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1. Introduction:

English as a world language plays a big part in our every day life. Due to new professions which are developing in a very short time these days and due to the trade relations with countries in East and West, the ability to speak foreign languages, especially English has become a basic skill.

It is not only the field of trade relations or economy that requires a good knowledge of foreign languages. Many public, private or scientific fields also require a broad knowledge of languages.

English is the language which takes up the leading part in the field of foreign languages.

This has several reasons:

- English is the lingua franca, a language which is used all over the world.
- English is the language which is used to communicate in many fields of profession, such as the computer business, the airport, the media and many more.
- some English words have even been integrated into the German language: People use the word „news“ instead of the German word *Nachrichten*, they understand words like „movie“, „life“ or „cool“.

As English is the dominating language in the field of foreign languages, it is not surprising, if also pupils are required to learn proper English at school.

According to the curricula of Baden - Württemberg, one of the major aims of English teaching is to enable pupils to use English in their later business or private life.

English therefore takes over the main function as a means of communication: Pupils should be able to talk to their friends in English, as well as they should be able to use it in their later job life for negotiating with other firms or writing letters etc.

Very often, English lessons consist of textwork - with most of the texts stemming from the text-book used in the lessons - and exercises where grammatical structures are trained.

Therefore, it is often claimed that the major aim of English teaching, which is to enable the pupils to communicate, is not reached.

In the following report, two major approaches in foreign language teaching will be discussed. Examples of exercises that go with these approaches will be presented and the effects that each approach has on pupils will be discussed, too.

In the last part, the personal reflection, the advantages and disadvantages of the two approaches will be examined.

The basic question on which the discussion of the two approaches is founded is:

“Which approach is useful in English teaching“- useful in a way that both, teacher and pupils profit from it.

2. Different approaches:

Two major approaches that exist as far as foreign language teaching is concerned can be described in two key words:

the “language-oriented approach“

the “ message-oriented approach“

These two key words are chosen on purpose, as they summarize the main issues of each approach.

The “*language-oriented approach*“ can be described as a teaching method with the focus on grammatical structures and grammar itself. Teachers who favour this method of foreign language teaching, put their emphasis on the teaching of grammar rules and exercises where grammatical structures are tested. They prefer an exercise where mistakes can be checked and do not put any emphasis on the meaning of the exercise or the effect the exercise has on the pupils.

Many teachers love to teach grammar this way, because it has a lot of advantages for them: Firstly, the mistakes which the pupils make can be seen and corrected easily, as the exercises only have one correct answer. Secondly, certain grammar rules can be created which the pupils have to learn and repeat - all this reduces the work a teacher has.

Typical exercises of this teaching method are the exercises below:

Exercise A:

Exercise B:

Exercise A is a typical drill pattern exercise in which the pupils have to repeat the same sentences every time. They have to write the same question in each part of the exercise and they also have to write most parts of the answer all the time.

They only have to change some single words in the answer, like *record* or *cassette-recorder*.

| | |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>“What have you got, Chris?”</i> | <i>“I’ve got a record“</i> |
| -, - | <i>“.....a cassette- recorder“</i> |
| <i>etc.</i> | |

Usually, the words that have to be changed in the answer are the ones that are required to be learned in the particular chapter of the book.

This kind of exercise very often seems extremely useless to pupils. For example in exercise A, they do not know Chris personally, but have to ask him several questions. Questions that are predicted and where they do not have any choice, as they have to name the things in the pictures.

The next problematic construction in this exercise is the fact that pupils have to be the questioner and Chris at the same time - they have to ask Chris a question and answer the question for Chris.

This fact makes the exercise very unrealistic and therefore makes the pupils aware of the fact that this exercise was only constructed to check certain grammatical structures. (In this case, the exercise was constructed to check to questions „Have you got...?“ and the corresponding answer „I have got..“.)

Once pupils realize that the only reason behind an exercise is to check their ability to use certain grammatical structures, they will lose their fun in doing these exercises.

Exercise B is a exercise of the same type, but does not have the same strict regulations as exercise A.

In exercise B, the pupils do have the possibility to create sentences of their own. But again the possibilities that the pupils have, are restricted. The pupils have to use „a lot of“ and „a few“ in every sentence. They also have the pictures of the things they should talk about. Again this is an exercise where the teacher can check certain grammatical structures easily.

