

**Lecture 3: I-The Reading Method (RM: India & USA: from 1920s to 1970s)****II-Situational Language Teaching (SLT/Oral Approach: UK: from 1920s to 1960s)****I-The Reading Method (RM)****Introduction**

The 1920's and the 1930s witnessed the birth of the Reading Method in India for students of English and USA for students of French and German. The principle underlying this method (also known as *the New Method* or *the Reading Approach*) is the development of the reading skill. The British Michael West, a professor of English in India, believed that you would not express yourself until you knew enough words, and reading was, in his opinion, the best way to learn them (1930, p. 514). He stressed the need to facilitate reading skill by enriching vocabulary. In his thesis at Oxford University, West criticised the direct methodologists for stressing the importance of speech without providing guidelines for teaching vocabulary. He commented that “the primary thing in learning a language is the acquisition of vocabulary...The problem is what vocabulary; and none of these modern textbooks in common use in English schools have attempted to solve the problem” (1927).

**1.Characteristics of the Reading Method**

Reading is viewed as the most usable skill to have in a foreign language. West viewed language teaching programme as a whole and gave each skill its legitimate place. He believed that “the initial stage of learning a foreign language should, we believe, be to learn to read it—even in the case of the student who aims at complete mastery (reading, writing, and speech)” (West, 1960, p. 5). In West's view plenty of exercises in reading comprehension would make later progress in speech and writing. The teaching of grammatical rules is principally based on the structures found in the reading passage, and comprehension is assessed through questions on the contexts of the reading materials. The method is also concerned with extensive reading where learners read on their own. Consequently, this method aims at developing an intensive reading for the purpose of comprehension, vocabulary acquisition and grammatical rules.

Coleman (1929, p. 11) stated that “a more reasonable goal for a foreign language course would be a reading knowledge of a foreign language, achieved through the gradual introduction of word and grammatical structures in simple reading texts”. In other words, the goal of language teaching is restricted to the training in reading comprehension. For the first time, vocabulary was considered one of the most important aspects of foreign language learning and a priority was placed on developing a scientific and a rational basis for selecting the vocabulary content of language courses. Teachers taught from books containing short reading passages in the foreign language, preceded by lists of vocabulary. Rapid silent reading was the goal, but in practice teachers often resorted to discussing the content of the passage in English.

West (1926) recommended reading for its practical utility, without neglecting the importance of speaking. Learners were trained in reading strategies, and graded readers (books for learning English that are graded by level of difficulty and interest) were prepared so that students faced textual models (not just disconnected sentences) and progressive varieties of the FL starting with the most basic level (made up of just 300-500 vocabulary items) up to more advanced ones. Ogden (1930) insisted on the value of a first stage or Basic English. Stern (1983, p. 161) pinpointed the first stage’s functional and educational orientation: “...based on the thought that, at an elementary level of language use, a learner requires *above all* the spoken language of everyday life”. Reading would become a foundation stone for a complete FL language learning process where the spoken side was postponed but not forgotten.

## **2. Practical Considerations of the Reading Method**

The reading method grew out of practical educational considerations ... it introduced into language teaching some important new elements;

1-The possibility of devising (creating) techniques, of language learning geared to specific purposes, in this case the reading objective.

2-The application of vocabulary control to second language texts, as a means of better grading of texts.

3-The creation of graded “reader”.

4-Thanks to vocabulary control, the introduction of techniques of rapid reading to the foreign language classroom. (Stern 1983, p. 462)

**Table 1**

*Methodological Features of the Reading Method*

<b>Content</b>	Controlled vocabulary within reading texts Basic grammar
<b>Objectives</b>	Learner needs Basic language and reading
<b>Materials</b>	Graded reading texts
<b>Procedures</b>	Oral introduction L1 is permitted for explanations and meaning Intensive and extensive reading exercises
<b>Assessment</b>	Ability to use the FL

*Source: Molina et al. (2006). Current approaches and teaching methods:*

*Bilingual programmes (p.10).*

### **3. Techniques of the Reading Method**

The techniques of RM were not radically different from those developed under previous methods. As under grammar translation the use of the first language is not banned in language instruction. The instruction of the second language was oral as in the direct method because facility in pronunciation and inner speech were regarded as an important aid in reading comprehension. Above all, vocabulary control in reading texts was regarded as of prime importance and so was the distinction between intensive reading for detailed study and extensive rapid reading of “graded readers” for general comprehension.

