A BRIEF EXAMINATION OF SOME EARLIER GRAMMAR-BASED METHODS THROUGH BROWN'S TWELVE PRINCIPLES OF LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

This article briefly explores the twelve principles of language teaching and learning formulated by H. Douglas Brown and also the underlying principles of some of the earlier grammar-based methods to calculate how consistent these principles are with those of Brown's. The grammar based approaches chosen for evaluation are the Grammar Translation Method, the Direct Method, the Audiolingual Method, the Silent Way and Suggestopedia. Interestingly enough, many of Brown's principles are found to be in complete or partial agreement with some of the principles of the earlier grammar-based methods.

INTRODUCTION

The twelve principles of language teaching and learning formulated by Brown are said to comprise some of the major foundation stones for teaching

practice. Coming under three categories; namely cognitive, affective and linguistic, these twelve principles can be exploited to assess the soundness and validity of teaching methods employed throughout the history of language teaching.

In his book "Teaching by principle: an interactive approach to language pedagogy"(P 17 – 29), Brown states these twelve principles as follows:

I. Automaticity

Efficient second language learning involves a timely movement of the control of a few language forms into the automatic processing of a relatively unlimited number of language forms. Overanalyzing language, thinking too much about its forms, and consciously lingering on rules of language all tend to impede this graduation to automaticity.

II. Meaningful Learning

Meaningful learning subsumes new information into existing structures and memory systems, and the resulting associative links create stronger retention. Rote learning - taking in isolated bits and pieces of information that are not connected with one's existing cognitive structures – has little chance of creating long-term retention.

III. The Anticipation of Reward

Human beings are universally driven to act, or behave, by the anticipation of some sort of reward – tangible or intangible, short term or long term – that will ensue as a result of the behaviour.

IV. The Intrinsic Motivation Principle

The most powerful rewards are those that are intrinsically motivated within the learner. Because the behaviour stems from needs, wants, or desires within oneself, the behaviour itself is self-rewarding; therefore, no externally administered reward is necessary at all.

V. Strategic Investment

Successful mastery of the second language will be due to a large extent to a learner's own personal "investment" of time, effort, and attention to the second language in the form of an individualized battery of strategies for comprehending and producing the language.

VI. Language Ego

As human beings learn to use a second language, they also develop a new mode of thinking, feeling, and acting – a second identity. The new

"language ego," intertwined with the second language, can easily create within the learner a sense of fragility, a defensiveness, and a raising of inhibitions.

VII. Self-confidence

The eventual success that learners attain in a task is at least partially a factor of their belief that they indeed are fully capable of accomplishing the task.

VIII. Risk-taking

Successful language learners, in their realistic appraisal of themselves as vulnerable beings yet capable of accomplishing tasks, must be willing to become "gamblers" in the game of languages, to attempt to produce and to interpret language that is a bit beyond their absolute certainty.

IX. The language-culture Connection

Whenever you teach a language, you also teach a complex system of cultural customs, values, and ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. Especially in second language learning contexts, the success with which learners adapt to a new cultural milieu will affect their language acquisition success, and vice versa, in some possibly significant ways.

X. The Native Language Effect

The native language of learners will be a highly significant system on which learners will rely to predict the target language system. While the native system will exercise both facilitating and interfering effects on the production and comprehension of the new language, the interfering effects are likely to be the most salient.

XI. Interlanguage

Second language learners tend to go through a systematic or quasi-systematic developmental process as they progress to full competence in the target language. Successful interlanguage development is partially a factor of utilizing feedback from others.

XII. Communicative Competence

Given that communicative competence is the goal of a language classroom, then instruction needs to point toward all of its components: organizational, pragmatic, strategic, and psychomotor. Communicative goals are best achieved by giving due attention to language use and not just usage, to fluency and not just accuracy, to authentic language and contexts, and to students' eventual need to apply classroom learning to heretofore unrehearsed contexts in the real world.

Some Grammar-based Methods

Five of the most popular grammar-based methods prevalent at different times between the mid-nineteenth and the mid-twentieth century are the Grammar Translation Method, the Direct Method, the Audiolingual method, the Silent Way and Suggestopedia.

The Grammar Translation Method against Brown's Principles

The Grammar Translation Method, the most traditional method for L2 teaching, emphasizes reading, writing, translation and the conscious learning of grammatical rules. Its primary goal is to develop literary mastery of the second language. The curriculum requires the memorization of paradigms, patterns and vocabulary, with translation being used to test the acquired knowledge. Consequently, the role of L1 is prominent.

Despite bearing the brunt of criticism from modern theorists for its so-called lack of a particular linguistic or psychological theory, the Grammar Translation Method still reflects at least 4 of Brown's twelve principles: language ego, self confidence, the language-culture connection and the Native Language Effect. Whether it is by accident or design, the method plainly tries to avoid such language ego states as raising of inhibitions and a sense of fragility by preparing grammatically sequenced lessons on a graded, mechanical level. The fact that little or no attention is given to pronunciation or oral activities makes the appearance of any humiliating effect of L2 oral production an impossibility. It is true that this method finds it hard to produce learners who are communicatively competent, yet it helps students to memorize words, inflected words and syntactic rules and to use them to translate from English to the native language or vice versa. This knowledge about the forms of the language may well be a necessity in some learning situations. For L2 learners with little exposure to L1, the knowledge of the forms of the language derived from this method may be the only source to boost their self-confidence. By helping the learners to gain mastery over the structures and usage of the language, the notion underlying this method is found to be consistent with Brown's principle of self-confidence. The Native Language Effect, one of Brown's linguistic principles, can also be traced in this method where translation plays a very important role. The facilitating or interfering effect of L1 will depend on how different it is from L2 linguistically and culturally. Since questions about the foreign culture are also common in evaluation, this method does not deviate from Brown's affective principle of the language-culture connection.

