

Teaching Speaking Skills to Adult English Language Learners through ALM

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Abstract—Audio-lingual Method (ALM) is a teaching approach that is claimed that ineffective for teaching second/foreign languages. Because some linguists and second/foreign language teachers believe that ALM is a rote learning style. However, this study is done on a belief that ALM will be able to solve Thais' English speaking problem. This paper aims to report the findings on teaching English speaking to adult learners with an "adapted ALM", one distinction of which is to use Thai as the medium language of instruction.

The participants are consisted of 9 adult learners. They were allowed to speak English more freely using both the materials presented in the class and their background knowledge of English. At the end of the course, they spoke English more fluently, more confidently, to the extent that they applied what they learnt both in and outside the class.

Keywords—Teaching English, Audio Lingual Method.

I. INTRODUCTION

ENGLISH subject is one of the subjects that included in Thai curriculum for a long time. Primary students in Thailand must study English as a required subject as well as high school students. However, the research by EF-“Education First” revealed that Thailand ranks near the bottom in an English proficiency survey. The survey on adults was conducted by the global leader in international education, EF Education First out of 60 countries and territories where English is not their mother tongue, Thailand manages only 55th place. The survey is conducted in the realization that English is a language for communicating in the globalized era.

The writer believes that there are two main reasons that lead into the problem. The first one is the emphasis on Grammar Translation method for Thai students. Grammar translation Method is not emphasis on listening and speaking skills. Grammar Translation Method is emphasis on grammar. Teachers, who teaching secondary school students use this method in class. The primary goal for teachers is that teaching students to pass the entrance exam. High school students wish to pass the entrance exam to the top university. The entrance exam is emphasis on grammar and reading skills [1]. The second is that teaching English in Thailand is teaching English as a foreign language. Many students have a chance to speak English only in class [2]. When they are outside the class, they switch language to their mother tongue language.

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The survey of Chamaiporn Puttarat, Sukumal Nilrat and Saowapak Suttichai found that many students would like to study speaking skill the most [3]-[5]. Therefore, the question “how to improve the English skills for Thais who have a basic skill of English” is raised in my mind. Many linguists, scholars, and teachers realize the problem. They try to find the best solution.

The writer who has an experience in teaching English for Thai students about five years believes that Audio-lingual Method (ALM) can apply with other methods to teach English. ALM is emphasis on listening and speaking skill. Thus, ALM is suitable for teaching speaking skills to adult learners.

II. OBJECTIVE

To give a result of teaching English by adapted ALM.

III. HYPOTHESIS

The participants speak English more fluently and more confidently to the extent that they applied what they learnt both inside and outside the class.

IV. BACKGROUND OF ALM

The entry of the United States into the World War II had an important role on language teaching in America. The government commissioned American universities to develop foreign language programs for military personnel. Thus the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) was established in 1942 to supply the US government with personnel who fluent in German, French, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Malay, and other languages. The objective of the army program was for students to attain conversational proficiency in a variety of foreign languages. ALM has gradually improved by the linguists. It is also called the Army Method, Oral Approach, Structural Approach, Linguistic Method, Michigan Method, Aural –Oral Approach and ALM [6]-[8]. It is widespread use in the 1960s.

ALM lasted only about two years. It is criticized on two points. The first, the oriental foundations of Audio Lingual Method were attached as being unsound in terms of both language theory and learning theory. The second is practioners found that the practical results fell short of expectations. Students were often found to be unable to transfer skills acquired through ALM to real communication outside the classroom.

The MIT linguist Noam Chomsky rejected the structuralist approach to language description as well as the behaviorist theory of language. “Language is not a habit structure.”

Chomsky's theory of transformational grammar proposed that the fundamental properties of language derive from innate aspects of the mind and from how humans process experience through language.

V. PRINCIPLE AND PROCEDURE OF ALM

A. Principle and Technique of ALM are as the Following [7]-[11].

1) ALM principle was derived from structural linguistics. Structural linguistics had developed in part as a reaction to traditional grammar. Language was viewed as a system of structurally related elements for the encoding of meaning, the elements being phonemes, morphemes, words, structures, and sentence types. The term structural referred to these characteristic as following:

1. Elements in a language were thought of as being literally produced in a rule-governed way.
2. Language samples could be exhaustively described at any structural level of description (phonetics, phonemic, morphological, etc.)
3. Linguistic levels were thought of as systems within systems

An important tenet of structural linguistics was that the primary medium of language is oral. Speech is language. Many languages do not have a written form. Learning to speak comes before learning to read and write.