### **4. Criticism of the Reading Method**

1-The Reading Method goes against educational principles: one of the education principles is that work should start simple and gradually increase in complexity. With the RM, the words and grammar that students learn do not get any more difficult as time goes on.

**2-**Students' vocabulary is limited: the RM limits students' vocabulary to the 2280 words that West thought were essential to learning to read English; this makes the students' work lack meaning because once someone knows all these words, they cannot progress. It also means that they use the exact words repeatedly, creating a limited speaking and writing style.

**3-**Students do not learn to express themselves properly: as students do not know any idioms or do any writing composition under the RM, this makes it difficult for them to learn how to express themselves. They also do not understand accurate grammar or complex sentence structure, as they focus on learning basic patterns and putting everything together.

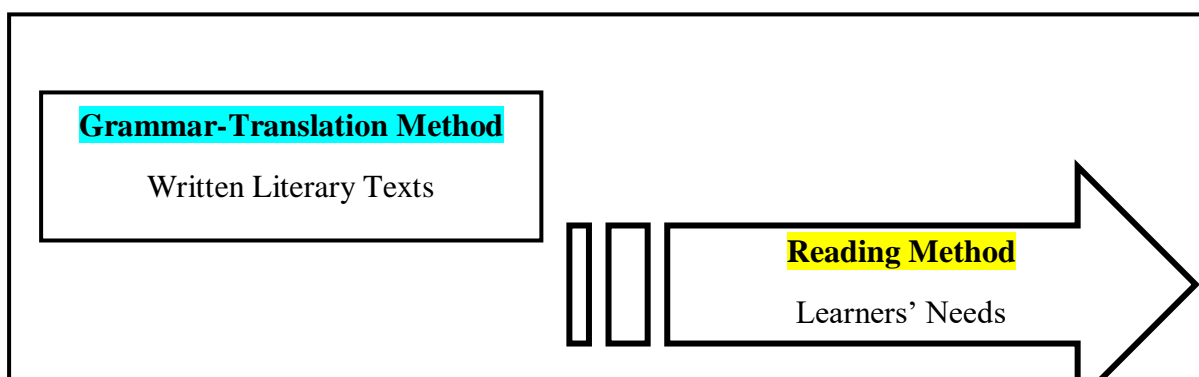
**4-**The Reading Method is educationally unsound: this method of teaching English is unsound for several reasons:

- ✓ Students might not necessarily grasp the structures of the language or the meanings of words;
- ✓ The teacher has no natural way of checking students' progress when they're all reading silently;
- ✓ Reading alone can be dull and monotonous, affecting students' ability to concentrate;
- ✓ The RM does not consider people's different learning styles – it only caters to those who enjoy reading.

## Conclusion

The reading method contributed greatly to FL teaching. It has directed learning towards a learner-centred approach. Needs are transformed into goals, something which makes teaching methodology more concrete and useful. Vocabulary and grammar are also subordinated and sequenced according to a progressive advance in the learning process. The compromise solution that the Reading Method indicates is just a sample of how different methods can be complementary proposals. It is outstanding that communicative needs are the guiding principles of the Reading Method among.

**Figure 1.** The Reading method: Towards a learner-centred method



## **The Direct Method**

Everyday Oral Language

*Source: Molina et al. (2006). Current approaches and teaching methods : Bilingual programmes (p. 10).*

## **II-Situational Language Teaching (SLT/Oral Approach)**

### **Introduction**

Situational Language Teaching (the Situational Approach) is an approach developed by British Applied Linguists (mainly Harold Palmer and A. S. Hornby) in the 1920s and 1930s, which had an impact on language courses and is still used today.

