

A Theoretical Overview on Teaching Sunrise Program to Kurdish EFL Learners: Sunrise 1 and Sunrise 2 as Examples

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Abstract—This paper is an attempt to tackle some theoretical issues in Sunrise program which is the latest program used for teaching English language in Iraqi Kurdistan region. It plays a stunning repertoire in teaching and using English language because it changed the way of teaching English language from teaching about language to the practical use of English. This program has been being taught to Kurdish EFL learners approximately for two decades. Thus, many studies have been conducted concerning the application of Sunrise in the field of pedagogy; however, there exist few ones about the theoretical aspects of that program. The main issue of this paper is to shed light on some theoretical linguistic aspects of Sunrise program that have a negative impact upon learning. In Sunrise, priority has been given to the existence of communicative approach which is the most significant and dominant one at present. The use of this approach has made students not to be passive participants anymore, and has also made them get involved in the dynamics of teaching. This paper concludes that too much repetition of the subjects, irregular classification of alphabetical letters and some grammatical deficiencies have made the program not to be satisfied by all teachers and students.

Keywords Sunrise program, Communicative approach, Repetition, Alphabetical Letters

Introduction:

The current program introduced by Ministry of Education / Kurdistan Region of Iraq to teach English to Kurdish learners as a Foreign Language (henceforth EFL) is Sunrise. This program is well-organized, applied to all levels of education from kindergarten level to twelfth high school level. Each course of Sunrise incorporates student's book, activity book, teacher's book, audio CD as well as flashcards, the latter are taught to six levels of basic schools.

For ages, the Kurdish EFL learners suffered a lot from old English language program entitled (The New English Course for Iraq) focusing on language teaching methods, such as the grammar-translation method, direct method, and audio-lingual method (Sofi-Karim, 2015, p.43). Nowadays, Sunrise is a good alternative to that old program; it is well received by teachers, educators, supervisors, and administrators. This program has many advantages, such as it grabs the students'

attention with colorful pictures, fascinating cartoons, moving scenes, and real life activities, etc. Most of the tasks, subjects, exercises, activities and discussions reflect real-life situations and develop students' critical thinking. This program enables the students to learn through fun, activities, repetition, communication, videos, audios, etc. In this program, communicative approach has been given top priority. Richards and Farrell (2012, p. 186-187) believe that this approach teaches a second or foreign language by developing the students' communicative competence; it helps the students learn a new language via real communication within the classroom rather than emphasis on rules, regulations, and accuracy of grammar and translation. Students are heavily included in class communication, thus, they can be active and diligent participants in communicative activities.

From the perspective of the dynamics of communication, this program strengthens the students' ability in English language learning through the communicative approach. The consequence of this approach indicates that the learner could be quite fluent in a foreign language through exposure to that language. However, this approach does not pay attention to the students' scientific ability (Schmitt and Celce - Murcia, 2002, p. 7).

This paper consists of an introduction, two parts and the concluding points. The first part sheds light on some theoretical perspectives of Sunrise 1, including the alphabetical knowledge, the structure of vocabularies and the frequency of the topics taught to students. The second part handles some theoretical overviews of Sunrise 2, including the asymmetric relationship between letters and the given examples, the repetition of the topics and grammatical aspects.

1. Sunrise 1

The general outline of Sunrise 1 indicates that it is made up of eighteen units, and six revisions. Each unit consists of three lessons and there is an additional unit for revision at the end of any three units to revise the subjects that have been taught during these three units

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1.1 Alphabetical Knowledge

Teaching alphabetical knowledge is not an easy task in any language because students face the letters of a foreign language for the first time. Thus, the teachers should be very much attentive; they should teach the students to think, recognize, name, read, and write the letters of that language. They have to employ various activities to develop an alphabet system, such as games, fun, stories, flashcard, cartoons, etc. Then, the

students can be familiar with the letter name, letter shape, and letter sound (Treiman, 2005, p. 587).

