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APPROACHES AND METHODS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

THIRD EDITION

Jack C. Richards and
Theodore S. Rodgers



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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Introduction to the third edition</i>	<i>ix</i>
I Major trends in twentieth-century language teaching	1
1 A brief history of early developments in language teaching	3
2 The nature of approaches and methods in language teaching	20
3 The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching	44
4 The Audiolingual Method	58
II Current approaches and methods	81
5 Communicative Language Teaching	83
6 Content-Based Instruction and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)	116
7 Whole Language	139
8 Competency-Based Language Teaching, standards, and the Common European Framework of Reference	150
9 Task-Based Language Teaching	174
10 Text-Based Instruction	200
11 The Lexical Approach	215
12 Multiple Intelligences	230
13 Cooperative Language Learning	244
III Alternative twentieth-century approaches and methods	259
14 The Natural Approach	261
15 Total Physical Response	277
16 The Silent Way	289
17 Community Language Learning	303
18 Suggestopedia	317

IV The teaching and learning environment	329
19 Learners, approaches, and methods	331
20 Teachers, approaches, and methods	346
21 Approaches, methods, and the curriculum	363
22 Postscript	382
<i>Appendix: Comparison of approaches and methods</i>	388
<i>Author index</i>	400
<i>Subject index</i>	403

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Introduction to the third edition

The first two editions of this book were published in the Cambridge Language Teaching Library series, with the first edition produced in 1986 followed by a second edition in 2001. *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* has been widely referred to by teachers and teachers in training for an account of the major teaching approaches and methods that have been used in language teaching from the late nineteenth century to the present day. Despite the advances that have been made in our understanding of language teaching and learning in the last few decades, the language teaching profession continues to explore new instructional designs and pedagogies. Language teaching today reflects the changed status of English as an international language, which has accelerated the demand for more effective approaches to language teaching. Innovations in technology, the growing trend to begin teaching English at primary level as well as the use of English as a medium of instruction in many university programs prompt an ongoing review of past and present practices as teachers and teacher educators search for effective activities and resources for their classrooms. And despite the belief that contemporary approaches to language teaching rely less on standard approaches and methods and more on post-method conceptions of teaching – new teaching proposals continue to appear (such as Content and Language Integrated Learning, or CLIL, text- and task-based teaching as well as the Common European Framework of Reference). Familiarity with these as well as with earlier traditions in language teaching are important components of the professional knowledge expected of today's language teachers. For these reasons a third edition of *Approaches and Methods* seemed appropriate.¹ As we prepared the third edition, we were reminded that not everything that is new is necessarily better and that today's teachers could continue to benefit from a text that provides a guide to this rich repository of instructional practices in our field.

A number of changes have been incorporated into the third edition.

- The book is now divided into four parts, with the final part presenting three new chapters focusing on approaches and methods in relation to the teaching and learning process. These chapters seek to show how current views of the roles of learners and teachers in the language teaching process prompt alternative conceptualizations of the status of approaches and methods, and also how approaches and methods can be viewed in relation to the processes of curriculum development.
- Part I of the book, *Major trends in twentieth-century language teaching*, has been updated, with the theoretical framework for the book presented in Chapter 2. Many chapters in the book now offer fuller descriptions of approach, design, and procedure.

¹ New material for the third edition has been mainly prepared by JCR.

- The chapters presenting current approaches and methods have been moved from Part III to Part II of the book, reflecting their continuity with the major twentieth-century trends. Chapter 5, Communicative Language Teaching, has been expanded significantly, as has Chapter 6, which now includes the approach known as CLIL, along with Content-Based Instruction. Chapter 8 now covers not only Competency-Based Instruction but also the broader standards and outcomes movements and the Common European Framework of Reference. A new chapter on Text-Based Instruction has been added.
- Several chapters in Part III, *Alternative twentieth-century approaches and methods*, have been expanded, with fuller descriptions of the underlying framework. (One chapter from the second edition, Neurolinguistic Programming [NLP], has not been included since NLP is not a language teaching method, but rather a humanistic philosophy based on popular psychology and, as such, does not meet the criteria for inclusion as an approach or method.)
- Discussion questions have been added to all chapters, allowing the reader to synthesize the material, and a comprehensive table comparing approaches and methods has been added as an appendix. Textbook samples of a number of approaches and methods have been provided, as well. While these samples may not reflect the approach or method in its pure form, and may combine features of more than one method, they provide realistic examples of how the approaches and methods have been interpreted by materials writers.

