

## **Evolution of ELT: A Comparative Analysis of Traditional Grammar-Translation and Modern Communicative Approaches**

**A.Mahathi**

Research scholar  
Department of English  
Sri Padmavathi Mahila University  
Tirupathi  
mahavibhavari@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

ELT has gone under a radical change from the rules to the meaning of the English language. This paper is intended to compare the pedagogical principles, strengths and limitations of traditional methods, namely the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), with modern communicative approaches, such as the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Learning (TBLT). The traditional approaches focus on mental control, deductive grammar, and memorization but do not ensure communicative competence in actual communication. Modern methods, however, are based on a learner-centered and constructivist methodology, placing particular emphasis on fluency, interaction and the use of authentic materials. It also examines how technology has enabled new forms of teaching and learning in the modern classroom and the systemic issues that prevent the use of innovative classroom strategies in many settings, including overcrowded classrooms and the digital divide. The study suggests that the best teaching methods that can be used in the 21st Century Classroom are a context-sensitive, eclectic approach that combines linguistic rigor with communicative flexibility.

Keywords: ELT (English Language Teaching), Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Communicative Competence, Learner Autonomy, Eclectic Approach, Pedagogical Innovation.

### **Introduction**

English has been a very interesting language development from being a local language to a global language that is vital in international communication, economic development, and cultural exchange. English has evolved from being a colonial imposition to an official or second language used in many countries for administration and education. This globalization has now made it imperative to continually enhance the methodology of English Language Teaching

(ELT) to accommodate a variety of learners with different social, educational and political backgrounds. One of the key debates that dominates this development is on the best methodology to be used for language acquisition. It is also true that, in the past, teaching was highly desirable when the teacher knew exactly what he or she wanted to achieve, but this is now the case when the teacher has to deal with a wide range of methods and approaches. Before we give attention to specific methodologies, it is crucial to identify the difference between 'method' and 'approach' – method is a systematic way to present the language based on a selected approach, and approach is a set of assumptions related to the nature of language learning and language teaching.

ELT can be divided into large scale eras: traditional approaches (until ca. 1960s), Classic Communicative Language Teaching (1970s-1990s), modern communicative and post-method approaches (1990s to present). Traditional approaches, which are mainly the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), have a well-defined, teacher-centered, and formal correctness approach. The emphasis was laid on the written word and the mastery of grammatical rules, with a strong focus on written language and less on speaking and listening. Task Based Learning (TBL) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which are two modern communicative teaching methods, focus on interaction, fluency, and using language in real-world contexts. The change reflects the ongoing education trend of learner autonomy, critical thinking, and a constructivist approach to knowledge where the learner participates in meaning making.

With globalization and the advancement of technology, the world has become more and more connected and there is a high demand for English. While English is the official language in India, it is the most common language to read and write in regions such as India. Likewise, in Southeast Asia, the education system has made English a priority subject, to help students develop their skills for the global economy. But modern approaches are not always implemented easily, as there are many examples of overcrowded classrooms, too few trained teachers, and a lack of access to innovative tools to do this. This comparative study examines the pedagogical principles, virtues, and problems of traditional and modern approaches to ELT; it also shows the development of ELT towards a more comprehensive, diverse and context sensitive approach to meet the needs of the 21st century learners.

The Traditional Paradigm: Grammar-Translation and its legacy

The Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), or the Classical Method, is one of the oldest and most popular methods in the history of language teaching. It dates back to the teaching of Greek and Latin in the European educational system from the 15th century onwards (which was considered "dead" at the time), where these languages were taught mainly for intellectual enrichment and the enjoyment of classical literature. In the 19th century, the standard method of teaching modern languages such as English, French and German was by the GTM. The overall mission of GTM is to provide students with the opportunity to read literature in the target language and to derive benefit from the mental discipline of intensive study of a foreign language.

GTM uses a very systematic and deductive structure, the teacher explicitly presents the grammar rule, and the teacher guides students to practice the grammar rule by means of translation exercises. In most of the GTM classrooms, the mother tongue is the main language of instruction and the system of reference for learning the second language. Students will have to commit long words lists to memory and learn complex grammatical structures, translating sentences and longer passages from the target language into their native language, and vice versa. This approach emphasizes the reading and writing abilities and emphasizes accuracy, morphology, and syntax. It provides little opportunity to develop oral-aural skills, however, since pronunciation and communication in real situations are not emphasized.

Proponents of GTM contend that it is a method with no sound linguistic theory or psychology and that is rigid, mechanical and tedious. One of the drawbacks is that it does not produce communicative competence, which means that after learning a language, students are unable to use it in spontaneous real-life situations. Learners are heavily memorizing the words that are out of context and, consequently, boring their learning process, which can reduce motivation. Despite this, GTM is common in many countries, including countries with expansive syllabuses in universities and significant student populations. For instance, the approach is still widely followed in India as it allows maintenance of a curriculum that supports average and low achieving students and the volume of resource and specialized teachers training are relatively low.

