

The Direct Method

The Direct Method was the outcome of a reaction against the Grammar Translation Method. It was based on the assumption that the learner of a foreign language should think directly in the target language. According to this method, English is taught through English. The learner learns the target language through discussion, conversation and reading in the second language. It does not take recourse to translation and foreign grammar. The first verses are taught while pointing to objects or pictures or by performing actions. According to H.G. Palmer, The Direct Method has the following:

1. Translation in every shape or form is banished from the classroom including the use of the mother tongue and that of the bilingual dictionary.
2. Grammar, when it is taught, is taught inductively.
3. Oral teaching precedes any form of reading and writing.
4. The use of disconnected sentences is replaced by the use of connected texts.
5. Pronunciation is taught systematically in accordance with the principles of phonetics and phonology of the target language.
6. The meanings of words and forms are taught by means of object or natural context.
7. The vocabulary and structure of the language are inculcated to a large extent by the teacher and answered by students.

Aims:

The Direct Method aims at establishing the direct bond between thought and expressions and between experience and language. It is based on the assumption that the learner should experience the new language in the same way as he experienced his mother tongue. In the Grammar Translation Method, the foreign concept or idea is first translated into the mother tongue and then understood. But in the Direct Method the intervention of the mother tongue is done away with the learner understands what he reads or hears in the second or foreign language without thinking of the mother tongue equivalence. Likewise, he speaks or writes the foreign language without the need of translating his thought or idea from the mother tongue into the second/foreign language. He acquires, what Champion calls that instinctive, unerring language sense which we all possess in variant degree in the mother tongue, and which superseding all rules, grammar and dictionaries, resting at bottom on the direct association between experience and expression, is the only sure guide in the use of language.

Principles:

1. Oral Training

The direct Method emphasizes the value of oral training in learning a foreign language. The pupil is given sufficient practice in listening to the language and then speaking it. It also lays emphasis on the knowledge of phonetics so that the learner may be able to acquire intelligible pronunciation. Oral training helps in establishing direct association between the words of the foreign language and the ideas for which they stand.

2. Inhibition of the Mother Tongue

Another way of securing bond between experience and expression is to inhibit the use of the mother tongue. Pupils are taught new words by actually showing them the objects for which they stand or performing actions or by suitable illustration in context. This enables them to think in English and respond directly in English.

3. Sentence is the Unit of Speech

Therefore, the teaching of a language starts with the teaching of sentence patterns rather than individual words. This enables the learner to internalize the structure of the target language. New vocabulary items are introduced gradually based on the principle of selection and gradation. They are taught through material association, explanation or use in suitable context.

4. Inductive Teaching of Grammar

In the direct method, grammar of the target language is not taught for its own sake. It is a means to an end. Its aim is to enable the learner to correct errors in his speech and writing. Grammar is taught inductively. It may be pertinent to point out here that in the Direct Method also lessons are prepared by the teacher or the author of textbooks according to some grammatical plan. The quantum of exposure to the language enables the learner to form his own hypothesis and rules of the language.

Advantages:

1. It is a natural method.

It teaches the second/foreign language in the same way as one learns one's mother tongue. The language is taught through demonstration and conversation in context. Pupils, therefore, acquire fluency in speech. They are quick at understanding spoken English. They can converse in English with felicity and ease.

2. No gap between active and passive vocabulary.

This method does not differentiate between active and passive vocabularies. According to this method whatever is required for understanding through English is also required for expressing through it. If English is taught through the mother tongue, the gulf between the active and passive vocabularies is widened. The learner acquires more of passive vocabulary because he concentrates on understanding English rather than expressing through it.

3. This method is based on sound principles of education.

It believes in introducing the particular before general, concrete before abstract and practice before theory.

Defects:

1. There are educationists, who hold the view that the Direct Method does not take into account all aspects of language teaching. Dr. Michael West considers that the best thing about this method is that it links the foreign word with idea that it represents. Hence, instead of being called a Direct Method it should be called a Direct Principle.

2. Not Comprehensive

Language learning involves acquisition of skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. The Direct Method concentrates on listening and speaking but not reading and writing. That is why many of those who have learned English through the Direct Method feel that they do not get adequate command over written language.

A comparison between the Direct Method and the Grammar Translation Method must take into account the following points:

iThe Direct Method:

1. avoids close association between the second or foreign language and the mother tongue.
2. lays emphasis on speech.
3. follows the child's natural way of learning a language.
4. teaches the language by 'use' and not by 'rule'.
5. does not favour the teaching of formal grammar at the early stage.

The Grammar Translation Method:

1. maintains close association between the foreign language and the mother tongue.
2. lays emphasis on speech.
3. follows the adult's natural way of learning a language.
4. teaches the language by 'rule' and not by 'use'.
5. teaches formal grammar from the very beginning.