The exercises above were taken from a book for 5th grade.

Normally teachers should try to create their lessons in 5th grade in such a way that pupils like to learn English. This is not an extremely difficult task, as beginners of English normally have a certain motivation to learn English, because it is something completely new for them and therefore has a certain fascination.

Exercises like those shown above, destroy the natural motivation which language beginners have. This is done by two factors: Firstly, the exercises always follow the same pattern (therefore they are also called ‘pattern drills’) which creates a certain boredom.

Secondly, the motivation is destroyed as the pupils realize that the teacher’s reason for doing the exercises is to find out their level of grammatical competence. They notice that the teacher does not do those exercises because he is interested in the answers the pupils give (as far as individual answers are possible), but because he wants to train and to test the pupils.

Once the point is reached where pupils notice that they only have to learn grammatical structures in English lessons, English as a language loses its special fascination and becomes another boring subject for the pupils.

With this approach, the claim to use English as a means of communication is not fulfilled.

Here, English does not have a communicative meaning, which might also contribute to the fact that English loses its fascination and becomes boring for the pupils.

Of course, learning a foreign language has to do with learning the structures and especially the grammar of the target language which might be boring for some pupils.

One way to extinguish the boredom from learning grammar is to create interesting exercises which can be done easily by giving every single exercise a meaning.

These really practical sentence : “Create interesting exercises by giving them a message“ leads to the second key word in foreign language teaching: the “*message-oriented approach*“. Here message is more important than accuracy. This means for a teacher who deals with this method that he has to neglect the mistakes the pupils make while they are producing sentences of their own. All the exercises that are used during an English lesson should have a real meaning. Instead of using pattern drills to practise the new vocabulary, it is more effective to create exercises which seem meaningful to pupils. Pupils have to realize that the exercises are not intended to train grammar, but that there is a certain message behind each exercise.

While dealing with this approach, it is also important to mention the way that the mistakes which the pupils make should be treated.

The message that an answer of a pupil contains should be evaluated more than the mistakes which the pupil makes.

Example:

Pupils in a class are supposed to express their own thoughts about the topic “ *teenagers - their needs and duties.* “

A boy wants to emphasize what a friend of him is allowed to do; he therefore says: “ *But Tom gone to the disco last night!* “

A teacher should not correct this answer by showing the boy that he used the wrong tense and by making him repeat the correct answer. It is more important to keep the conversation between the pupils alive - a teacher who corrects every mistake that pupils do weakens their self-confidence which might have the consequence that pupils say less.

A good way of correcting this boy might be to repeat the sentence, the boy said and reproduce it the right way. So, a teacher might say: “ *Oh, so Tom really went to the disco last night? That is really interesting. How do you feel about that?* “

While using this way of correction, the teacher has the possibility to keep the conversation alive, to express his own interest in the topic and to make sure that the other pupils heard his correct reproduction of the sentence.

It is very important that teachers show their own interest in a topic, as usually teachers start a conversation. Starting a conversation without having any interest in it is more than unnatural.

In the example above, the teacher did not put his emphasis on the correct answer, but on the opinion which the boy wanted to express - the teacher preferred message before accuracy.

A good example of an exercise that contains a meaning is a role play. The teacher has the possibility to choose the topic of the role play. While doing this, he has the chance to choose a topic which corresponds with the actual chapter of the textbook. There is also the possibility to make the pupils practise certain vocabulary by giving them key words which have to be used during the role play.

Pupils can be given small papers where their characters and the situation of the role play are written down.

Here is an example of such a paper:

Pupil number one:

You are an assistant in a bookshop. The shop is just about to close, but then one last customer rushes in. You have a date with your friend, therefore you really want to close your shop.

Convince the customer to come again the next day.

Pupil number two:

You are a customer in a book shop. It is 18.00 and the shop is about to close. You managed to rush into the shop, before the doors were closed. You would like to buy a new book, but the shop assistant wants to convince you to leave the shop and to come again the next day.

Convince the shop assistant that he must sell the book to you.

