ECLECTICISM "A" COMPROMISE"
IN COLLEGE ENGLISH TEACHING IN CHINA

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Abstract
The article attempts to analyze the approaches to foreign language teaching and their influence in Chinese colleges and universities. However, it is hard and irresponsible to aimlessly conclude which one is the most effective approach in teaching English as a foreign language in China. In fact, quite a few of equivalently effective approaches should be simultaneously used. Thus the author reduces all of them to one term "eclecticism," which is a mixture of a host of different approaches/methods.

Key words
College English teaching/approaches/methods/eclecticism

1 Introduction
It is a common phenomenon that teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) work hard but eventually feel disappointed and college students study diligently but failed to improve their English ability as they had expected. Liu 2003/ Gu 2004. How can English teachers choose an efficient approach in their particular classroom activities? To what degree can the approach affect College English classrooms? There will be more questions like these if we keep asking. In this paper, the main purpose is to base on our own context (Liaoning University of Petroleum and Chemical Technology) to analyze the approaches in our College English teaching context through observation and through our experiences and understanding of the approaches to language teaching and their influence as well.

2 Analysis of Approaches and Methods
According to Anthony 1963 cited in Richards & Rodgers 2001, an approach is a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language teaching and learning. Approach is the level at which theories of language and language learning are specified. It is axiomatic. It describes the nature of the subject matter to be taught. Method: on the other hand, is the level at which theory is put into practice and at which decisions are made with regard to which skills to be taught, what content to be taught and how content will be organized. It is more specific than an approach. A method is typically compatible with one or two approaches. To be specific, any language teaching method is implicitly or explicitly based on an approach which answers the question: what is language and what is language learning? Wedell & Liu 1995. This article will analyze three most widely used English teaching methods in China: Grammar Translation Method, Audiolingual Method and Communicative Approach.

2.1 Grammar Translation Method
Grammar Translation Method is based on the traditional teaching of classical Latin and Greek. "Grammar Translation dominated European and foreign language teaching from the 1840s to 1940s." Richards & Rodgers 2001. It started from a belief that learners learn a second language by
comparing it with their first language. According to Grammar-Translation Method, languages are systems of rules for the construction of correct sentences. Thus, a sentence is the basic unit of teaching and language practice. Literature is considered to be the superior form of a language. And languages are believed to be learned efficiently by memorizing the rules along with bilingual vocabulary lists and by applying them when making sentences. Translation is considered as one of the best ways to practice the application of rules. Reading and writing are the primary skills that the learners should develop, but there is much less attention given to speaking and listening. Larsen & Freeman 1986. Teachers’ role is to explain grammatical rules and vocabulary and to correct their mistakes. For the learners, foreign language learning is a dull process of memorizing numerous materials and attempting to produce perfect translation of literature.

2.2 Audiolingual Method

Just like Grammar-Translation Method, Audiolingual Method concentrates on correction in the course of language learning, so a great effort is made to prevent learners from making errors. Unlike Grammar-Translation Method, however, in Audiolingual Method, emphasis is placed on the language materials but not on the grammatical learning. Audiolingual Method gives priority to listening and speaking rather than reading and writing. The main activities of the method are oral practices like imitation, memorization and pattern drilling. Learning process is dominated by the teacher whose main duty is to monitor the learners’ performance and to correct their mistakes. Meanwhile, learners are required and encouraged to listen to their teacher and practice the drills and exercises. Richards & Rodgers 2001. Audiolingual Method was first introduced into China in 1964. Xu 1985 and reached its peak period from the 1960s to 1980s. Although today it has gradually lost its advocates, some versions of Audiolingual Method still remain popular in language teaching. Yule 1985. A case in point is that the classic masterpieces based on this approach—English 900 and New Concept English remain reputable and praised by many Chinese English teachers and learners.