While we considered not including some of the “innovative” methods of the 1970s and 1980s that attract little interest today, reviewers felt that retaining them provided a useful historical perspective on method trends; hence, they have been included in this edition.

We are grateful for the anonymous reviewers for their feedback on this edition and who provided many useful suggestions, to Hayo Reinders for help with discussion questions, and to Debbie Goldblatt and Jacqueline French for their skillful editorial guidance. We also wish to thank Karen Momber and Joanna Garbutt of Cambridge University Press for their support in bringing this edition to fruition.

Part I *Major trends in twentieth-century language teaching*

Language teaching came into its own as a profession in the twentieth century. The whole foundation of contemporary language teaching was developed during the early part of the twentieth century, as applied linguists and others sought to develop principles and procedures for the design of teaching methods and materials, drawing on the developing fields of linguistics and psychology to support a succession of proposals for what were thought to be more effective and theoretically sound teaching methods. Language teaching in the twentieth century was characterized by frequent change and innovation and by the development of sometimes competing language teaching ideologies. Much of the impetus for change in approaches to language teaching came about from changes in teaching methods. The method concept in teaching – the notion of a systematic set of teaching practices based on a particular theory of language and language learning – is a powerful one, and the quest for better methods was a preoccupation of many teachers and applied linguists throughout the twentieth century. Methods typically make the same claim, namely that they reflect a correct understanding of language learning and that adopting the newest method will lead to better results than the method that preceded it. The chapters in Part I examine the developments that led to the first major paradigm in modern language teaching – the adoption of grammar-based teaching methods that came to be known as the structural approach or Situational Language Teaching in the United Kingdom, and Audiolingualism in the United States. In Chapter 1, we outline the historical precedents to language teaching in the first part of the twentieth century and provide a rationale for the study of approaches and methods and their impact on trends and practices in language teaching. In Chapter 2, we introduce a model, or framework, for the description of approaches and methods, one that identifies three levels of organization underlying approaches and methods that we refer to as *approach*, *design*, and *procedure*. These levels of organization are used throughout the book. In Chapter 3, we describe one of the most important British language teaching proposals of the twentieth century, the Oral Approach or Situational Language Teaching, a method that continues to be widely used today in textbooks and teaching materials, though in the somewhat modified form of Presentation-Practice-Production, or PPP. In Chapter 4, we describe the method known as Audiolingualism, an American teaching method that has similarly left a lasting and continuing legacy in terms of commonly used teaching procedures that focus on structure and pattern practice.

1 A brief history of early developments in language teaching

Introduction

By the beginning of the twentieth century, language teaching was emerging as an active area of educational debate and innovation. Although language teaching has a very long history, the foundations of contemporary approaches to language teaching were developed during the early part of the twentieth century, as applied linguists and others sought to develop principles and procedures for the design of teaching methods and materials, drawing on the developing fields of linguistics and psychology. This led to a succession of proposals for what were thought to be more effective and theoretically sound language teaching methods. Language teaching in the twentieth century was characterized at different times by change and innovation and by the development of competing language teaching ideologies. The impetus for change in approaches to language teaching is generally a response to increased demand for speakers of second and foreign languages. World War II, for example, prompted the need for new ways of teaching oral skills in foreign languages, as we discuss in Chapter 4. Large-scale movement of people through immigration as well as the internationalization of education since the 1950s also created a demand for new types of language programs. And in more recent times, globalization, the rise of the Internet, and the global spread of English has also prompted a reassessment of language teaching policies and practices. This chapter, in briefly reviewing the history of language teaching methods, provides a background for the discussion of past and present methods and suggests the issues we will refer to in analyzing these methods.

The emergence of methods

Efforts to improve the effectiveness of language teaching have often focused on changes in teaching methods. Throughout history such changes have reflected changes in the goals of language teaching, such as a move toward oral proficiency rather than reading comprehension as the goal of language study; they have also reflected changes in theories of the nature of language and of language learning. The method concept in teaching – the notion of a systematic set of teaching practices based on a particular theory of language and language learning – is a powerful though controversial one, and the quest for better methods was a preoccupation of many teachers and applied linguists

throughout the twentieth century. From a historical perspective, we are able to see that the concerns that have prompted recent innovations in language teaching, such as Task-Based Language Teaching (Chapter 9) and Content and Language Integrated Learning, or CLIL (Chapter 6), are similar to those that have always been at the center of discussions on how to teach foreign languages. Common to each method is the belief that the teaching practices it supports provide a more effective and theoretically sound basis for teaching than the methods that preceded it. Today's controversies reflect contemporary responses to questions that have often been asked throughout the history of language teaching – questions about how to improve the quality of teaching and learning in language teaching classrooms.