2) Behaviorism is another empirically based approach to the study of human behavior. To the behaviorist, the human being is an organism capable of a wide repertoire of behaviors. The occurrence of these behaviors is dependent on three crucial elements in learning:

1. Stimulus, which serves to elicit behavior
 2. response triggered by a stimulus
 3. Reinforcement which serves to mark the response as being appropriate and encourages. The repetition of the response in the future.
- 3) Brooks lists the following procedures that the teacher should adapt in using the Audiolingual Method [12]:
1. Students listen to a model dialogue either read by the teacher or on tape.
 2. They repeat each line of the dialogue.
 3. A line maybe broken down and train many times in case of students can't remember.
 4. The students repeat whole the dialogue with teacher.
 5. The dialogue is read aloud in chorus, and can separate to small group to one by one.
 6. Certain key structures from the dialogue are selected and used as the basis for pattern drills of different kinds.
 7. Review the dialogue again

VI. TEACHING TECHNIQUES

Drills and pattern practice are used as the following:

1. Repetition drill – the students repeats aloud with teacher.
2. Backward build-up expansion drill - this technique is used when students encounter the long lines. Teacher breaks down the line into several parts. Students repeat a part of

the sentence. It begins from the end of the sentence to the beginning. Students expand what they repeated part by part until they are able repeat the entire line.

3. Chain drill - To make students ask and answer questions with each other.
4. Dialogue memorization – students take the role one person in the dialogue and the teacher the other. Switch roles and memorize the other person's part.
5. Single slot substitution drill – teacher gives students a line from the conversation, then substitute with the given words into the sentence in the correct place.
6. Multiple slot substitution drill - That is the same with single slot substitution drill. However, more words are fitted into different slots in the dialogue.
7. Use of minimal pair - Teacher chooses pairs of words which differ in only are sound, for example ship/sheep

VII. ADAPTED ALM TECHNIQUE

Adapted ALM in this research is not pure ALM. The writer adapts other teaching approaches to the ALM. The writer chooses the best techniques in each approach as the following:

1. Using Thai language as a medium language in class. This technique is different from the original technique that is the target language is the only language to be used in the classroom. Using the mother language of participants in class adapts from GT Grammar Translation Method [7], [8].
2. Action and teaching materials are used in the classroom. A wide variety of realia, posters, and props are in the classroom. Many teaching methods use teaching materials in class such as NA, TPR, DM, and CLT. The comprehensible input from NA is adapted in the method.
3. Making the participants feel secure and unstressed. This technique adapts from the following teaching theory:
 - 1) The Natural Approach [7], [8]. The Affective Filter Hypothesis is used in class. The variables such as fear, nervousness, and boredom can affect the acquisition of a second language. Therefore, making participants feel free is better.
 - 2) Community Language Learning [7], [8]. The teachers make a statement of the goals and guidelines for the course. This one will help participants know what will happen in the classroom.
 - 3) Desuggestopedia [7], [8]. The participants choose new names and identities. They feel less inhibited since their performance is really that of a different person.
 - 4) Total Physical Response [7], [8]. Participants are happy with the classroom when teacher uses action while speaking. The action will help them remember the dialogue.
 - 5) Giving the participants to tell their feelings after class is ended. Participants can tell their experience and share it with teacher and others friends.

VIII. METHODOLOGY

In this study "Teaching Speaking Skills to Adult English

Language Learners through ALM” uses qualitative method. This part will discuss the point as following:

A. Samples

The population samples are consisted of 9 learners who are one-stop service personnel in SuanSunandhaRajabhat University.

B. Instrumentation

1. The model dialogue
2. Realia, posters, pictures and props
3. Vocabulary card

C. Duration

This study is done every Tuesday and Thursday from 7th January to 13rd March 2014. There are 20 hours. One hour per each.

