



The “Quick Meal” English Language Training: Preparing Employees for the AEC Linguistic Challenge

Kanchana Khamnungsook, Ph.D.
kanchana.k@bu.ac.th

Bangkok University

Abstract

The growing need for English training programs that yield immediate results has led to the design and implementation of the “Quick Meal” English course. This course combines the various strengths of the Direct Method, Audio-lingual Method, and Communicative language teaching together. Its aims are to encourage the expansion of English vocabulary, improve accuracy of actual use, and enhance learners’ ability to communicate- in English. The “Quick Meal” is recommended as an alternative English training course that organizations may include as part of their personnel development plans in order to better prepare their workforce for the approaching establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC).

บทคัดย่อ

การที่ประเทศไทยจะเข้าร่วมเป็นสมาชิกประชาคมเศรษฐกิจอาเซียนในปี ค.ศ. 2015 ทำให้องค์กรจำนวนมากต้องการการอบรมภาษาอังกฤษที่จะพัฒนาสมาชิกของตนให้สามารถใช้ภาษาอังกฤษในการติดต่อสื่อสารได้อย่างรวดเร็ว ผู้เขียนในฐานะผู้สอนคนหนึ่งจึงได้คิดสร้างหลักสูตรอบรมภาษาอังกฤษ Quick Meal ขึ้น โดยได้ประสานจุดเด่นของวิธีการสอนแบบ 1) Direct Method 2) Audio-Lingual Method และ 3) Communicative Approach เข้าด้วยกัน เพื่อเป็นทางเลือกของการอบรมภาษาอังกฤษที่ให้ผลลัพธ์อย่างรวดเร็ว ที่องค์กรสามารถจะนำไปใช้ในการพัฒนาทักษะทางภาษาอังกฤษให้แก่บุคลากรของตนได้

Introduction

The ever-increasing possibility of Thailand joining the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015 has led to observable enthusiasm throughout many organizations with regards to training courses in occupational English. Due to widespread speculation that interactions in English will become inevitable as a result of the mobility of citizens within member countries, many now believe that employees of all backgrounds need adequate abilities and training in the English language in order to help their organizations reap the benefits of AEC cooperation. Demand for English language courses at all levels, therefore, has increased, be they simple courses in basic conversation or advanced ones dealing with business negotiations and presentations.

The purpose of each course is understandably different, depending largely on the language needs deemed necessary by each organizational unit. The commonality that these courses share, however, is discernible; organizations have requested training that yields dramatic impact on learners. That is, after only a matter of days or weeks, a poor level of English proficiency is expected to rise to an ability to communicate satisfactorily. As a trainer of the English language, I find this high expectation quite a task, given the fact that accumulating ability and proficiency in any language is a long-term effort. Nevertheless, after consulting a vast array of available language teaching theories, I attempted to tailor an English course that responds to this “kick-in-fast” requirement. My breakthrough combines several existing English language teaching approaches together to develop a course that is comparable to, and thus called, the “Quick Meal”.



Characteristics of the “Quick Meal” English Training Course

A quick meal is usually distinguished by its readiness for consumption when an individual is constrained by time. Similarly, the Quick Meal English course is a response to the desire for language practice and activities that promise immediate results. The Quick Meal training recipe comprises three ingredients: the direct approach, the audio-lingual approach, and the communicative approach. Despite critiques surrounding the shortcomings of these language teaching approaches, their strengths have been selected to complement one another in order to ensure the greatest possible effectiveness of the learning outcomes. The significance of each approach is applied to the Quick Meal course in the following manners.

1. The Direct Approach

The direct approach provides the Direct Method that, according to the British Council, is well-known for its intention to immerse learners in the target language. The Direct Method assumes that the acquisition of vocabulary derives from the connection of terms with the materials or behaviors that they stand for. Words, therefore, should not be translated into the native language of learners, but should be paired with corresponding objects or behaviors to encourage actual remembrance. Hence, vocabulary is taught through the visual spectrum by methods such as pantomiming and materials such as pictures, videos, and genuine objects. Learners are also taught to pronounce the words correctly and use them in complete sentences (Prakash, 2012).

