

A Review of the Audiolingual Method

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Abstract

Based on American structuralism and behaviorism, the Audiolingual Method is a system of foreign language teaching methodology that focuses on the development of listening and speaking skills by using sentence patterns as the outline and sentence drills as the center. It emphasizes teaching methods that combine auditory perception with visual perception in certain situations. The Audiolingual Method is widely used in second language teaching and this paper briefly summarize this method and give the author's own comment.

Keywords

The Audiolingual Method; Behaviorism; Language Teaching; Practice.

1. Introduction

World War II broke out and suddenly the United States was thrust into a worldwide conflict, heightening the need for Americans to become orally proficient in the languages of both their allies and their enemies. The U.S. military provided special, intensive language courses that focused on the oral skills. These courses came to be known as the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP). Or more colloquially, the Army Method. The Army Method came to be known in the 1950s as the Audiolingual Method (ALM).

The Audiolingual Method, which was proposed by American linguists in 1950s, was developed from the principle that "a language is first of all a system of sounds for social communication; writing is a secondary derivative system for the recording of spoken language" (Carroll, 1963). The Audiolingual Method teaches language through dialogues that focus on habit formation of students. Larsen-Freeman states that students will achieve communicative competence by forming new habits in the target language and overcoming the old habits of their native language (2000, p.45).

2. Theoretical Basis

The linguistic theory of the Audiolingual Method is based on American structuralism and behaviorism. Behaviorism maintained that it is the learner's experience that is largely responsible for language acquisition and this is more important than any innate capacity. It argued that the child's mind is a tabula rasa and good language habits are learned through the process of repetition, imitation, and reinforcement. The Audiolingual Method emphasizes the development of speaking and listening skills through repeated sentence structure drills. The teaching process of listening and speaking is divided into five stages according to Twaddle's generalization: cognition, imitation, repetition, transformation and selection. Its teaching philosophy is based on structuralist linguistic theory and absorbs the views of behaviorist learning theory. It believes that the learning process is a process of habit development, and that learning is the establishment of a set of habits, as it emphasizes the role of repeated imitation, memorization and drilling in language learning. Difficulties in foreign language learning are attributed to the conflict between different language systems, and with the help of comparative analysis between native and foreign languages, potential problems in foreign language learning

can be predicted. The Audiolingual Method holds that any language is sound first and then words, and that spoken language is the basis of all language activities. The reaction in teaching activities is to strictly follow the natural order of acquisition of listening, reading and writing, and to advocate the principle of leading by listening. By the 1960s the Hearing Method was widely used in foreign language teaching.

3. Principles and Features

Carroll (1963) in *Research on Teaching Foreign Languages* pointed out four essential characteristics of the method of foreign-language teaching. They are as follows:

- 1) Items are normally presented and learned in their spoken form before they are presented in their written form.
- 2) Teaching methods rest upon the careful scientific analysis of the contrasts between the learner's language and the target language.
- 3) Stress is laid on the need for over learning of language patterns by a special type of drill known as "pattern practice."
- 4) There is an insistence on the desirability, or even the necessity, of learning to make responses in situations which simulate "real-life" communication situations as closely as possible.

The Audio-Lingual Method emphasized the use of memorization, mechanical, and pattern drills practice. Its main principles were: Language instructors play the role of leaders and are responsible for providing a good language model. In the Audiolingual Method, learning L2 is like developing a habit of using the target language. In order to minimize the occurrence of errors, learners need to constantly practice speaking and memorize correct conversational patterns. In the classroom, L2 can be presented in a spoken way first, and the students can be trained in listening and speaking, in order to make the learning both effective and efficient, and only after they are proficient in listening and speaking, can they continue to practice reading and writing. In other words, ALM emphasizes more on form and structure, but less on meaning, such as tense, grammar, sentence structure, so it is listening and speaking before reading and writing. It is more beneficial to students than deductive and analytical explanations. In addition, it is helpful for students to do a lot of analogy and generalization drills to improve their generalization skills. It is important to teach vocabulary and sentence patterns in the cultural context of L2. The teaching and learning process of the Audiolingual Method highlights a focus on mechanical exercises, culminating in the ability to make concrete use of it in a specific context.