#### Intermediate Shifts: The Direct Method and Structural Approaches

The restrictions of GTM caused the Reform Movement in the late 19th century which resulted in the creation of the Direct Method (also referred to as the Natural Method). This was a radical

turn around GTM, a focus on learning language "naturally," analogous to how children learn their first language. The Direct Method did not allow the mother tongue to be used in the classroom, and all teaching and communication was to be in the target language. Meanings were explained by conversation, pictures and body language rather than translation. The first target was to help students to think in English and to achieve instant fluency.

The Direct Method, however, had difficulties in practice because the teachers needed to be very proficient and there were practical problems in actually using the method in large classes. This resulted in additional developments such as the University of London's Structural Approach. The Structural Approach emphasizes the organization of words into meaningful patterns called structures, which are predetermined by factors such as teachability, productivity and usefulness. In this grammar approach, grammar is presented in an inductive manner and students are drilled into them until they can control basic forms of the sentences automatically. The Oral-Situational Approach was frequently used in conjunction with this, in which language items were presented and practised in relevant classroom contexts or "situations" to meaningfully place language learning in these contexts.

Another important method that is still in use today is the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM), also known as the Army Method because it was used during World War II to teach foreign languages to soldiers. Based on the principles of behaviorist psychology, ALM considers language acquisition a repetitive habit formation process, which consists of memorizing dialogues, listening and thinking exercises, and constant repetition of language. ALM, like the Direct Method, emphasizes the need for the learner to avoid using the native language and to focus on oral skills rather than written skills. Many students complained that they were just "parroting" phrases and that ALM was boring, although it was good to learn the language quickly.

The Communicative Turn: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

The shift from the traditional form-based teaching to meaning-based teaching led to the development of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the late 1960s and 1970s. This change arose due to a disillusionment with behaviourist models and structural syllabuses, which were inadequate in equipping learners for functional demands of real-life communication. Later, theories of universal grammar were challenged by prominent linguists such as Dell Hymes, who suggested that not only were sentences constructed in a

grammatically correct way, but they were also used in a socially appropriate manner, as well—this was called communicative competence.

The basic tenets of CLT are that language is a means of communication and that learning is best achieved through active use of the language for real purpose. As opposed to GTM, which deals with the "what" of language (rules and vocabulary), CLT is more about the "how" (interaction and negotiation of meaning). CLT classrooms is a learning environment where the teacher does not have a commanding position in the classroom but rather serves as a facilitator or guide. Lessons are structured with activities that are interactive and include role plays, group discussions, debates, and problem-solving, which simulate real-life communication situations.

The emphasis in a CLT context is on being fluent rather than accurate. Errors are seen as a normal and inevitable aspect of the process of L2 development and correction is not aimed at formal accuracy but at effectiveness in communication. The method also encourages learners to read real texts, watch movies or listen to podcasts in the target language, familiarizing them with the culture and nuances of the target language. By focusing on four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), CLT seeks to build them all into a meaningful task. CLT has been proven to be successful in other contexts including in Thailand, where CLT was the most cited method to develop students' overall competency.

TBLT, CBI and Immersive Learning are some of the modern variations that can be used for this purpose.

Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is one of the many developed modern approaches that have emerged from the principles of CLT. Learning in TBLT is organized into tasks that are specific, meaningful, and authentic and reflect real-life situations, such as creating a travel plan or solving a puzzle. The focus of this method is language for task rather than language for meaning, it encourages critical thinking, and relies on students' current linguistic resources to reach a goal. TBLT is most effective in Asia where the government agencies have promoted it as an advanced form of communicative instruction.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and Content Based Instruction (CBI) are other important modern strategies. These approaches combine language instruction with the content of the academic subject taught, for example science, history, or business. When the target language is used as the medium of instruction, as is done in a CBI or CLIL classroom,

students learn the knowledge of their field and gain proficiency in the target language. It is a growing trend in higher education, particularly in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) settings, which aims to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Additionally, as an effective approach, Project-Based Learning (PBL) has become a way to engage students in real-life, lengthy projects. Students, when cooperating on projects, are more able to improve their technical skills, but also are encouraged to take risks and experiment with the language, to become fluent and confident in it. Such contemporary practices frequently include interdisciplinary perspectives; language is seen as a multi-functional phenomenon, connecting people to larger world communities.

A comparative approach to pedagogical principles and learner experience.

Direct comparison between traditional and modern approaches to ELT reveals some basic differences in the pedagogical philosophies and the outcome of learning. Traditional approaches are mainly teacher-centered and would involve a hierarchy between teacher and learner, with the teacher passing on predetermined information to the passive students. Today's techniques, by contrast, are Student Centered and result in a dynamic learning atmosphere in which students take ownership of their learning. This shift is supported by the understanding that research suggests that often times experienced teachers opt for the social and experiential learning approaches, whereas less experienced teachers might be more inclined toward bilingual and/or observation-based approaches.

The place of the mother tongue also shows great differences between the methodologies. GTM native language is the main language system in place, but there are many modern approaches that encourage the use of the target language as the medium of instruction to achieve maximum immersion. There are however some modern views which recognize that strategic use of the mother tongues can help to understand complex concepts, which in turn, may be addressed in an eclectic or bilingual manner. The analysis of errors is different in traditional and modern approaches because in traditional approaches errors are considered as failure that needs correction while in modern approaches errors are seen as indications of the formation of 'interlanguage' and the ability of the student to express the meaning is given priority.