The Sunrise 1 program includes all the letters of the English language, the basic students can be acquainting with them in the first year. At the beginning of teaching foreign languages, the students of the elementary stage at the basic schools should be familiar with the letters of the foreign language because these small units establish the basis of familiarity with the foreign language. The alphabetical letters of any language should be simplified so that foreign language students can learn them easily. As far as the Sunrise 1 program is concerned, the twenty-six letters of English language exist in the book, but they have not been divided into the units evenly. The uneven division of the letters into the units can be apparently perceived. When the students study the first three units of Sunrise 1 including nine lessons and a revision, they do not see any kind of English letter. Instead of the letters, the students are taught some other subjects, such as saying hello p.4, simple classroom language p.7, and simple instructions p.10. During these three units, some words are taught to the students, such as hello, play, look, sing, clap, listen, come here, stand up, sit down, etc. The attentive look at these words indicates that they have been structured according to a phonological arrangement of the sounds whose written forms are expressed by the graphemes. If the students had been taught the letters in the preceding units, they would have been acquainted with the letters earlier.

In unit four, students of the first basic stage see the first English letter for the first time. Basically, these letters are painted and presented in an interesting way and they have been illustrated with examples very well. When the students study the letter (a) p.15, the word apple has been exemplified and the picture of a big red apple has been drawn so that the students can understand it better. Thus, the students are taught one letter in each unit till unit nine, but this classification changes in units ten and eleven because they study two letters in each unit, meaning that they study (g, h) p.35 in unit ten and (i, j) p.38 in unit eleven. On the other hand, this classification changes again in unit twelve because the number of letters increases to three letters per unit, meaning that (k, l, m) p.41 are taught to the students in unit twelve. This classification changes again in units thirteen and fourteen because the students study two letters in each unit, meaning that the letters (n, o) p.45 have been placed in unit thirteen and (p, q) p.48 have been placed in unit fourteen. The number of letters changes again in unit fifteen because they study three letters (r, s, t) p.51 in that unit. The continuous change of letters does not stop because each of the last three units includes two letters, meaning that (u, v) p.55 have been placed in unit sixteen, (w, x) p.58 have been placed in unit seventeen and (y, z) p.61 have been placed in unit eighteen. If someone looks at this uneven classification of English letters into the successive units of Sunrise 1, he will come out to the fact that this is an abnormal classification of the letters. This imbalanced style of classification might have negative repercussions on the mind of the students and their learning. If the syllabus designers had classified the letters into the units and lessons evenly, there would not have been so many changes in the arrangement of letters and the students would not have been obliged to study two or three letters in one unit.

1.2 The Vocabulary

This program has provided the students with a variety of vocabularies wherever necessary and the meaning of vocabularies has been illustrated with colorful and fascinating pictures. This one creates a good pedagogical world for the students. For the ease of learning, when there is the name of a bird, an animal, or an instrument, there will be a beautiful picture of the bird, animal, or instrument. Most of the words given as examples are simple and appropriate words for that stage because they can be easily articulated by the students of the first basic stage, such as apple, cat, one, two, three, four, bag, duck, egg, fig, girl, hen, kite, lion, nut, pen, sock, etc. On the other hand, there can be found some words that consist of more than one syllable; they are di-syllabic or tri-syllabic words. These words require more muscular energy to be articulated by the students. Steinberg (1991, p. 149) believes that among the stages of child language acquisition, children reach a stage which is known as the holophrastic stage, they can express single-unit utterances. These single units may be words, phrases or sentences, almost all the words are made up of one syllable that is why they can be articulated easily. These words that are more than one syllable include ice-cream p.38, congratulation p. 50, rabbit p. 51, umbrella p.55, window p. 58, yogurt, zebra p.61, etc. Each of these words is either di-syllabic or tri-syllabic; they are somehow difficult and cannot be articulated easily.

Sometimes there is no connection between the example and the picture illustrating that example. The letter h has been exemplified by the word hen and the picture of a hen has been drawn. The problem is that the picture does not look like a hen, but a cock.

