as magazines, advertisements and newspapers or some visual sources around which communication can be built (photos, maps, graphs, etc.).

The main task of the communicative technique is to help the student to get rid of the language barrier. It is no secret that the language barrier often develops from the fact that a person is afraid of making mistakes in a conversation. And the communicative approach successfully fights this fear: more than a half of the lesson time is devoted to the development of speaking skills. The communicative approach helps to remove both the language barrier and the psychological barrier: students lose their fear of speaking English. The more often the students speak English, the faster they learn to formulate their thoughts. And in the classroom, using the communicative methodology, students talk for most of the lesson. The teacher builds the dialogue in such a way that it is interesting for students to answer questions and they can use the acquired knowledge to the maximum. The communicative method teaches coherent speech, various colloquial phrases and clichés that allow them to speak fluently later.

The use of the communicative approach to teaching English is different now than it was in the late twentieth century when native speakers were considered to be the best teachers. But still the main principles remain the same. M. Finocchiaro and C. Brumfit contrasting the audio-lingual method and the communicative approach formulated the main features of the communicative language teaching which can be summarized in the following way:

- meaning is paramount;
- dialogues must be functionally meaningful, there is no need to memorize them;
- basis for the presentation of the language is the context;
- there is no need for perfect pronunciation, clear pronunciation is enough;
- attempts to communicate, read and write are encouraged from the very beginning;
- native language is accepted where feasible;
- translation may be used if students need it or benefit from it;
- students are expected to interact through pairs and group work;
- language is learned through trial and error;

- lexical fluency is the primary goal, grammatical accuracy is acquired a little later;
- intrinsic motivation of students increases due to the interest in communication (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983: 91-93).

The communicative language teaching has its pros and cons. While describing the advantages of this methodology, researchers highlight, first of all, the emphasis on authentic and meaningful communication though created in the process of classroom-based interaction. Supporting this idea R. Belchamber admits that «a proficient teacher will provide a context so that class interactions are realistic and meaningful but with the support needed to assist students to generate the target language. We need to consider that producing language is a skill and when we learn a skill we practise in improvised settings» (Belchamber, 2007: 2). Meaningful communication in class leads to the formation of communicative competence necessary for successful communication in real life.

Another important benefit of the communicative approach is the focus on the learners because their interests and needs are always taken into account. «Learners' communicative needs provide a framework for elaborating program goals with regard to functional competence. Functional goals imply global, qualitative evaluation of learner achievement as opposed to quantitative assessment of discrete linguistic features» (Savignon, 2002: 4).

The use of authentic teaching resources that motivate and encourage the learners is the next positive side of this method. Such teaching resources stimulate the use of the language for communicative purposes. In addition, numerous role-play elements in teaching bring revitalization to classes, support the positive emotional mood of students and make classes creative and exciting.

All these factors help to solve a lot of psychological problems of language learning, the most important of which is the fear of communicating in a foreign language. Students' fears have various reasons but most often they are afraid of making mistakes. Communication-oriented learning implies a less rigid attitude to mistakes, which is another plus of this method. It is recommended not to interrupt the communication process, but to analyze mistakes only after the communication situation is over. At the same time, the attention is paid to those errors that significantly distort the meaning of the utterance. The ability to adequately correct mistakes, without violating the integrity of the student's speech and without discouraging his/her desire to talk is the key to successful teaching using the communicative method.

The last but not least widely mentioned advantage of the communicative approach is the acquisition of fluency in the use of the English language with the help of linguistic means aimed at performing various kinds of functions. «Fluency is an important dimension of communication», J.C. Richards and T.S. Rodgers conclude in their article on communicative language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 172).

Every method of teaching has its disadvantages and the communicative method of language teaching is not an exception. The main drawback of this method, as many researchers admit, is preference to fluency than to accuracy which is usually achieved by means of drills in the process of teaching. «The challenge is that lack of drilling may lead to broken English in more advanced stages of language acquisition» (Casady, 2019). The same situation is with correcting students' mistakes. Since their mistakes are not always corrected, learners are likely to produce incorrect grammatical sentences. One more problem is pronunciation. Though according to the communication approach «comprehensible pronunciation is sought» (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 156), it doesn't mean that teachers shouldn't strive for improving their learners' pronunciation.

To avoid these negative aspects of communicative language teaching it is possible to integrate the elements of audio-lingual and grammar-translation approaches into the communicative method of teaching English. In the context of blended learning this can be implemented with the help of different online learning management systems. While teaching English to undergraduate students at the Izmail State University of Humanities, the open source LMS Moodle is widely used. There, students can find various audio and video resources to train

their intonation and pronunciation in a distance learning format. In addition, LMS Moodle can be effectively used for teaching grammar. The communicative approach presupposes learning grammar in context, which is always interesting, engaging and motivating. But to enhance their grammatical competence, students are recommended to constantly review the grammatical material with the help of the teaching resources posted on the Moodle platform by the teachers. Besides, teachers have the opportunity to create their own tests customized for certain grammatical aspects communicatively learnt in class. Such tests can be used for students' assessment, as well as for their self-education if there is such a necessity.