The Direct Method against Brown's Principles

The Direct Method generally adheres to the principle that grammar is the foundation upon which language should be taught. The native language, however, is never used in the class. Correct pronunciation is emphasized and grammar is taught inductively, with the major emphasis on communicating.

The goal and the teaching styles of the Direct Method reflect many of Brown's principles. This method is natural in that an attempt is made to simulate learning a foreign language in the way children learn their native language. This means that learners are encouraged to use language automatically for meaningful purposes. Hence, two of the cognitive principles, automaticity and meaningful learning, are part and parcel of this method. In doing fluency activities, learners will definitely attempt to struggle with the target language. Naturally, lots of oral interaction, and spontaneous use of language will ensue and learners will have to take calculated risks in attempting to use the language. So one of Brown's affective principles, risk-taking, is also involved in this method. L2 acquisition is regarded similar to that of L1's in this method, and the teacher needs to create a natural learning environment within the classroom. Very often, students' systematic interlanguage errors may arise while conducting production activities. The teacher will then have to either tolerate or correct their errors depending on to what extent the errors affect the communication. In other words, the teacher has to act on a principle similar to Brown's principle of interlanguage. The principle of communicative competence is also applied here in that emphasis is given on correct pronunciation and the target language is used in classroom instruction.

The Audio-lingual Method (ALM) against Brown's Principles

The Audio-lingual Method is a language teaching method based on the assumption that language is acquired mainly through imitation, repetition and reinforcement.

Taking the drills and memorization of structure-based dialogue employed in this method into consideration, some might think that the principle of automaticity is not involved in ALM. But it is a very obvious fact that automaticity cannot be gained overnight even in a L1 speaking community. A habit may become automatic only with much practice. So it is logical to say that the students' language will become automatic by forming new habits in the target language over a long period of time. The sequence of units in ALM is determined solely by principles of linguistic complexity. Brown's principle of self-confidence is also in favour of sequence technique, that is, from easier to more difficult. There is no denying

the fact that the students will be gaining more and more confidence in the new language together with the linguistic competence gained after each unit. Another factor that helps the learners become more confident in the use of target language is that students' successful responses are positively reinforced in ALM. Some aspects of the principle of communicative competence can be traced in this method since listening and speaking skills are given priority over reading and writing skills. Organizational competence can be acquired through pattern drills and conversation practice. Some carefully chosen dialogues may contain functional and sociolinguistic aspects of life (ie. greetings and idiomatic expressions). Great importance is attached to pronunciation (psychomotor skill).

The Silent Way against Brown's Principles

Learners taught by the Silent Way are responsible for their own learning and must develop independence, autonomy and responsibility. Using unique materials such as colour rods, colour coded pronunciation and vocabulary charts, learners are made to respond to commands, questions and visual cues. Though this method is not in favour of explicit grammar explanation, there is still a focus on the structure of the language.

The most prominent principle underlying this method is Brown's meaningful learning. The roles of both teacher and learners clearly reveal the prevalence of this principle in their teaching/ learning process. The teacher, relying on the students' previously existing knowledge, provides exercises to ensure their facility with the language. The students, making use of what they know, actively engage in exploring the language. In dealing with structures, the teacher starts with what the students know and build from one structure to the next. So all the activity types exactly fit in with Brown's interpretation of the principle of meaningful learning: "Meaningful learning "subsumes" new information into existing structures and memory systems, and the resulting associative links create stronger retention" (P 18). The Silent Way also depends almost entirely on Strategic Investment as learners in this approach employ a multiplicity of strategies for sending and receiving language and one learner's strategies for success may differ markedly from another's. Since Silent Way essentially forces the students to make guesses aloud in a large group, it provokes risk-taking, too, and progress depends on the whole group correcting each other's guesses till they find the solution. A lot of people think it is too artificial and that the teacher could save a lot of time just delivering input or answering the students' questions at teachable moments. But it did teach us the value of teachers not talking all the time.

Suggestopedia against Brown's Principles

Suggestopedia has been developed to help learners to enhance their learning capacity in a deeply relaxed state with the accompaniment of the music. Activity types involve initiatives, questions and answers, role-play and listening exercises under deep relaxation. Posters containing grammatical information about the target language are hung around the room and are changed every few weeks.

The principle of language ego becomes evident in Suggestopedia since the fundamental principle of this method is to make students more spontaneous and less inhibited by putting them in a state of deep relaxation. Consequently, their confidence in the use of the target language keeps growing together with the linguistic competence thus gained through activities. So, this method is in agreement with Brown's principle of self-confidence, the "I can do it" principle as he called it. The use of the fine arts is also possible in suggestopedic classes. The culture which the students learn may concern the everyday life of people who speak the language. For this reason, the principle of cultural connection can be said to have a place in suggestopedic classrooms.

Conclusion

Two of Brown's principles that have not been discussed so far concerning their roles in the earlier grammar-based methods are reward anticipation (inspiration to work harder in anticipation of some sort of reward), and intrinsic motivation (self-rewarding behaviour stemming from needs, wants or desire within oneself). These principles have not been attached to any methods discussed earlier because they are only of individual concern. Depending on the types of students, their taste might differ and so will their attitudes towards these two principles. All of the other ten principles, on the other hand, are found to be in complete or partial agreement with some of the principles of the earlier grammar-based methods.

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Reference

Brown, H.Douglas.1994. *Teaching by principle: an interactive approach to language pedagogy.* Prentice Hall Regents.

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