Exercises should always be created in such a way that the pupils have possibilities to express their own thoughts. When using such exercises there is one key word that has to be considered: respect!

Teachers should respect the courage of pupils to express their own ideas and thoughts, especially if the pupils are in the middle of puberty, where they do not always want to express their own thoughts or do not want to be the center of interest.

The fact that English should function as a means of communication is not always aware to pupils. Of course, exercises which have a real meaning and which are interesting for the pupils evoke conversations and fulfill the communicative aim of foreign language teaching, but nevertheless, this is not always obvious and pupils do not really know that they can and even do use English in communication.

One problem concerning the *language-oriented approach* was that pupils might get the impression that English is only a subject where grammar and vocabulary is learned. Pupils do not get the impression that English is also used outside their classroom.

Pupils must realize that they can **use** English! Pupils have to notice that English is not a subject like physics or algebra, which can only be used in school, but that English is a language which is spoken in the world.

The answer to the question "*Why do I learn English*" should not be

"Because I have to." or *"Because it is a subject that is taught in school."*,

but the answer should be : **"Because I can use English to communicate with other people. I can also use English while visiting other countries .**

These answers are a good motivation for pupils to learn English. Usually pupils who begin learning English have the motivation to learn foreign languages.

With growing age, pupils lose their motivation when English becomes harder to learn.

Another problem pupils have is that English is usually only used inside their classroom.

They never have the possibility to use their competence of speaking English outside the classroom. It is a good idea to create a classroom for English outside the school building.

The *message-oriented approach* which does not stick to the learning of grammar rules, provides a wide range of such possibilities, like school exchanges, simulations or projects.

One possibility which will be shown in the following is the project "airport":

An international or even a national airport is a place where a lot of English is spoken.

Pilots use English to communicate with the tower, airplane crews from England, America and many other countries have English as their mother tongue and even a lot of passengers speak English.

While visiting an airport, pupils could use their English in real life. The main questions for them could be *"How much did I learn in ... years? How much English can I use?"*

A one-day-trip to the airport will be enough for the pupils to find out how much English they have learned up to then. Of course, such a trip needs to be well-prepared.

The first step will be to fix a date for the airport visit. It might be a good idea to consult the airport management in order to see on which day most planes and flights from English-speaking countries take place.

It is also a good idea to inform the airport management that a school class will be coming to train and test their competence of English.

Maybe the management can tell where good places to meet foreign people are. It might even be possible that pupils might get the chance to have a look in the crew lounge, where crews meet before and after a flight.

In the weeks before the trip, the teacher should provide the pupils with the vocabulary they will need. Texts about airports can be read and written, posters can be arranged and the classroom can be decorated with them. Pupils will be motivated to get more information about airports and will certainly be eager to learn their vocabulary if they have an aim - the trip to the airport.

The next step will be to arrange the tasks for the airport visit. Different groups have to be founded which prepare different exercises.

Those exercises might be:

- to interview people at the airport in English (Where are they flying to ? Where are they coming from? If the people are kind enough to give reasons for their trips this will also be interesting.)
- to find out where English is used at the airport. Pupils could use video cameras and cameras to take pictures.
- to interview crew members of English or American airlines (this could be arranged in advance by the teacher)
- etc.

In the weeks before the trip, the different groups should prepare their exercises properly, so that they will all know what to do when they arrive at the airport.

The interview group should prepare all the questions for each interview. Different pairs should be formed - a pupil who asks the questions and a pupil who takes notes.

It would also be nice if a photo of every interviewee could be taken.

The videogroup should learn how to deal with cameras and might even make a video tape of the preparations.

Every group should present their individual project or task to the whole class, so that all pupils are informed about what the other groups will be doing during the day at the airport.

It might be a good idea if other teachers or parents join the group at the trip to help the pupils, especially because video cameras might cause some problems.

After the trip to the airport, every group should present their result to the whole class.

The last step will be a presentation of the project “airport“ to parents and other people who are interested. A good possibility to present such a project is a school fair or a parents meeting.

In class work, the video tapes can be cut. The whole class should discuss and decide which parts of the video tape or which photos will be presented.

The best interviews can be written on posters which can be put on the walls. Each poster could consist of the written interview and a picture of the interviewee.