1.3 The topics

The program of Sunrise 1 incorporates a group of useful topics, such as saying hello, saying goodbye, asking questions, introducing yourself, congratulating someone, counting, talking about colors, numbers, etc. These are useful topics because they are simple topics of daily conversation, students need them in daily communication and they are practical topics because they encourage the students to participate in classroom activities. The primary school topics should refer to issues that are based on students' life, culture and age. They should be taught topics moving their feelings, such as art, music, game, fun, etc. The topics include various activities that strengthen the pedagogical aspect of language. However, many topics mentioned in the introductory units have been repeated in the other units. It is intrinsically a negative point because it enables the students not to feel a new topic in a new unit. There can be apparently found many repeated topics. For example, the students study a topic in unit one which is entitled saying hello p.6, they are also taught a topic in unit six which is entitled saying hello and goodbye p.22. The students think that these two topics are identical with a slight difference; the comparison of these two topics indicates that the topic in unit one has been repeated in unit six, but another topic has been added to it.

After that, the students are taught a topic in unit four entitled saying thank you p.14, they are also taught the same topic in unit eleven saying thank you p.37. Obviously there is a direct relation between the two topics of unit four and unit eleven

because the same topic is exactly repeated in the other unit. Both of these topics encourage the students to express thankful feelings in return for doing or offering something. As it was mentioned, the topic of unit six was saying hello and goodbye p. 22, the students are also taught a topic in unit eighteen entitled saying goodbye p.62. It can be apparently seen that the topic of the previous unit is repeated in the other unit. As the students were taught this topic, they know how and when to use goodbye. I think that the topic is better to be taught in unit eighteen rather than unit six because when they are taught the topic in the final unit, they finish the course of the English language and they practically say goodbye to the course and finalize it.

2. Sunrise 2

Just like Sunrise 1, the program of Sunrise 2 is made up of eighteen units, each unit includes three lessons. There is an additional unit at the end of any three units for revision; the whole book consists of six revisions. The students can revise the topics and information studied throughout each three units.

2.1 The Asymmetric Relationship of the Letters and Examples
The introductory three units of Sunrise 2 have been devoted to the revision of lower case letters taught in Sunrise 1. The rest of the book is devoted to the upper case letters so that the students will draw a distinction between the lower case letters and upper case letters.

In unit three of Sunrise 2, the students are taught two types of letters: they are lower case letters and upper case letters. It is the first time that the students study upper case letters, but it is the second time that they study the lower case letters. For the first time, the students think that the English language letters have two different pictures; one picture is the lower case letter and the other is the upper case letter. These two forms of letters include two different uses, each one occurs in a specific position. What is worth mentioning is the style of exemplification for these letters. In fact, the examples have been given for these two types of letters, but in an imbalanced way because some letters have been clarified with one, two or three examples, but some others, specially the upper case letters, have been given without any sort of examples.

When the students of the second basic stage study the letter (A, a) p.11, they are given two examples for (a) including ant, and apple, but one example has been given for (A) which is Aven. In the same page, there exists another letter which is (B, b), obviously two examples have been given for (b) including bag, and banana, but for the upper case letter (B), no example has been given. The syllabus designers should have written at least one example because the letter would have been more understandable in use. Let's consider two other letters (C, c and D, d) p.15. The students have been given three examples for the lower case letter including car, cap, and cat, but they find no any example for the upper case letter. The same thing applies for the letter (D, d) because three examples have been written for the lower case letter (d), they are doll, dog, and duck, but no example has been given for the upper case letter (D). Besides, the students study some letters whose examples are different from those of the previous letters. The letter (K, k) has been explained with six examples because three examples are given for the lower case letter, they are king, kitten, and kite and three

other examples are given for the capital letter, they are Karwan, Kitten, and Kurdistan.

Another confusing point belongs to the lack of agreement between the letter and example. In Sunrise 2 p.3, it has been written A is for apple, as an example for (A); the confusing point is that the upper case letter has been exemplified with a word starting with a lower case letter. Obviously, this way of exemplification is not appropriate because there is no any recognizable relation between the letter and the example. Then, the students find it confusing when some letters have been explained by one example, but some others by two and some others by three whereas many upper case letters are devoid of any examples.