### **1.Characteristics of Situational Language Teaching/the Oral Approach**

The Oral Approach or Situational Language Teaching is based on a structural view of language. Speech was viewed as the basis of language and structure as being at the heart of the speaking ability. The theory of learning underlying this approach is behaviourism. Speech, structures and a focus on a set of basic vocabulary items are seen as the basis of language teaching. This was a view similar to that held by American structuralists, such as Fries and Halliday. However, what distinguishes the Situational Language Teaching Approach is its emphasis on the presentation of structures in situations. Pittman (1963) explained that

Our principal classroom activity in the teaching of English structure will be the oral practice of structures. This oral practice of controlled sentence patterns should be given in situations designed to give the greatest amount of practice in English speech to the pupil". (p. 179)

Language was taught by practising basic structures in meaningful situation-based activities. In situational teaching, actions are simulated to illustrate the utterances; numerous pictures and other real objects are used. Such a contextual teaching, therefore, attempts to teach the structures of the language in everyday situations where they are likely to occur. The basis of this method is the use of dialogues dealing with specific social situations such as "At the Supermarket", "Visiting a

Friend", and so on. In this respect, contextualization is a vital component in situational language teaching.

Hornby and other British Applied Linguists from the 1920s onward developed an approach to methodology that involved systematic principles of selection (the procedures by which lexical and grammatical content was chosen), gradation (principles by which the organisation and sequencing of content were determined), and presentation (techniques used for presentation and practice of items in a course). Furthermore, substitution tables could be used to help internalise the rules of English sentence structure. The following is an example of a sentence pattern:

**Pattern: S-Vtr-DO**

(Subject + Transitive Verb + Direct Object)

*The dog catches the ball.*

*Dogs chase cats.*

*That man teaches English.*

The main characteristics of the Oral Approach could be summarised as follows:

- 1-Language teaching begins with the spoken language. Material is taught orally before it is presented in written form.
- 2-The target language is the language of the classroom.
- 3-New language points are introduced and practiced situationally.
- 4-Vocabulary selection procedures are followed to ensure that an essential general service vocabulary is covered.
- 5-Grammar is taught inductively. Items of grammar are graded following the principle that simple forms should be taught before complex ones.
- 6-Reading and writing are introduced once a sufficient lexical and grammatical basis is established.
- 7-The meaning of words or structures is not to be given through explanation in either the native language or the target language but is to be induced from the way the form is used in a situation.

## **2. Principles of Situational Language Teaching**

- 1-Language learning is habit formation.

2-Mistakes are bad and should be avoided, as they are bad habits.

3-Language skills are learned more effectively if they are presented orally first, then in written form.

4-Analogy is a better foundation for language learning than analysis.

5-The meaning of words can be learned only in a linguistic context. (Richards & Rogers, 1986, p. 16)

So, this approach to language teaching stresses accuracy in both grammar and pronunciation, and the automatic control of basic structures and sentence patterns. Procedures move from controlled to free practice of structures.

### **3. Procedures Used in SLT (The sequence of activities)**

#### **3.1. Richards and Rodgers (2014, p. 37)**

**1-Presentation:** the new structure is introduced and presented.

**2-Controlled practice:** learners are given intensive practice in the structure, under the teachers guidance and control.

**3-Free practice:** the students practice using the structure without any control by the teacher.

**4-Checking:** the teacher elicits use of the new structure to check that it has been learned.

**5-Further practice:** the structure is now practiced in new situations or in combination with other structures.

#### **3.2. Davies et al. (1975, pp. 6-7)**

**1-Listening practice:** the teacher obtains his pupils' attention and repeats an example of the patterns or a word in isolation clearly many times, probably saying it slowly at least once, separating the words (where ... is ... the ... pen?).