2.3 Communicative Approach

In Communicative Language Teaching, language is considered to be a system of communication in which linguistic forms convey messages in specific contexts. Languages are acquired by using them in communication. Communicative skills are emphasized as one of the best ways to promote both subconscious acquisition and conscious learning of the language. Teaching is learner-centered and responsive to learners’ needs and interests. The teacher’s role is to “facilitate the communication process” (Breen & Candlin 1980), but not to dominate the class. In Communicative Language Teaching, teachers are helpers, advisers and facilitators. Learners hear and speak the language in real communication and the learning process is slow, subconscious, and probably full of errors. Learners are more responsible managers of their own learning. Larsen & Freeman 1986. Learners are encouraged to discover the forms and structures of language for themselves. Because of the participation, learners may find they gain confidence in using the target language step by step. In some sense, Communicative Language Teaching is a little like learning to ride a bicycle. Only when a learner actually gets on the bicycle and falls off a few times does meaningful learning take place. It is an approach with wide variation—‘not a well-defined method’. At the level of language theory, Communicative Language Teaching has a rich if somewhat eclectic theoretical base. Richards & Rodgers 2001. 160-161

3. The Current Situation of College English Teaching in China

In today’s Chinese College English teaching context, teachers are confronted with the pressure from both sides: the growing class size and the improvement of students’ all-round ability (especially in listening and speaking). Thanks to the growth and popularity of modern information technology, the design and use of PC-based and internet-based multimedia teaching model provide an efficient assistant to help the teachers to alleviate the burden. In this way, the teachers are able to get easy access to the trends of English teaching and acquisition and actively participate in and stimulate the change. Change is essential. However, some teachers are used to the traditional teaching methods and technologies. They still hold the traditional way of teaching with a textbook, a classroom, a mouth and a group of obedient but reluctant students. But now they should realize that change is a must. If we can reshape the existing unitary teacher-dominated pattern of language teaching with the help of multimedia
and network technology when the number of class hours will be accordingly reduced. Only in this way can we emancipate ourselves from the heavy teaching burden and free our students from test anxiety and distressing spoon feeding or duck stuffing in the Chinese expression.

Therefore, we are endeavoring to keep balance between traditional teaching methods and new approaches like Communicative Language Teaching. For example, in order to deal with the exam-oriented education system, we adapt the grammar and vocabulary focused teaching methods and new approaches like Communicative Language Teaching. We also give consideration to the development of the students' communicative competence to keep up with the tendency of quality-oriented education. Besides, in the Listening Course, the characteristics of Communicative Language Method can be reflected for the teachers are still exercising the traditional series of skills namely listening to the tapes answering the given questions and checking the answers.

The 2004 national curriculum reflects the progress of College English teaching in China. That is the transition from traditional approaches to Communicative Language Teaching. First, the new national curriculum lays more emphasis on communicative competence requiring that "the objective of College English is to develop students' ability to use English in an all-round way, especially in listening and speaking." Second, the new national curriculum is more flexible. Under the guidance of the curriculum, the teachers in different regions can choose particular principles of instruction in order to meet the specific demands of the individual learners which will be realized by "the extensive use of advanced information technology" 2004 19 mostly the computer-based and web-based English teaching facilities.

Furthermore, the curriculum introduces some new concepts such as developing students' autonomous learning ability and making more use of formative assessment which includes students' self-assessment, peer assessment and assessment conducted by teachers and school administrators so as to complement summative assessment, final tests and proficiency tests. While the new curriculum has been broadly acclaimed by teachers for its reflection of communicative teaching approaches, it sets higher standards for the students. For instance, students' vocabulary requirement has been enlarged from 5,000 words to 6,500 words in its higher demands. The requirements of listening and speaking are both more demanding than before. Meanwhile, another impressive characteristic is that the new national curriculum tries to lighten the negative effects caused by national proficiency tests CET. While English teaching and learning is quite similar to that of other subjects like Advanced Mathematics in which teacher is the only role in the monologue. As far as the students are concerned, the formal study with a purpose to pass certain exams is clearly more important than the use of language to communicate with others. In this case, as some well-trained and well-informed teachers have to take ideas from the traditional methods which seem appropriate for our own teaching situation, Communicative Language Teaching is welcomed by some students but not all when they hope to improve their communicative competence. Therefore, Communicative Language Teaching is used in the College English classroom by many well-trained teachers but it has reached a compromise with the traditional methods. If the Grammar Translation Method and Audiolingual Method

4 Effects on Teachers and Learners
4-1 Effects on Teachers
In School of Foreign Studies of Liaoning University of Petroleum, Chemical Technology, there are currently 44 College English teachers, 27 of whom are assistants and novice teachers who just graduated from university within the past 4 years. Due to the local economic situation, college teachers' earnings do not match their duties. When compared with our counterparts in the South, our pockets are much slimmer. Naturally, many teachers quit their jobs and went to more modernized or prosperous cities to seek more opportunities. Consequently, all the teachers in the faculty have to teach 6 days a week and
The average workload is 18 hours per week. What's worse, an average class has 60 students more or less. Under such circumstances, how can we say goodbye to easy Grammar Translation Method and welcome the demanding Communicative Language Teaching?