4. Comment

Despite the criticisms leveled against the Audiolingual Method, its contribution to language teaching cannot be ignored. It emphasizes syntactic development rather than being concerned only with morphology and vocabulary, and many simple teaching techniques have arisen from it. When using audio-lingual method in the classroom, the teachers need to shape correct language structure. When students imitate and learn, the teacher should give suggestions. At the same time, the teacher should control the whole learning process. The most important thing is that the structure of the language should be repeated constantly by students until they can form the ability to use this structure without thinking (Spiro, 2013).

One of the greatest advantage of this method is that it helps students form perfect oral ability and learn authentic grammar structure. That is because it different from traditional teaching methods. It is well known that traditional teaching methods in Chinese EFL class usually focus on grammar rules and writing training, rather than listening and speaking. However, audio-lingual method focuses on the teaching of oral English and attaches importance to sentence

pattern teaching (Feng Linzhuo, 2012). That means the students can master the skill of expressing ideas proficiently in daily life after learning. In addition, audio-lingual method focuses on the close combination of language and scene. It not only pays attention to students' listening and speaking ability, but also puts students in a real language environment. Students are allowed to practice listening and speaking while watching pictures, and learn English immersively through modern teaching aids. At the same time, they can naturally link the scene they see and the sound they hear, so as to make students more impressed.

However, we cannot ignore the disadvantages of this method. The Audiolingual Method pays too much attention to mechanical training, ignores the guiding role of language rules, and pays too much attention to the structural form of language. It neglects the depth of content and meaning of language, there is a tendency of superficial language. First of all, the teacher should do a lot of things during teaching and the students just follow the steps of teacher. That means the role of teacher is more active than the students. Secondly, it's just a process of stimulus-response and the process of students' mechanical imitation and repetition. Although the students can remember sentence patterns that they've learned, they cannot use them proficiently. Lastly, it may enhance students' speaking skills, but it is not conducive to the development of their communicative competence in the use of language, ignoring reading and writing and not creating appropriate authentic contexts.

5. Application in L2 Teaching

After 1980, the application of the Audiolingual Method in China's education and teaching has gradually become widespread, and it has become the mainstream teaching method in China's English teaching, and the related academic research has also been developed more rapidly. The application of the Audiolingual Method in English teaching is not only reflected in the pedagogy, but also in the preparation of English teaching materials. The comprehensive introduction of the Audiolingual Method in China, which was firstly applied to the teaching of foreign language majors in colleges and universities and soon spread to the teaching of public and amateur foreign languages, fully reflects the important role of the listening method in English teaching. Considering its drawbacks, some scholars believe that the use of the Listening Method should be combined with other teaching methods to make up for the shortcomings and comprehensive development. Many scholars believe that the teaching of listening to sayings can be combined with multimedia technology, making full use of the interactive advantages provided by multimedia computer technology and network technology to enhance the interaction between teachers and students in the teaching, so as to achieve mutual benefit in teaching and learning. Language skills training should pay attention to the teaching sequence of listening, reading, speaking and writing, Krashen's $i+1$ theory also believes that language learning begins with a large amount of comprehensible input, i.e., listening and reading, and then through the conversion of learned language rules to generate output, i.e., oral expression, speaking and written expression. The sequence of listening, reading, speaking and writing emphasized in the Audiolingual Method is not only in line with the law of language learning, but also in line with the principle of teaching from easy to difficult and step by step. We should combine the teaching practice of the Audiolingual Method with the characteristics of the development of the times, make corresponding improvements and innovations in the teaching process according to local conditions, and promote the comprehensive study of the Audiolingual Method.

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