The influence of Latin

We live in a bilingual and multilingual world. From both a contemporary and a historical perspective, bilingualism or multilingualism is the norm rather than the exception. It is fair, then, to say that throughout history foreign language learning has always been an important practical concern. Whereas today English is the world's most widely studied foreign or second language, 500 years ago it was Latin, for it was the dominant language of education, commerce, religion, and government in the Western world. In the sixteenth century, however, French, Italian, and English gained in importance as a result of political changes in Europe, and Latin gradually became displaced as a language of spoken and written communication.

As the status of Latin diminished from that of a living language to that of an “occasional” subject in the school curriculum, the study of Latin took on a different function. The study of classical Latin (the Latin in which the works of Virgil, Ovid, and Cicero were written) and an analysis of its grammar and rhetoric became the model for foreign language study from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. Children entering “grammar school” in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries in England were initially given a rigorous introduction to Latin grammar, which was taught through rote learning of grammar rules, study of declensions and conjugations, translation, and practice in writing sample sentences, sometimes with the use of parallel bilingual texts and dialogue (Kelly 1969; Howatt 1984). Once basic proficiency was established, students were introduced to the advanced study of grammar and rhetoric. School learning must have been a deadening experience for children, for lapses in knowledge were often met with brutal punishment. There were occasional attempts to promote alternative approaches to education; Roger Ascham and Montaigne in the sixteenth century and Comenius and John Locke in the seventeenth century, for example, had made specific proposals for curriculum reform and for changes in the way Latin was taught (Kelly 1969; Howatt 1984), but since Latin (and, to a lesser extent, Greek) had for so long been regarded as the classical and therefore most ideal form of language, it was not surprising that ideas about the role of language study in the curriculum reflected the long-established status of Latin.

The decline of Latin also brought with it a new justification for teaching Latin. Latin was said to develop intellectual abilities, and the study of Latin grammar became an end in itself.

When once the Latin tongue had ceased to be a normal vehicle for communication, and was replaced as such by the vernacular languages, then it most speedily became a “mental gymnastic,” the supremely “dead” language, a disciplined and systematic study of which was held to be indispensable as a basis for all forms of higher education.

(V. Mallison, cited in Titone 1968: 26)

As “modern” languages began to enter the curriculum of European schools in the eighteenth century, they were taught using the same basic procedures that were used for teaching Latin. Textbooks consisted of statements of abstract grammar rules, lists of vocabulary, and sentences for translation. Speaking the foreign language was not the goal, and oral practice was limited to students reading aloud the sentences they had translated. These sentences were constructed to illustrate the grammatical system of the language and consequently bore no relation to the language of real communication. Students labored over translating sentences such as the following:

The philosopher pulled the lower jaw of the hen.

My sons have bought the mirrors of the Duke.

The cat of my aunt is more treacherous than the dog of your uncle.

(Titone 1968: 28)

By the nineteenth century, this approach based on the study of Latin had become the standard way of studying foreign languages in schools. A typical textbook in the mid-nineteenth century thus consisted of chapters or lessons organized around grammar points. Each grammar point was listed, rules on its use were explained, and it was illustrated by sample sentences.

Nineteenth-century textbook compilers were mainly determined to codify the foreign language into frozen rules of morphology and syntax to be explained and eventually memorized. Oral work was reduced to an absolute minimum, while a handful of written exercises, constructed at random, came as a sort of appendix to the rules. Of the many books published during this period, those by Seidenstücker and Plötz were perhaps the most typical ... [Seidenstücker] reduced the material to disconnected sentences to illustrate specific rules. He divided his text carefully into two parts, one giving the rules and necessary paradigms, the other giving French sentences for translation into German and German sentences for translation into French. The immediate aim was for the student to apply the given rules by means of appropriate exercises ... In [Plötz's] textbooks, divided into the two parts described above, the sole form of instruction was mechanical translation. Typical sentences were: “Thou hast a book. The house is

beautiful. He has a kind dog. We have a bread [sic]. The door is black. He has a book and a dog. The horse of the father was kind.”

(Titone 1968: 27)

This approach to foreign language teaching became known as the Grammar-Translation Method.