Firstly, in Liaoning University of Petroleum Chemical Technology three years ago, the number of undergraduates was no more than 8000; but in 2004 this number has reached 12,142. LUPCT pamphlet 2004. And the number is bound to increase in the near future. Teachers will face larger classes. Therefore, we are confronted with the pressure from both sides: the growing class size and the improvement of students' bound ability, especially in listening and speaking. Thanks to the growth and popularity of modern information technology, the design and use of PC-based and intranet or Internet-based multimedia teaching model provide an efficient assistant to help the teachers to alleviate the burden. At present, the new campus of the university is under construction. On this new campus, nine 70-seat brand new multimedia language laboratories will be completed and put to use within the next 3 years. As we seek to make the language laboratory an efficient milieu for teaching and learning, training for the teachers is essential. As for the training, money will not be a big problem. The problem consists largely in the efficiency of the project, which involves the adaptation of teachers and students. Technically and psychologically and more importantly, support from authorities. Otherwise, the entire process is nothing but futility. Another effect on teachers is that in recent years the training opportunities are actually more than before. So we can attend more conferences, more seminars and communication with the experts and teachers in the College English teaching circle. In this way, the teachers are able to get easy access to the trends of English teaching and acquire and actively participate in and stimulate the change. Change is essential. In school of foreign studies of the university, some teachers are used to the traditional teaching methods and technologies. They still hold the traditional way of teaching with a textbook, a simply equipped classroom, a mouth and a group of obedient but reluctant students. But now, they should realize that change is a must. If we can reshape the existing unitary teaching-dominated pattern of language teaching with the help of multimedia and network technology, then the number of class hours will be accordingly reduced. Only in this way can we emancipate ourselves from the heavy teaching burden and free our students from test anxiety and distressing spoon-feeding.

4.2 Effects on Learners

First, students are bored of purely traditional teaching methods like Grammar Translation Method and Audiolingual Method. Monotonous teaching method and artificial teaching materials and teachers' stale methodology should be all responsible for this. The teachers tried to change the currently used methodologies broke through the confinement of the traditional textbooks and tried to develop the students' overall ability. Fortunately, our efforts are fruitful. However, some kind of misunderstanding still exists. When advised by teachers' "language first", many students would counter by saying "CEI first." In order to pass the test, some students, for instance, are keen of some fast-food learning styles. In China, driven by the alluring market, some so-called "experts" launch the advertisements like they trainees in this intensive training class are guaranteed to pass CEI. If the students cannot be satisfied by the skills and knowledge offered by their teachers, or they do not trust their teachers, they would turn to these training schools for help. In their mind, this "fast-food" learning style and the tricks and skills that the trainers sell them are very useful in dealing with the test. After passing the test, however, they certainly throw away the used testing skills together with the English language. Then, next problem emerges. That is "good at taking exams but poor in practice" or in other words "high score and low ability." Many students who achieved high grades in English tests via the traditional method and the testing skills typically find themselves at a loss when confronted by the real communication with native English speakers.

As for the effects on the teachers and learners in our College English classroom, we here present more problems than profits. But indeed, we are making progress despite the problems and difficulties. In the meantime, we should also consider that there is still much room left for improvement in our College English teaching. Both teachers and students have a long way to go.

5 Conclusion

As to the significance of most influential teaching methods, namely Grammar Translation Method.
Audiolingual Method and Communicative Language Teaching. I cannot say which one is superior to another because all of them play very important roles in our College English classroom. Based on the reality in the context, it is risky to aimlessly get rid of any one of them. But we do hope to keep a balance between them. Grammar-Translation Method is important because the rudimentary knowledge is the core of language acquisition and we believe that grammar remains a significant part for English acquisition in today's China.

It is understandable that in such big classes the teachers cannot tailor any single approach to each individual student. Students cannot always depend upon their teachers to provide them with an approach that is specifically designed for each of them. The rediscovery of learner autonomy is really significant for English acquisition in the information era. In addition to autonomous learning, cooperating with peers or working with other students within a small or large group should also be encouraged.

References


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References