Conclusion. Thus, applying communicative language teaching as the basic approach in teaching English as a foreign language in a blended learning environment, it is possible to combine it with other methods of teaching languages using modern information and communication technologies. LMS Moodle has turned out to be a very effective learning tool ever since blended learning entered our lives a few years ago. It helps to effectively combine traditional educational process with distance learning which makes possible the integration of new and old teaching methods into the process of education helping students to master the English language in the best possible way.

REFERENCES

Abu-Melhim A.R. (2009). Re-evaluating the Effectiveness of the Audio-lingual Method in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. *International Forum of Teaching and Studies.* № 5 (2). P. 39-45. [in English].

Belchamber R. (2007). The Advantages of Communicative Language Teaching. *The Internet TESL Journal*. № 13 (2). P. 1-4. [in English]. URL: http://iteslj.org/Articles/Belchamber-CLT.html

Canale M., Swain M. (1980). Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing. *Applied Linguistics. №*1 (1). P. 1-47. [in English].

Casady L. (2019). Traditional ESL Teaching Methods. [in English]. URL: https://www.theclassroom. com/traditional-esl-teaching-methods-8077585.html

Finocchiaro M., Brumfit C. (1983). The Functional-Notional Approach: from Theory to Practice. New York: Oxford University Press. [in English].

Gorski V. (2019). Advantages and Disadvantages of GTM in TEFL. [in English]. URL: https://www.theclassroom.com/advantages-disadvantages-gtm-tefl-8059435.html

Rhalmi M. (2009). The Audio-lingual Method**.** [in English]. URL: https://www.myenglishpages.com/blog/the-audiolingual-approach/

Richards J. C., Schmidt R. (2002). Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics. England: Pearson Education Limited. [in English]. URL: https://archive.org/stream/DictionaryOfLanguageTeachingAndAppliedLinguistics/Dictionary+of+Language+Teaching+and+Applied+Linguistics_djvu.txt

Richards J.C., Rodgers T.S. (2001). Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. *Cambridge University Press*. [in English]. URL: https://ia601204.us.archive.org/6/items/ApproachesAndMethodsInLanguageTeaching2ndEditionCambridgeLanguageTeachingLibrary_201610/__Approaches_and_Methods_in_Language_Teaching__2nd_Edition__Cambridge_Language_Teaching_Library_.pdf

Savignon S. J. (2002). Interpreting Communicative Language Teaching: Contexts and Concerns in Teacher Education. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. [in English]. URL: https://www.academia.edu/7630071/E_D_I_Interpreting_Communicative_Language_Teaching

Weller D. (2022). What is «Engage, Study, Activate»? [in English]. URL: https://www.barefootteflteacher.com/p/what-is-engage-study-activate

АНОТАЦІЯ

Метою цієї статті є огляд найпопулярніших підходів до викладання англійської мови як іноземної. Описано найбільш традиційний граматико-перекладний підхід. Незважаючи на сумнозвісний наголос на граматичній структурі мови та її відповідних еквівалентах у рідній мові тих, хто вивчає англійську, цей метод вважається таким, що має ряд позитивних сторін, найважливішою з яких є розвиток інтелектуальних здібностей учнів, оскільки цей метод базується на розумінні мови як системи та спирається на когнітивний підхід до навчання. Також велика увага приділяється аудіо-лінгвальному методу навчання. Підкреслюється, що цей метод передбачає багаторазове повторення мовних конструкцій і мовленнєвих зразків, що призводить до їх автоматизації, що позитивно впливає на засвоєння звуково-інтонаційної системи англійської мови. Комунікативний метод навчання визнано найпопулярнішим у наш час. Це зміна пріоритетів від опанування граматики та вимови до впевненого спілкування англійською мовою у всіх можливих життєвих ситуаціях. Прихильники цього методу підкреслюють його численні переваги, включаючи змістовне спілкування, орієнтоване на студента навчання та вільне володіння мовою, хоча не виключають і недоліки. Розглянуто праці різних сучасних лінгвістів і методистів у галузі комунікативного навчання мови. Особливу увагу приділено використанню комунікативного підходу до навчання англійської мови в умовах змішаного навчання. Зроблено висновок, що комунікативну методику навчання англійської мови у змішаному навчальному середовищі можна поєднати з іншими методиками навчання шляхом використання сучасних інформаційно-комунікаційних технологій.

Ключові слова: *методи навчання, граматико-перекладний підхід, аудіо-лінгвальний підхід, комунікативний підхід до навчання мови, комунікативна компетентність, плюси і мінуси, змішане навчання.*