The Grammar-Translation Method

As the names of some of its leading exponents suggest (Johann Seidenstücker, Karl Plötz, H. S. Ollendorf, and Johann Meidinger), Grammar Translation was the offspring of German scholarship, the object of which, according to one of its less charitable critics, was “to know everything about something rather than the thing itself” (W. H. D. Rouse, quoted in Kelly 1969: 53). Grammar Translation was in fact first known in the United States as the Prussian Method. (A book by B. Sears, an American classics teacher, published in 1845 was titled *The Ciceronian or the Prussian Method of Teaching the Elements of the Latin Language* [Kelly 1969].) The principal characteristics of the Grammar-Translation Method were these:

1. The goal of foreign language study is to learn a language in order to read its literature or in order to benefit from the mental discipline and intellectual development that result from foreign language study. Grammar Translation is a way of studying a language that approaches the language first through detailed analysis of its grammar rules, followed by application of this knowledge to the task of translating sentences and texts into and out of the target language. It hence views language learning as consisting of little more than memorizing rules and facts in order to understand and manipulate the morphology and syntax of the foreign language. “The first language is maintained as the reference system in the acquisition of the second language” (Stern 1983: 455).
2. Reading and writing are the major focus; little or no systematic attention is paid to speaking or listening.
3. Vocabulary selection is based solely on the reading texts used, and words are taught through bilingual word lists, dictionary study, and memorization. In a typical Grammar-Translation text, the grammar rules are presented and illustrated, a list of vocabulary items is presented with their translation equivalents, and translation exercises are prescribed.
4. The sentence is the basic unit of teaching and language practice. Much of the lesson is devoted to translating sentences into and out of the target language, and it is this focus on the sentence that is a distinctive feature of the method. Earlier approaches to foreign language study used grammar as an aid to the study of texts in a foreign language. But this was thought to be too difficult for students in secondary schools, and the focus on the sentence was an attempt to make language learning easier (see Howatt 1984: 131).
5. Accuracy is emphasized. Students are expected to attain high standards in translation, because of “the high priority attached to meticulous standards of accuracy which, as well

- as having an intrinsic moral value, was a prerequisite for passing the increasing number of formal written examinations that grew up during the century” (Howatt 1984: 132).
6. Grammar is taught deductively – that is, by presentation and study of grammar rules, which are then practiced through translation exercises. In most Grammar-Translation texts, a syllabus was followed for the sequencing of grammar points throughout a text, and there was an attempt to teach grammar in an organized and systematic way.
 7. The student’s native language is the medium of instruction. It is used to explain new items and to enable comparisons to be made between the foreign language and the student’s native language.

Grammar Translation dominated European and foreign language teaching from the 1840s to the 1940s, and in modified form it continues to be widely used in some parts of the world today. At its best, as Howatt (1984) points out, it was not necessarily the horror that its critics depicted it as. Its worst excesses were introduced by those who wanted to demonstrate that the study of French or German was no less rigorous than the study of classical languages. This resulted in the type of Grammar-Translation courses remembered with distaste by thousands of school learners, for whom foreign language learning meant a tedious experience of memorizing endless lists of unusable grammar rules and vocabulary and attempting to produce perfect translations of stilted or literary prose. Although the Grammar-Translation Method often creates frustration for students, it makes few demands on teachers. It is still used in situations where understanding literary texts is the primary focus of foreign language study and there is little need for a speaking knowledge of the language. Contemporary texts for the teaching of foreign languages at the college level still sometimes reflect Grammar-Translation principles. These texts are frequently the products of people trained in literature rather than in language teaching or applied linguistics. Consequently, though it may be true to say that the Grammar-Translation Method is still widely practiced, it has no advocates. It is a method for which there is no theory. There is no literature that offers a rationale or justification for it or that attempts to relate it to issues in linguistics, psychology, or educational theory. However, its continued use in some part of the world may be due to (a) the limited command of spoken English of language teachers, (b) the fact that this was the method their teachers used, (c) it gives teachers a sense of control and authority in the classroom, and (d) it works well in large classes. Jin and Cortazzi (2011: 558–9) offer the following explanation for the continued use of Grammar Translation and other traditional teaching approaches in some parts of the world:

TAs (traditional approaches) have persisted for longer in most developing parts of the world than in more economically developed ones, due to the slower development of educational systems and language teacher training, cultural perceptions and different ways of change, limited learning resources and finance.