**2-Choral imitation:** All pupils or in large groups repeat what the teacher has said. This works best if the teacher gives a clear instruction like "Repeat," and hand signals to mark time and stress.

**3-Individual imitation:** the teacher asks several individual pupils to repeat the model he has given in order to check their pronunciation.

**4-Isolation:** the teacher isolates sounds, words, or groups of words which cause trouble and goes through techniques “1-3” with them before replacing them in context.

**5-Building up to a new model:** the teacher gets students to ask and answer questions using patterns they already know in order to bring about the information necessary to introduce the new model.

**6-Elicitation:** the teacher, using mime, prompt words, gestures, etc., gets students to give new examples of the pattern, ask questions, or make statements.

**7-Substitution drilling:** the teacher uses cue words (words, pictures, numbers...) to get individual students to mix the examples of the new patterns.

**8-Question-answer drilling:** the teacher gets pupil 1 to ask a question and pupil 2 to answer until most pupils in the class practice asking and answering the new question form.

**9-Correction:** the teacher indicates by shaking his head, repeating the error,...that there is a mistake and invites the pupil or another pupil to correct it. If not possible the teacher corrects the mistake himself.

#### **4. Teacher's Roles in Situational Language Teaching**

In this approach/method, the teacher's role is central and active. He has to vary drills and tasks and choose relevant situations to practise structures. Language learning, in this method, is seen to result from active verbal interaction between the teacher and the learners. In fact, the teacher serves as a model; learners are required to listen and repeat. In order to check whether learning has taken place the teacher uses questions and commands. Pittman summarises the teacher's responsibilities as dealing with: 1. timing 2. oral practice, to support the textbook structures 3. revision [i.e., review] 4. adjustment to special needs of individuals 5. testing 6. developing language activities other than those arising from the textbook (1963, pp. 177-178).

#### **5. Teaching Materials in Situational Language Teaching**

SLT is dependent on both a textbook and visual aids. The textbook contains tightly organized lessons planned around different grammatical structures. Visual aids may be produced by the teacher or may be commercially produced; they consist of wall charts, flashcards, pictures, stick



figures, and so on. The visual element together with a carefully graded grammatical syllabus is a crucial aspect of SLT.

## **6. Criticism of the Situational Language Teaching**

In spite of the fact that the technique of creating situations in the classroom is crucial for effective use of certain functions and notions, British Applied Linguists began to question the theoretical assumptions underlying SLT, i.e., that speech and structure are regarded as the basis of language, and that the knowledge of structures must be related to situations in which they could be used. As a result, criticism of SLT centred around the following points:

- 1-Learning a language is not simply habit formation, and this is clearly evidenced by the fact that any person can build completely novel sentences despite having never heard that sentence before.
- 2-The delay with dealing with reading and writing may not suit all students. Some may need these skills more than the ability to speak or listen to the language.
- 3-Not all language can be suitably demonstrated in clear situations.
- 4-The approach requires a fluent and confident teacher.
- 5-Teacher-centred lessons may become boring for students very quickly.

Eventually, the teacher should be sensitive to the individual needs of the students in the matter, which was the basis of the emergence of the communicative approach.

## **Conclusion**

The impact of the Oral Approach (SLT) has been long-lasting, and it shaped the design of many widely used English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) textbooks and courses, particularly those published in the United Kingdom. One of the most enduring legacies of SLT at the procedure level is what came to be known as the Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP), that was widely popular in the 1990s and still used today. The main features of a PPT lesson format can be characterised as follows:

**Presentation:** a text, audio, or visual is used by the teacher to present the grammar in a controlled situation.

**Practice:** a controlled practice phase follows where the learner says the structure correctly, using such activities as drills and transformations, gap-fill/cloze activities, and multiple-choice questions.

**Production:** in the production phase, the learner transfers the structure to free communication through dialogues and other activities, where there is more than one correct answer. Critics have argued, however, that not all learners effectively manage this transfer and that controlled practice does not prepare them adequately for free production.

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