IX. RESULTS

The results of this study will discuss into three points as the following:

1. The participants can adapt the knowledge from the model dialogue into the real situation in the classroom. It means that language is not a habit structure. The participants can transfer skills acquired through ALM to real communication outside the classroom. For example, the topic “Describing goods and merchandising”, the participants can fill noun and adjective word into the blank.

A: Good morning. How may I help you?
 B: I lost my wallet. (1) I think left it in room number 3534.
 A: What does it look like?
 B: Well, it is a rectangular shape with a brown LV symbol on it. (2)
 A: Let me see. Is this yours?
 B: Yes that's mine. Thank you very much.

Fig. 1 A model conversation

*(1) and (2) in Fig. 1 are the words that the participants should substitute them with the new words.

TABLE I
 WORDS FOR SUBSTITUTING IN THE SLOT

(1) the first place	(2) the second place
Set 1 Pencil bag	It's dark blue with a white zipper.
Set 2 Purse	It's red with a floral patterns.
Set 3 Umbrella	It's a tube shape with a pink heart shaped on it.

From the above conversation, the participants should substitute into (1) and (2)

The teaching materials are placed on the table for participants to choose such as a pencil bag, a wallet, and an umbrella. The participant that is B in the conversation chooses set number three to make a conversation. A compound word “pencil bag” will substitute into (1). The participant adds a new vocabulary into (2) with the old structure that is “It's dark

blue with a white zipper and a brown monkey.” The participant can add more details because the pencil bag on the table has a monkey cartoon.

A: Good morning. Can I help you?
 B: Oh, yes. Could you please tell me where I can buy some snacks?
 A: Of course. You can buy it at the SSRU food plaza.

Fig. 2 A conversation about telling directions

One of the participants can substitute the compound word “the SSRU food plaza” with “the coffee café”. It's no need for teacher to give the words for participants. They can think and substitute in the slot by herself.

2. At the beginning, the participants need some helps from teacher when they encounter with some problems. For example, they can't memorize the dialogue. When participants study about 7 or 8 hours, they don't need any helps from teacher. They try to recall the conversation by themselves.
3. The participants can speak English with more fluently and more confidently. The writer can observe that at the end of each time, they try to speak English with teacher. They try to tell their everyday life in English.

X. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study analyzed “Teaching Speaking Skills to Adult English Language Learners through ALM” by the following two points:

A. Language Teaching Theory

ALM was popular around 1940-1960. It was used as a tool in teaching many languages. In Thailand, there's also in teaching French and German. There are two causes that led to the decline of ALM as stated in background of ALM section. The writer would like to suggest three points as the following:

1. There is little chance to speak English in Thailand for everyday life. It's difficult for Thais to practice speaking English. Most of participants speak English only when they are in classroom. That makes Thais are shy when they meet foreigners. The writer would like to suggest that the practice by ALM for Thais. ALM methodology allows participants to speak English for the first time of class. The writer believes it will help participants more confident when they speak. The participants don't worried when they make some mistakes because the teacher will help to correct it.
2. The results from this study found that the participants can adapt their knowledge to practice the conversation. This one can prove that participants don't learn by imitation and repetition. They can generate to the everyday conversation. The participants imitate the teacher from their understanding. They pay attention to the dialogue. The writer believes that Thais have a fundamental English

skill but they can't communicate. Because they lack of the speaking skill.

3. Thais familiar with the memorization pattern. They can memorize the multiplication table and the recitation. Also, the backward build-up drill is used with a long sentence. This method can help participants memorize the dialogue. If the participants can't memorize, the action will be used to help.

B. Applied Theory

The teaching methodology in this study is not pure ALM. The writer adapts many techniques into the classroom. Using Thai language in class is the strength of this study. Thai language is used as a medium between teacher and participants. The writer believes that using Thai language makes the participants more clearly understand.

The teacher interviews the participants after the class ended. More participants in class have an experience learning English with native speaker. The participants feel excited. However, they don't understand what the native speaker said. This leads to the participants are bored and don't want to study with native speaker.

After the participants study English with adapted ALM, they are happy. They are eager to learn English. It means that the participants understand the vocabulary and the whole conversation. They are not just only memorizing the conversation.

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