CURRENT TENDENCIES IN TEACHING LANGUAGES

Ion Laurentia

Universitatea “Valahia”, Târgoviște

Key words: language, teaching, didactician, methodologist

Many language teachers of ESP have advocated an eclectic attitude towards linguistic theories, considering it a sacred right and duty to borrow from one theory or another according to the help it can give to make students understand, internalise, and put into practice the way a linguistic pattern works and is used in communication.

Lately new foreign language teaching methods appeared, each claiming to be the best suited to the students’ learning process: the cognitive method, suggestopedia, community language learning the natural approach, to name only a few. It would not be wise to ignore these various attends at more efficient teaching and learning, though many of them are still experimental, and are generally used in the more favourable circumstances of adult education rather than in colleges or universities. On the other hand, I would consider it unwise for an ESP teacher to adopt one of these methods as a whole, to the exclusion of everything else.

The eclectic way is not a method; it is an attitude on the part of the ESP teacher. It is the only sensible answer to the challenge of the present day situation in most of Romanian universities, with mixed ability classes, where every learner has his/her personal attitude toward the foreign language, his/her own ability and motivation, or lack of it, his/her own way of learning, forgetting, unlearning (Sharewood-Smith;1981:32). It is neither for the didactician or methodologist nor for the textbook writer to decide which teaching the teacher must use at every step. It is up to the teacher, according to what he knows about the mixed mass of students he has in each group and about their various needs and attitudes (positive or negative) toward different activities or tasks. This does not mean that he can afford to ignore what didacticians and methodologists have to say about language teaching and language learning. Nor does it mean that text books will not be helpful: many of them, when carefully selected will provide useful guidelines and a wealth of graded teaching materials and exercises that will lighten the teacher’s task, providing he does not become a slave to the author’s suggestions In the same way, he will find interesting insights into his profession, in the writings of linguists and psychologists. He will never neglect the semantic awareness in vocabulary teaching (Stan;1998:49) and will make his personal choices on the basis of the questions he will have to ask himself, as he goes along, about the main issues of language teaching and on the basis of the answers he will be able to give in connection with several criteria.

One can easily foresee that it is only the well-trained teacher who is going to be able to become eclectic, to put into practice the Eclectic way. The language teacher with no training at all or who has been given only a series of teaching recipes, with no theoretical thinking about the advantages and the drawbacks of such and such an approach for different categories of learners, is bound to be content with the following old fashioned textbooks.

The complete eclectic method is not a compromise between two antagonistic schools; it boldly incorporates what is valuable in any system or method of teaching and refuses to recognise any conflict, except the conflict between the good and the inherently bad. The complete method will embody every type of teaching except bad teaching, and every process of learning except defective learning.