It would also be interesting to mark the places where the people flew to on a world map.

This project might be an interesting alternative to textwork about planes or airports.

Realizing that English is **not** a subject like others and realizing that English can be used and needed in real life might be motivating for pupils to study hard and maybe even learn the “boring grammar rules“!

3. Reflection:

The diagram on the next page shows a general summary of the two approaches which were discussed above.

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| <p>message-oriented</p> | <p>advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - topics have a real meaning => pupils are interested - teachers respect all answers, mistakes are not very important ☛ pupils feel respected and feel free to express their opinion <p>⇒ the communicative aim of language teaching is reached! English is used as a means of communication</p> | <p>disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the preparation needs more time |
| <p>language-oriented</p> | <p>advantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - teachers are able to correct exercises or tests easier, as there is only one correct answer (right or wrong). - the preparation of the lessons requires less time | <p>disadvantages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - pupils realize that there is no real meaning behind an exercise - pupils realize that the teacher is not really interested in their opinion, but in their ability to use grammatical structures. ☛ English lessons become boring for them. <p>⇒ the communicative aim of language teaching is not reached.</p> |

Some teachers might say that it is very difficult and needs a lot of time to use the message-oriented approach and to create lessons which have a real meaning behind them.

But in fact, it is not that difficult - one item of each English lesson that has a real meaning is: class organization. Class organization is real communication for the pupils and the teacher, as the message is very important for all of them.

Pupils want to ask a really important question and teachers want to give help or instructions. For both of them, the message behind all the statements is important - therefore it is real communication for them.

Teachers should try to do all class organizations right from the beginning in English.

It is a good idea to make posters on which the most important phrases are written down.

These posters can be made in group work by the pupils. The advantage of this method is that the pupils will always remember the German expressions of the phrases, because they wrote them down themselves and they will not destroy the posters easily, because they know how much work was needed to create all the posters on the wall.

Examples of some posters which can be used for class organization can be found on the next page.

What can you say, when the lesson starts?

- Good morning!
- Sorry, I'm late.
- I missed my bus/ my train.
- May I leave earlier today?
- I have to go to the doctor.
- Can I open the window please?

What can you say during the lesson?:

- I'm sorry, I haven't done my homework.
- Sorry, what page are we on?
- What is.....in English, please?
- Can you spell it, please?
- Can you speak louder, please?
- Could you write.....on the board, please?
- Can I go to the toilet, please?

What can you say at the end of the lesson?:

- What is for homework, please?
- Sorry, what is the homework, please?
- Goodbye.
- Bye.

In consideration of all the advantages, the *message-oriented approach* has, it seems very scaring to me that many teachers still use the *language-oriented approach*.

Besides the advantages of the *message-oriented approach* which were shown above, there are other items that speak well for the *message-oriented approach*.

It is provable, that also in language theories, there has been a change from theories which have their focus on language to theories which have their focus on communication.

As it is shown in the report by Martha Pennington, there is a tendency among some researchers to neglect the non-interactional orientations to language and to support the interactional orientations to language.

non-interactional:

traditional grammar
functional grammar
minimalism

focus on language:

sentence structure
functional basis of grammar
human language and language
learning

interactional:

incremental grammar
action grammar
relevance theory

focus on communication:

spoken discourse
actions performed with language
utterance interpretation

Shouldn't this be a sign for all foreign language teachers to support the position of foreign languages as a means of communication? Approaches which have their focus on communicative skills and which respect the messages that their pupils produce more than the mistakes they make, should therefore be the centre of foreign language teaching.

A second, but even more important item are psychological researches which should also be taken into consideration while thinking about the correct approach in foreign language teaching.

Researchers found out that the brain has to do with the meaning of a sentence.

There is one main sentence which Mrs. Christison from the Universtiy of Utah formulated and which should be considered by all foreign language teachers:

Our brain is meaning driven- it helps to construct meaning.

The didactic consequence should therefore be that our material, which is used in lessons must be meaningful to the learner!

In consideration of all the advantages the *message-oriented approach* has, it should be easy for English teachers to pick out the approach which is better for the pupils, as they do not lose their fun in learning English and which is also better for the teachers as they can reach the major aim of foreign language teaching: communication.

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