Lecture 4

**The Direct-Method: A Good Start to Teach Oral Language**

1. The Direct-Method: theoretical framework

2. Principles and Techniques of the Direct Method

The Direct Method has one very basic rule: *No translation is allowed.*

This approach, also known as the ‘**oral**’ or ‘**natural**’ method, originated around the 1900s as an alternative to the traditional grammatical translation method. At this time teachers were starting to experiment with teaching and educational models as previous techniques were failing to improve spoken communication.

The direct method was developed in response to the grammar translation method, which involved very little spoken communication and listening comprehension. The primary objective of the direct method was to teach L2 learners how to use language for communication purposes. Its main principles are: learners should be taught in the target language; no translation should be allowed; grammar should be taught inductively; oral and listening skills are the main focus of instruction. The popularity of the direct method began to increase in the nineteenth century because of the importance of and demand for developing oral communication. However, it was primarily successful in private language schools (e.g., Berlitz) and less so in non‐commercial schools and educational institutions. Between the 1920s and 1930s, the use of this methodology begun to decline, opening the way for audiolingualism.

*Direct Method (Berlitz method)* *receives its name from the fact that meaning is to be connected directly with the target language, without going through the process of translating into the students' native language.*

The Direct Method is based on the direct involvement of the student when speaking, and listening to, the foreign language in common everyday situations. Consequently, there is lots of oral interaction, spontaneous use of the language, no translation, and little if any analysis of grammar rules and syntax.

Objectives. The basic premise of the Direct Method is that students will learn 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 whatsoever.  Objectives include teaching the students how to use the language spontaneously and orally, linking meaning with the target language through the use of realia, pictures or pantomime (Larsen-Freeman 1986:24).

In the Direct Method language is learnt for communication, as Larsen-Freeman (2000) states language is primarily speech. Classroom instruction and classroom activities are carried out in the target language; therefore, students are actively involved in using the target language. Conversational activities hold an important place in this method. Through using language in real contexts, students stand a better chance of thinking, and speaking in the target language.

The Direct Method will enable students to understand the language which will help them to use the language with ease; moreover, as L1 is not allowed students learn the language through demonstration and conversation which will lead them to acquire fluency. The Direct Method has been useful in that it “provided an exciting and interesting way of learning the foreign language through activity. It proved to be successful in releasing students from the inhibitions all too often associated with speaking a foreign tongue, particularly at the early stages.” (Rivers, 1968, s.20)

The Direct Method received strong criticism in that it required teachers speak with a native-like fluency (Richards and Rodgers, 2007).

Because the success of this method depends on the competence of the teachers, students will not have a good opportunity to develop their language skills unless this native-like proficiency is obtained by the teachers. As the professors of the Pennsylvania State University state “a successful teacher of the Direct Method needs competence in his language, stamina, energy, imagination, ability and time to create own materials and courses, immense vitality, robust health, real fluency in the modern language he teaches. He must be resourceful in the way of gesture and tricks of facial expression, be proof against linguistic fatigue in the language teaching day and be able to sketch rapidly on the board.” (Ducháčková, 2006).

**2. Principles and Techniques of the Direct Method**

* Reading in the target language should be taught from the beginning of language instruction; however, the reading skill will be developed through practice with speaking.
* Objects or pictures present in the immediate classroom environment should be used to help students understand the meaning.
* The native language should not be used in the classroom.
* The teacher should demonstrate, not explain or translate. It is desirable that students make a direct association between the target language and meaning.

Students should learn to think in the target language as soon as possible.

* The purpose of language learning is communication (therefore students need to learn how to ask questions as well as answer them).
* Pronunciation should be worked on right from the beginning of language instruction.
* Self-correction facilitates language learning.
* Lessons should contain some con­versational activity-some oppor­tunity for students to use language in real contexts. Students should be encouraged to speak as much as possible.

**Principles of the Direct Method**

* Grammar should be taught inductively. There may never be an explicit grammar rule given.
* Writing is an important skill, to be developed from the beginning of language instruction.
* The syllabus is based on situations or topics, not usually on linguistic structures.
* Learning another language also involves learning how speakers of that language live.

**The principles are still followed in contemporary Berlitz schools:**

Never translate: demonstrate,

Never explain: act,

Never make a speech: ask questions,

Never imitate mistakes: correct,

Never speak with single words: use sentences,

Never speak too much: make students speak much,

Never use the book: use your lesson plan,

Never jump around: follow your plan,

Never go too fast: keep the pace of the student,

Never speak too slowly: speak normally,

Never speak too quickly: speak naturally,

Never speak too loudly: speak naturally,

Never be impatient: take it easy.

**Techniques of the Direct Method**

* *Reading Aloud*
* *Question and Answer Exercise*
* *Getting Students to Self-correct*
* *Conversation Practice*
* *Fill-in-the-blank Exercise*
* *Dictation*

The Direct Method continues to provoke interest and enthusiasm today, but it is not an easy methodology to use in a classroom situation. It requires small classes and high student motivation, and in the artificial environment of a classroom it is difficult to generate natural situations of understanding and guarantee sufficient practice for everyone.

However, **variants** of this method have been developed where the teacher allows limited explanations in the student’s native language and explains some grammar rules to correct common errors a student may make when speaking.

One of the most famous supporters of this method was the German Maximilian Berlitz, who founded the Berlitz chain of private language schools.

Some characteristics of this method are:

* Lessons are in the target language
* There is a focus on everyday vocabulary
* Visual aids are used to teach vocabulary
* Particular attention is placed on the accuracy of pronunciation and grammar
* A systematic approach is developed for comprehension and oral expression.

**Drawbacks:**

First, it required teachers who were native speakers or who had native-like fluency in the foreign language. It was largely dependent on the teacher's skill, rather than on a textbook, and not all teachers were proficient enough in the foreign language to adhere to the principles of the method. Critics pointed out that strict adherence to Direct Method principles was often counterproductive, since teachers were required to go to great lengths to avoid using the native tongue, when sometimes a simple brief explanation in the students native tongue would have been a more efficient route to comprehension.

Teachers should value students’ talk. Acquisition of a good oral proficiency is of paramount importance in foreign language learning process. Creating a communicative environment encourages students to get engaged in the target language, and enhances their oral language development. The teacher should be aware of his/her potential in the Direct Method as it will positively influence language development of students.

**References:**

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