

DOGME TEACHING - A HUMANISTIC TASK BASED APPROACH TO LEARNING

Аннотация

В статье раскрываются преимущества и недостатки одной из коммуникативных методик обучения языку – Dogme, которая основана на преподавании языка без учебных пособий и материалов; внимание фокусируется на интерактивном взаимодействии учителя и ученика.

EFL teachers' rooms are often scenes of frantic activity: one teacher is cutting up pieces of paper, one is typing questions onto a computer, one is photocopying a resource pack, and one is illegally copying an activity from a course book his students don't use. In a Dogme world this room would be vastly different. Dogme proponents believe that with course books, videos, resource packs, etc teachers have forgotten the student, hence they are "waging war on materials-driven lessons"[2] in order to put the focus back onto the student. In its purest form there should be no materials other than those produced by the learners.

Could Dogme help us to focus more on the students and create the lesson in the classroom through natural liaison? Would they benefit?

1. The emergence of Dogme

To understand Dogme we need to consider briefly its position in the scheme of language teaching methodologies. It is not a revolutionary new belief in learning. We see it more as a natural development within the overall sphere of the Communicative Approach [1]. This approach views language as something better learned by trial and error while attempting to communicate, in contrast to the behaviourist basis of its forerunners that focused on repetition; *language is learned behaviour*.

In recent years attempts have been made to incorporate Humanistic Approaches into communicative language lessons. These are learner centered and take account of affective factors in language learning [1]. An example is Neuro Linguistic Programming, which is based on how individual learners differ and how to create the right learning environment [1]. If we combine these with the practical aims of Task Based Learning (TBL) then we can see Dogme beginning to emerge. TBL has the completion of a task, not language, as the driver, with language arising or 'emerging' during the course of a task, *possibly ad*

hoc. Dogme takes this further by suggesting that we should *only* work with the language that arises during this process and that the tasks should *not* be prepared in advance. Dogme doesn't suggest a hugely different understanding of *how* language is learned, but it does aim for a vastly different structuring of *what* the student learns. Dogme believes that all the material for the lesson should come from the students themselves. The materials the teachers often bring to the lesson are distanced from the learner – teachers may create material with their learners in mind but they usually do this hours or days after they last spoke to their students. Dogme's philosophy is that we should return to a purer state where students' needs are central and where communication is real, not contrived by external contexts such as course books.

2. What does Dogme mean for the classroom?

The answer to this question depends on how pure you want to be with the approach. When Thornbury and Forrest first propounded it around 6 years ago the ideas were dramatic and clearly intended to shake up the EFL profession. Teaching should be done using the internal resources of the teacher and students. Any external material should be used in its natural location e.g. books - in a library. There should be no pre-planned syllabi nor graded grammar. Language work should emerge from the lesson. Testing must be negotiated with the student [3].

The guiding principle for these dramatic rules on method is that language is an “emergent phenomenon” [4]. This means that it arises from social process (“language is not a subject – it is a medium” [4]) and the teacher's role is to “scaffold” this process i.e. help to facilitate it, manage it, and then provide focus and assistance on appropriate language systems such as grammar. External structure such as imported material is incompatible because it “positions learners as passive consumers of grammar”[4] and sells students the debatable message that language runs along a predetermined route [5].

A less strict form of Dogme has since developed. Thornbury says Dogme is not about materials-free activities but it is about materials-light teaching. The lesson should be created *primarily* out of the language that emerges from the classroom. Thornbury sees the important thing as capturing text in the classroom and then putting it to work [3].

A practical example of Dogme (Teaching without material)

How do we manage an entire lesson without material?

Text Creation

The text created could be student initiated (e.g. they decide they want to talk about politics), or by a prompt from the teacher (e.g. Teacher says 'I saw a film, get information about this film by asking me questions').

Text Capture

The text can then be captured by recording or by students writing. It would appear that these are the only two realistic ways of capturing text to provide the listening or reading to provide context for language focus.

Language Work

It can then be put to work by looking at ways of improving it, by re-formulating it, or re-formatting it (e.g. from dialogue to letter), etc.

Summarize

Finally the work that has been done should be summarized.

3. Advantages of Dogme

1. For the teacher there is no need to prepare extra material.
2. Teachers are perhaps less likely to become bored with EFL teaching. Dogme keeps things fresh and dynamic for the teacher. As one teacher said, there is a feeling of self-confidence and anticipation that comes from knowing that one can walk into any classroom with the bare essentials ... and generate relevant material in an enjoyable context that will feel fresh to everyone involved (including the teacher).
3. The students don't need to buy a course book.
4. It is student centered – they are in-charge of the syllabus (autonomy and empowerment).
5. Because the text comes from the students there should be no danger of irrelevance and less chance of boredom.
6. The teacher focuses on the students more completely because he has no distractions such as a plan and material. He operates in symbiosis with the students and their need. This suggests he'll have more empathy with them.
7. Students needs dictate the syllabus. As a learner I know it can be frustrating when a teacher tells you that you aren't ready for a certain structure, despite the fact that you feel it to be necessary.
8. If there is a natural order to language learning irrespective of the teaching programme and students only learn what they are ready to learn, texts that they themselves create may be more valuable because they will indicate what the student is striving for and perhaps what they are now ready for.

4. Disadvantages

1. Students are used to studying within a syllabus structure and using a course book, so abandoning them would likely be met with suspicion at best.

2. The possible view that the teacher is *winging it*. In our experience students like to see a well-prepared teacher. The absence of material and the apparently ad hoc nature of the Dogme procedure might result in distrust or hostility e.g. 'We paid good money for a lesson – it should be well planned'.

3. Grammar rules mean order and Dogme appears to be task based. In our experience the majority of learners come from a grammar focussed background and are often more trusting of the teacher once they are sure he knows his grammar and can explain it.

4. A meaning-driven (as opposed to form-driven) pedagogy presents seemingly intractable management problems to the novice and non-native teacher. Pre-selected language that has been created prior to the lesson (in a coursebook or by a teacher for example) is safer. Couldn't the lesson all go horribly wrong? It could be chaos! Careful planning and material selection keeps order.

5. Can students really be in charge of the learning process? Perhaps the teacher knows better than they what language and skills they need.

6. Exam courses to a large extent dictate the syllabus. Is it possible to use Dogme when students need direction to pass an exam?

It is perfectly possible that some students simply have unrealistic expectations of what they can get out of group lessons. Experimenting with Dogme could allow students to break the inflexibility of the planned lessons, or it could prove to some students that their demands are unrealistic or at least not matched by other students – both results would be worthwhile.

List of sources used:

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2. Thornbury S. *A Dogma for EFL* // <http://www.thornburyscott.com/tu/Dogma%20article.htm>

3. Thornbury S. *Teaching Unplugged (or That's Dogme with an E)* // www.thornburyscott.com/tu/Its%20magazine.htm

4. *Thornbury S., Meddings L. Dogme out in the open //*
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