In the Quick Meal course, the Direct Method is used to introduce new words and expressions. In the present age of information technology, trainers are able to benefit from the Internet through virtually any graphic or video clip that can be used in the classroom to stimulate the relationship between language and its meanings. Even abstract ideas can be illustrated without the need for translation into a learner's native language with the help of Google and Yahoo images, as well as YouTube videos. Basic types of graphic design software can also be used during teaching preparations to create lessons that better motivate a mastery

of vocabulary and its functions within a sentence. Learners may also be guided to websites which highlight pronunciation of words, and help students to learn and practice these pronunciations if their trainers are not native speakers of English. Besides technology, conventional teaching techniques such as miming and gestures can also prove helpful in promoting comprehension.

The many advantages of the Direct Method in the Quick Meal course are evident in the inspiring vocabulary lessons and entertaining classroom atmosphere. Research has proven that the use of graphics, illustrations, and videos helps to create excitement, which will keep learners' attention, maintain their involvement in class, and increase their motivation to learn (Chen & Wan, 2011). Equally entertaining is the use of mimes and gestures to create an understanding of words and expressions. Thus, the Direct Method lends the Quick Meal course an edutainment flair that helps to create pleasant learning experiences and positive attitudes towards the English language in addition to remarkable expansion of vocabulary in a short time.

2. The Audio-lingual Approach

With the assumption that language learning is attainable through habit formation, the audio-lingual approach offers a method that emphasizes continuous repetition of syntax through drills and pattern practice (Griffiths, 2004). Structural models of the language are provided and reinforced in the language lab without explicit explanation of the associated grammar rules. Learners are required to undergo rote learning of accurate language forms in all their various contexts as well as the language sound system. The acquisition of relevant vocabulary is a secondary concern, and is expected to occur only as part of the grammar practice routine.

Audio-lingual lessons are included within the Quick Meal training course for three purposes. To begin with, the grammar drills and pattern practice are used to supplement the Direct Method's emphasis on the mastery of vocabulary. Secondly, the Audio-lingual exercises, which focus on accuracy of the target language, help equip learners with correct language input. Moreover, recent innovations in technology allow for the use of portable audio devices; this



means that learners can limitlessly repeat the practice and drills at their convenience, and thus receive consistent reinforcement that can help to enhance their retention and recall of the language learned.

The use of Audio-lingual Method in the Quick Meal course results in the accumulation of knowledge of English syntax that, together with knowledge of vocabulary obtained through the Direct Method, can contribute to the development of communicative competence. Besides, some Audio-lingual activities such as the chain drill, role playing of scripted dialogs and question and answer drill, give learners a chance to start communicating with others even though the communication is rather controlled and limited. Learners can also improve their listening skills as they take part in the audio practice.

3. The Communicative Approach

According to Richards (2006), communicative language teaching aims at developing communicative competence in learners so that they are able to use the language for meaningful communication. Communicative competence is composed of four competence areas (NCLRC, n.d.). First, learners need to have “linguistic competence”, or the ability to use grammar, syntax and vocabulary in their communication in the target language. In addition, learners need “sociolinguistic competence”, so they know how to use the language appropriately given various social contexts and relationships among people they interact with. They also need “discourse competence” in order to understand different types of texts and know how to produce them. Lastly, learners need to have “strategic competence” that enables them to make their communication work even when there is a limitation of language knowledge or when other communication problems occur.

The Quick Meal Course provides communicative tasks that help to increase learners’ communicative competence. The tasks, based on Nunan (1991), encourage learners to participate in simulations of the situations in which they need to interact with others to seek information or complete assignments. Provided activities also imitate the real-world contexts in which learners are involved in using English to make decisions and solve problems (Lunce, 2006).

Learners are also guided to experiment with using English to achieve purposes; for example, they use English to describe a certain situation, tell a story, discuss their point, argue their position, or persuade others. They are also drawn to take part in simulated situations where they need to use communication techniques to make their communication work.

The communicative approach exposes learners in the Quick Meal course to real-world experiences when they need to actually use English to create effects. Learners have a chance to practice negotiating meanings in virtually real-life situations, which are less controlled and rather unpredictable. They can also rehearse the socially appropriate use of the language in the classroom to be well-prepared for their language encounters in the real world. They can as well improve their ability to communicate strategically and learn to become better communicators in English.