But in Europe in the mid and late nineteenth century, opposition to the Grammar-Translation Method gradually developed in several countries. This Reform Movement, as it

was referred to, laid the foundations for the development of new ways of teaching languages and raised controversies that have continued to the present day.

Language teaching innovations in the nineteenth century

Toward the middle of the nineteenth century, several factors contributed to a questioning and rejection of the Grammar-Translation Method. Increased opportunities for communication among Europeans created a demand for oral proficiency in foreign languages. Initially, this created a market for conversation books and phrase books intended for private study, but language teaching specialists also turned their attention to the way English and modern European languages were being taught in secondary schools. Increasingly, the public education system was seen to be failing in its responsibilities. In Germany, England, France, and other parts of Europe, new approaches to language teaching were developed by individual language teaching specialists, each with a specific method for reforming the teaching of modern languages. Some of these specialists, such as C. Marcel, T. Prendergast, and F. Gouin, did not manage to achieve any lasting impact, though their ideas are of historical interest.

The Frenchman C. Marcel (1793–1896) referred to child language learning as a model for language teaching, emphasized the importance of meaning in learning, proposed that reading be taught before other skills, and tried to locate language teaching within a broader educational framework. The Englishman T. Prendergast (1806–1886) was one of the first to record the observation that children use contextual and situational cues to interpret utterances and that they use memorized phrases and “routines” in speaking. He proposed the first “structural syllabus,” advocating that learners be taught the most basic structural patterns occurring in the language. In this way he was anticipating a more scientific approach to language study, an issue that was to be taken up in the 1920s and 1930s, as we shall see in Chapter 3. The Frenchman F. Gouin (1831–1896) is perhaps the best known of these mid-nineteenth-century reformers. Gouin developed an approach to teaching a foreign language based on his observations of children’s use of language. He believed that language learning was facilitated through using language to accomplish events consisting of a sequence of related actions. His method used situations and themes as ways of organizing and presenting oral language – the famous Gouin “series,” which includes sequences of sentences related to such activities as chopping wood and opening the door. Gouin established schools to teach according to his method, and it was quite popular for a time. In the first lesson of a foreign language, the following series would be learned:

I walk toward the door.	I walk.
I draw near to the door.	I draw near.
I draw nearer to the door.	I draw nearer.
I get to the door.	I get to.
I stop at the door.	I stop.
I stretch out my arm.	I stretch out.

I take hold of the handle.	I take hold.
I turn the handle.	I turn.
I open the door.	I open.
I pull the door.	I pull.
The door moves.	moves
The door turns on its hinges	turns
The door turns and turns.	turns
I open the door wide.	I open.
I let go of the handle.	I let go.

(Titone 1968: 35)

Gouin's emphasis on the need to present new teaching items in a context that makes their meaning clear, and the use of gestures and actions to convey the meanings of utterances, are practices that later became part of such approaches and methods as Situational Language Teaching (Chapter 3) and Total Physical Response (Chapter 15).

The work of individual language specialists like these reflects the changing climate of the times in which they worked. Educators recognized the need for speaking proficiency rather than reading comprehension, grammar, or literary appreciation as the goal for foreign language programs; there was an interest in how children learn languages, which prompted attempts to develop teaching principles from observation of (or, more typically, reflections about) child language learning. But the ideas and methods of Marcel, Prendergast, Gouin, and other innovators were developed outside the context of established circles of education and hence lacked the means for wider dissemination, acceptance, and implementation. They were writing at a time when there was not sufficient organizational structure in the language teaching profession (i.e., in the form of professional associations, journals, and conferences) to enable new ideas to develop into an educational movement. This began to change toward the end of the nineteenth century, however, when a more concerted effort arose in which the interests of reform-minded language teachers and linguists coincided. Teachers and linguists began to write about the need for new approaches to language teaching, and through their pamphlets, books, speeches, and articles, the foundation for more widespread pedagogical reforms was laid. This effort became known as the Reform Movement in language teaching.

The Reform Movement

Language teaching specialists such as Marcel, Prendergast, and Gouin had done much to promote alternative approaches to language teaching, but their ideas failed to receive widespread support or attention. From the 1880s, however, practical-minded linguists such as Henry Sweet in England, Wilhelm Viëtor in Germany, and Paul Passy in France began to provide the intellectual leadership needed to give reformist ideas greater credibility and acceptance. The discipline of linguistics was revitalized. Phonetics – the scientific analysis and description of the sound systems of languages – was established, giving new insights