

A Brief Discussion of the Audiolingual Method

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Abstract

The Audiolingual Method was sometimes known as the “Army Method” or “Oral Approach”, it is a method in English teaching. Although the method began to fall for some reasons, Audiolingualism and those materials based on audiolingual principles continue to be widely used today and is still widely adopted in China. This paper examined the Audiolingual Method in the following aspects: introduction, features, advantages and disadvantages, application and my humble comments.

Keywords

English Teaching; Audiolingual Method; Teaching Method.

1. Introduction

At present, there are a lot of teaching methods in middle school English teaching: the Audiolingual Method, Cognitive Approach, Situational Language Teaching, Communicative Language Teaching, the Direct Method, the Natural method, etc. Among them, Audiolingual method has a profound impact on the middle school English teaching and still is widely adopted in China.

1.1. The Background of Audiolingual Method

The Audiolingual Method emerged in the United States in the 1940s, after World War II, the US military has established the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) in order to attain conversational proficiency in a variety of foreign languages in a short time by strengthen the training of soldiers' hearing and expression. After the war, this combination of structural linguistic theory, contrastive analysis, aural-oral procedures, and behaviorist theory psychology led to the Audiolingual Method. The Audiolingual Method was popular in the United States and Western countries in the 1950s and 1960s and widely used in middle school English teaching.

1.2. The Underlying Theory

The theory of language underlying Audiolingualism was derived from structural linguistics. Language was viewed as a system of structurally related elements for the encoding of meaning. Learning a language, it was assumed, entails mastering the elements of the language and learning the rules by which these elements are combined. An important tenet of structural linguistics was that the primary medium of language is oral: speech is language. It was assumed that speech had a priority in language teaching. Therefore the Audiolingual Method advocates the teaching model of listening before speaking, then reading and writing.

The theory of learning behind the Audiolingual Method is behaviorism. The experiments they did showed that language learning is the automation of language through stimulation, response and reinforcement, which is precisely in line with a series of mechanical language knowledge such as phonetics, morphology, syntax and lexicology advocated by the syllabus. Students learn vocabulary and language structures through dialogue, constantly imitating the dialogue and practicing important sentence patterns to master vocabulary and grammar on the basis of mastering listening and speaking.

2. The Characteristics of Audiolingual Method

Listening and speaking first.

The most notable feature of Audiolingual Method is that listening and speaking is more important than reading and writing. Listening and speaking is the basic knowledge of all language activities. Speaking is primary, reading and writing come from listening and speaking. Drill, drill, drill.

Students develop the habit of automatic learning through imitation, repetition, memorizing and other ways of continuous practice that strengthen the ability of memory.

Focus on sentence pattern. Sentence pattern is not only the foundation of language teaching, but also the center of foreign language teaching process. students can automatically use each sentence pattern through a lot of practice, so as to better grasp the language rules.

Limit the use of mother tongue and correct every mistake. In this method, the use of the mother tongue is prohibited. Students are supposed to use the target language to think, answer questions, and acquire new knowledge. If a student makes a mistake in the practice, the teacher should correct it in time to make sure that the student can use the language correctly.

3. The Advantages and Disadvantages of Audiolingual Method

There are some basic characteristics of Audiolingual Method: emphasis on practice; have a good command of sentence patterns; cultivate the habit of foreign language; training that emphasizes listening and speaking. To enable students to use a foreign language fluently on the basis of limited English and easily master foreign language pronunciation and intonation. Teachers help students master a foreign language by comparing language structures and compiling targeted textbooks. It encourages students to use the target language to communicate, which enables them to develop the speaking ability. The pattern drills of this approach give beginning learners great help in learning and memorizing structures. As a result, students can speak accurately and fluently.

However, the excessive emphasis on mechanical practice is not conducive to students' application of language. Although students can remember the sentences, they are divorced from the semantics and real life, and can not use them or use them improperly in communication, and sometimes even make mistakes. Too much emphasis is placed on the cultivation of language forms, while the connotation and meaning of language are ignored, which leads to the unnatural language learning; In teaching, it often leads to students' poor fluency in listening and speaking of a sentence. The teacher's teaching method is mechanical and monotonous, which is easy to cause students' boredom. The biggest drawback is that it is unfavorable to the development of creative thinking. The mechanical mimicry and repetition make students lose the initiative in learning.

4. Application in the Classroom

In a typical audiolingual lesson, students first hear a model dialogue and students will practice. In this process, students only pay attention to the accuracy of pronunciation and intonation, and all the mistakes will be corrected immediately. The dialogue is adapted to the students' interest or situation, through changing certain key words or phrases, it is acted out by the students. Finally, the teacher explains the key words and sentences in the dialogue. After that, the students may refer to the book, and follow-up reading, writing, or vocabulary activities based on the dialogue may be introduced. Audiolingual Method is primarily an oral approach to language teaching, it is easier to learn more natural English pronunciation and intonation in class.

The classroom guided by Audiolingual Method has the following characteristics:

Emphasize that listening and speaking are ahead of reading and writing.

The practice of sentence patterns is the center of classroom teaching. Repeatedly practicing English sentence patterns helps students form English habits.

Restrict native language and correct any mistakes. Emphasize the structure, grammar, and pronunciation of sentences. Therefore, during the practice process, if a teacher discovers a student's mistake, they must immediately correct it in order to form correct language habits.

5. Comments on Audiolingual Method

As far as I am concerned, this method is quite effective for junior students/beginners to learn a new language, especially for those underdeveloped area, in which students are less successful in English. They can master the basic structures of English in the shortest time. Secondly, for those novice teachers it will be very useful to practice. Also, Audiolingual Method is primarily an oral approach to language teaching, it is indeed practical for speech learning.

However, in the whole teaching process, students has not be taught listening skills or listening strategies, but imitate the text mechanically and recite a large number of phrases and sentence structures to achieve automatic oral output. Students are just machines that produce language, they play a reactive role by responding to stimuli, and thus have little control over the content, pace, or style of learning. They are not encouraged to initiate interaction, because it may lead to mistakes. However the teachers' role is central and active thus it is a teacher-dominated method.

The Audiolingual Method overemphasizes the form and structure of language, ignores the actual content and meaning of language, over-relies on teaching materials, and ignores students' experience and interests. It is considered no longer breast of recent developments and ripe for major revision.

Now Communicative Language Teaching is becoming more and more popular in listening and speaking class, in which students learn in a relatively independent manner and take responsibility for their own learning, with teachers assisting students as participants, organizers and facilitators. Therefore it is necessary for us English teachers to make adjustment to the Audiolingual Method in class and that needs further study.

In the early stages of student learning, their English foundation and oral expression ability are relatively weak. Teachers can use Audiolingual Method to guide teaching. However, in the process of English teaching, a single teaching method is not omnipotent. Considering factors such as students' English foundation, grade level, teaching syllabus, and major, teachers should tailor their teaching to local conditions and have a targeted approach. For example, combining audiolingual method with communicative approach.

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