2.2 Repetition

Just like Sunrise 1, Sunrise 2 contains many topics illustrated with interesting and colorful pictures. These are educational topics because they are suitable to the age of childhood, reflect their real life, provide fun, show confidence, and create educational opportunities to learn. However, some topics of this program are considerably similar and related. Possibly, the purpose behind this repetition is to confirm the information and make the students understand the topic easily. I think that the repeated subjects do not attract the students' attention a lot because once they see the topic; they remember that the topic has been taught earlier. For example, the students are taught a topic in unit three entitled Asking about objects p.10; here the students are taught how to ask these questions, such as what is this? and what are these? Then this topic Asking about objects has been repeated in unit five p.17, and the students are taught how to ask this question; what is that? After that, this topic Asking about objects has been repeated in unit six p.20 for the third time and this question has been elicited what are those? For the fourth time, this topic Asking about objects has been repeated in unit nine p. 30. Looking at these questions attentively, the question word 'what' has been used with the demonstratives 'this, that, these, those'. Praninskas (1975, p. 6) states that the difference among them is that this is used for something singular and close to the speaker, but that is used for something singular, but distant from the speaker. These is used for something plural and close to the speaker, but those is used for something plural, but distant from the speaker. Obviously, these demonstratives are used for something close to the speaker should have been presented in one unit which is unit three, but these demonstratives used for something distant should have been presented in unit four consecutively, not in four separate units.

There exist other repeated topics in Sunrise 2. There is a topic entitled Asking about actions in unit seven p. 24, the students study this a topic What are you doing? Then this subject Asking about actions has been repeated in unit eight p.27, and the same question What are you doing? is taught to the students. This subject Asking about actions has been repeated for the third time in unit eighteen p.60. The students understand these repeated topics very apparently; they know that these topics that are seen twice or three times have a direct relation together. The repeated topics seem to have a negative impact on the process of teaching, once they see a topic in the next unit; they

remember the topic of the previous unit. Even if these topics are not repeated, they can be studied again in the unit of revision.

2.3 About Grammar

There exist many grammatical subjects in Sunrise 2 because the topics taught to the students should be expressed in grammatically correct sentences. However communicative approach does not stick to using rules, regulations, and accuracy of grammar, but the language which is taught to the students should be rule-bound and devoid of any mistakes. They contain demonstratives, interrogative sentences, possessions, conjunctions, imperative sentences, numbers, etc. The grammatical subject introduced here is the conjunction. The conjunctions are parts of speech that are used for connecting two or more elements in a sentence. They are divided into two types: coordinating conjunctions and subordinating conjunctions. The conjunction discussed here is the coordinating conjunction including and, or, but. Fowler and Aaron (1998, p. 189) think that the coordinator can “combine two words, phrases and clauses on the condition that the combined elements are of equal importance; they are nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. When we have more than two items, the coordinator is typically placed between the last two items because the other parts are separated by comma; it indicates that coordinator is not repeated between any two items”.

The type of the coordinator used in Sunrise 2 is and used to link some noun phrases. The coordinator and in unit four, p. 16 has been exemplified in this way: I have a doll and a dog and a hen. In the same page, there is also I have a car, and a cap and a pen. What is abnormal in using this coordinator is that it has been repeated between any two the noun phrases in the sentence. Grammatically the coordinator should be placed between the penultimate and final element, and the other items are separated by a comma in this way. I have a car, a cap and a pen. I have a doll a dog and a hen. However, this coordinator has been used in the other units quite grammatically, such as listen, point and say, look, point and say, listen, sing, and point and point, ask, and say, etc. This curriculum should include the correctly used grammatical topics because it is prepared for the beginning of basic stage and this stage includes a generation who are at the beginning of acquaintance with the world of English language.

Conclusion:

1-Sunrise program heavily focuses on the practical use of language for communication; this is done by employment of communicative approach which is the most significant approach for language teaching. This approach integrates all the skills of language learning specially listening and speaking. Consequently, this program changed the direction of English language teaching from teaching about English to the practical use of English.

2-Both Sunrise 1 and Sunrise 2 contain some shortcomings and defectives that cause problems in teaching process. These issues existing in Sunrise, such as alphabetical letters, complex vocabularies, repeated topics, exemplification, and grammatical issues make the program not satisfactory to the teachers as well as students.

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