Proportion of the Ingredients

The quantity of each approach to be implemented, in order to make an effective recipe, will depend largely on the level of proficiency of each learner. Beginners will need more language input from the vocabulary exercises, in addition to pronunciation practice and grammar drills, in order to possess the confidence and capability to participate in communication activities. Both of these are provided by the Direct Method and Audio-lingual Method respectively. Intermediate students gravitate towards the Communicative Approach, which allows them to gradually interact in the most hypothetical situations. Advanced learners are primarily focused on communicative tasks that help to enhance their competence and fluency; vocabulary lessons and practice of language patterns would be minimally used. It must be said that an effective Quick Meal course is achievable only when the ingredients are made proportionate to the language abilities of the learners.

The Trainer’s Personality as a Condiment

According to established research, the teacher’s personality may not be the only factor inductive to the success of the learner. Findings do indicate, however, that



the teacher's personality does contribute to learning success in a rather significant manner (Garcia, Kupczynski, & Holland, 2011). The Quick Meal course is partly based on the Direct Method, which is grounded in the notion that physical illustrations will encourage mastery of the target language. It is unavoidable, therefore, that acting will be brought into play, and the trainer, therefore, will be obliged to become a performer. According to Harmer (2002), performer teachers, or trainers in the Quick Meal case, are not required to put on a show in front of their class. These amateur actors and actresses must enter into "performance mode" (p. 63) once they step into the classroom. They need to be able to exaggerate their gestures, and gaze into the learners' eyes as if they were on stage. This means that the Quick Meal trainer who possesses an outgoing and confident personality is likely to be the most effective trainer in any given class. Besides, liveliness is also needed to season the Quick Meal course, especially when the trainer leads the Audio-lingual practice and facilitates communicative tasks.

The Final Justification

The establishment of the Asian Economic Community (AEC) will soon be realized. Out of all the organizational attempts to invest in the English language training as a means to cope with this approaching cooperation, the Quick Meal training course should be given the most consideration. With theoretical foundations laid and accounted for, the course is an alternative that organizations may try in order to prepare their members for the linguistic challenge that the AEC will bring in the coming years. ♦

References

- British Council. (n.d.). Direct method. Retrieved September 15, 2012, from <http://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/knowledge-database/direct-method>
- Chen, Y. & Wan, L. (2011). Research on the learning effects of multimedia assisted instruction on mandarin vocabulary for Vietnamese students: A preliminary study involving e- learning system. *Educational Research Review*, 6(17), 919-927. Retrieved September 26, 2012, from <http://www.academicjournals.org/err/PDF/Pdf%202011/5Nov/Chen%20and%20Chung.pdf>
- Garcia, P., Kupczynski, L., & Holland, G. (2011). Impact of teacher personality styles on academic excellence of secondary students. *National Forum of Teacher Education Journal*, 21(3). Retrieved September 25, 2012, from <http://www.nationalforum.com/Electronic%20Journal%20Volumes/Garcia,%20Patricia%20Impact%20of%20Teacher%20Personality%20Styles%20NFTEJ%20V21%20N3%202011.pdf>
- Griffiths, C. (2004, February). *Language learning strategies: Theory and research* (Occasional Paper No. 1). Retrieved September 25, 2012, from http://www.crie.org.nz/research-papers/c_griffiths_op1.pdf
- Harmer, J. (2002). *The practice of language teaching*. Essex: Pearson Education.
- Lunce, L. M. (2006). Simulations: Bringing the benefits of situated learning to the traditional classroom. *Journal of Applied Educational Technology*, 3(1). Retrieved September 26, 2012, from http://www.crie.org.nz/research-papers/c_griffiths_op1.pdf
- Nunan, D. (1991). Communicative tasks and the language curriculum. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25(2), 279-295. Retrieved September 25, 2012, from <http://tesolexpert.com/home/CommunicativeTasksAndTheLanguageCurriculum.pdf>
- Prakash, J. (2012). Short notes on the direct method of teaching english. Retrieved September 24, 2012, from <http://www.preservearticles.com/201105216929/direct-method-of-teaching-english.html>
- Richards, J. C. (2006). *Communicative Language Teaching Today*. NY: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved September 26, 2012, from http://www.cambridge.org/other_files/downloads/esl/booklets/Richards-Communicative-Language.pdf
- The National Capital Language Resource Center. (n.d.). Teaching goals and method: Communicative competence. Retrieved September 15, 2012, from <http://www.nclrc.org/essentials/goalsmethods/goal.htm>