Another aspect where contemporary approaches to education seem better than traditional ones is on student engagement. Rote memorization and repetitious drills in GTM and ALM may be

uniforming and discouraging, especially for younger students. The communicative and task-based methods, which emphasize the relevance of the task in real life situations and emphasize problem-solving skills in a cooperative way, generally maintain higher levels of motivation and engagement. In addition, modern technologies better suit the needs of GEN Z students, who prefer highly interactive learning spaces and incorporation of various media.

The role of technology and innovation. Technology and innovation.

Technology has transformed the way ELT has developed, and now provides opportunities for personalized learning and immersive experiences that were never thought possible. In the modern approaches, the Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is continuously being used to enhance the learning process through the use of interactive learning software and online learning platforms, offering immediate feedback and various linguistic contexts. Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is a learning approach using mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets to provide learners with continuous language learning opportunities, which is creating a new learning paradigm of formal learning and informal learning.

New technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) promise to further transform ELT by providing realistic simulations of day-to-day situations in which students can practice. In addition, Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies such as chatbots and adaptive learning platforms provide personalized teaching and learning, which can adapt to each student's pace and complexity, thus enhancing autonomous learning. But the successful use of these technologies demands a careful pedagogical embedding that takes care to ensure that they are used not to supplant the teacher, but to supplement.

The world is experiencing a new era that is being called "Post-Method", as we battle challenges.

While modern communicative methods are clearly better, there are systemic and cultural obstacles to use. Technological infrastructure in many developing areas is uneven, and schools may not have access to basic tools for digital use, or to a reliable internet connection. High student/teacher ratios and overcrowding also make for an interactive methodology difficult to accommodate. Moreover, teachers used to teaching based on teacher-centered approach and teachers who think that they are not good enough at English to teach Immersion approach are resistant to change.

The problems that have arisen have inspired another period known as the Post-Method era, which challenges the belief that there is one "perfect" method that can be applied to every context. Instead, it calls upon teachers to have the freedom and ability to assess their own context and choose from among different methodologies the most appropriate. It is usually reflected in an "Eclectic Approach", which combines a solid language development (Building a solid grammatical foundation) with a communicative approach (Language is used in a communicative way). A successful program may include a variety of methods such as traditional grammar practice and contemporary digital story creation to increase accuracy and creativity.

### Multidisciplinary Trends and Future Directions

The future of ELT is being determined by an increasingly multi-disciplinary perspective which considers language from the point of view of psychology, sociology and cultural studies. The notion of a "text" has been extended to encompass advertisements, political cartoons, films, and even body language, all of which have become the multimodal and interactive forms of communication in today's world. The concept of intercultural competence has also come to the forefront of research, as learners are encouraged to learn how to deal with the various linguistic and cultural contexts that are found in a globalised world.

It takes note of new directions in ELT, such as the ones pointed out by institutional research, for example, in Singapore, where they have tried to introduce multiliteracies, metacognition, and classroom dialogue. In addition, there is an increased awareness of the potential of learners' L1s as resources, not as obstacles, and the development of translanguaging pedagogies. The field is still developing, and on-going professional development will be an important tool for teachers to acquire the skills and confidence to use innovative approaches and technologies in their teaching.

### Conclusion

The shift in the nature of ELT from the Grammar-Translation Method to the modern communicative approach is a radical change in the attitude towards language, from the rules to the meaning of the language. Although traditional approaches have a structure that is foundational and very beneficial in building a strong grammatical foundation, it may not be sufficient in teaching practical skills for real-life communication, especially in situations where

resources are limited. CLT, TBLT and CBI are contemporary methods which emphasize interaction, learner autonomy, and authenticity, thus better equipping students for the needs of the 21st century. The effectiveness of these new approaches depends on issues like the digital divide and teacher training. The best approach is to find a balance, use a variety of different methods and make use of a context-relevant teaching methods, thus enabling learners to be successful in a world that is constantly changing and interrelated.

## References

1. Abid. (2019). An Overview of Approaches to English Language Teaching. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation (IJLLT)*, 2(7), 214-220.
2. Krishna, T. M., & Kumar, M. S. (2020). English Language Teaching: New Perspectives. *VEDA'S Journal of English Language and Literature (JOELL)*, 7(4), 18-24.
3. Larsen-Freeman, D. (2000). *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
4. Rajeev T, A. (2020). Methods and Approaches of Teaching English Language in India: An Eclectic Overview. *GAP BODHI TARU*, 3(4), 34-38.
5. Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
6. Sameem, M. A. M. (2013). Methods, Approaches, And Techniques Of Teaching English: A Comprehensive Review. *Ilkogretim Online - Elementary Education Online*, 12(1), 314-323.
7. Sharma, M. (2019). Approaches and Methods of Teaching English as a Second Language: A Historical Perspective. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews (IJRAR)*.
8. Stern, H. H. (1983). *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching: Historical and Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Applied Linguistic Research*. Oxford University Press.