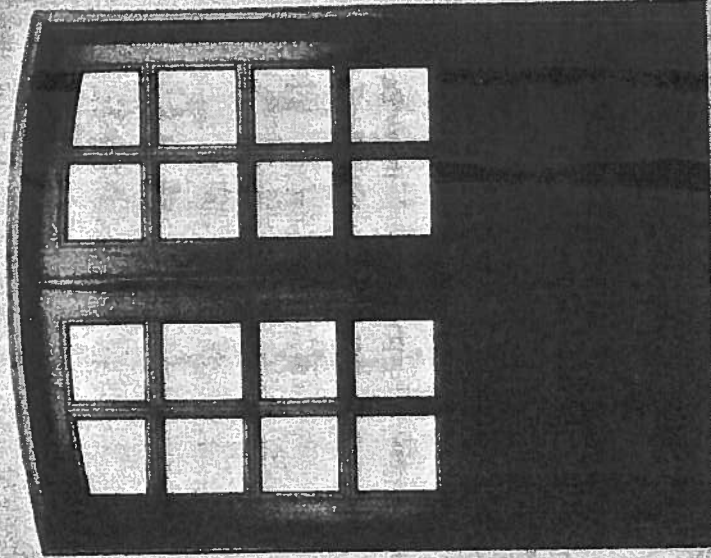


THIRD EDITION

# TEACHING by PRINCIPLES

An Interactive Approach

to Language Pedagogy



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## CHAPTER 2

### A "METHODICAL" HISTORY

### OF LANGUAGE TEACHING

**OBJECTIVES** After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

- develop a historical understanding of language-teaching methodology
- explain differences between approaches and methods
- understand how teaching methods borrow from and contribute to theoretical trends in linguistics, psychology, education, and other fields
- summarize major characteristics of a number of methods
- appreciate your need as a teacher to be cautiously eclectic in deriving insights about your classroom practices

The first step toward developing a principled approach to language teaching will be to turn back the clock about a century to learn from the historical cycles and trends that have brought us to the present day. After all, it is difficult to completely analyze the class session you just observed (Chapter 1) without the backdrop of history. In this chapter we focus on methods as the identifying characteristics of a century of "modern" language-teaching efforts. What do we mean by the term "method" by which we tend to characterize that history? How do methods reflect various trends of disciplinary thought? How does current research on language learning and teaching help us to distinguish, in our history, between passing fads and "the good stuff"? These are some of the questions we will address in this chapter.

In the next chapter, this historical overview culminates in a close look at the current state of the art in language teaching. Above all, you will come to see how our profession is now more aptly characterized by a relatively unified, comprehensive "approach" rather than by competing, restricted methods. That general approach will be described in detail, along with some of the current professional jargon associated with it.

As you read on, you will encounter references to concepts, constructs, issues, and models that are normally covered in a course in second language acquisition (SLA). I am assuming that you have already taken or are currently taking such a course. If not, may I recommend that you consult my *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, Fifth Edition (Brown, 2007), or a book like Mitchell and Myles's (2004) *Second Language Learning Theories* that summarizes current topics

and issues in SLA. Throughout this book I will refer to specific chapters of my *Principles* book (PLT) for background review or reading, should you need it.

## APPROACH, METHOD, AND TECHNIQUE

For the century spanning the mid-1880s to the mid-1980s, the language-teaching profession may be aptly characterized by a series of methods that rose and declined in popularity. It appears that some practitioners in this time period hoped to define the ultimate method, one that would be generalizable across widely varying audiences, contexts, and languages. Historical accounts of the profession tend to describe a succession of methods, each of which was more or less discarded as a new method took its place (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). We will turn to that "methodical" history of language teaching in a moment, but first, we should try to understand what we mean by **method**.

What is a method? About four decades ago Edward Anthony (1963) gave us a definition that has admirably withstood the test of time. His concept of "method" was the second of three hierarchical elements, namely **approach**, **method**, and **technique**. An **approach**, according to Anthony, was a set of assumptions dealing with the nature of language, learning, and teaching. **Method** was described as an overall plan for systematic presentation of language based upon a selected approach. **Techniques** were the specific activities manifested in the classroom that were consistent with a method and therefore were in harmony with an approach as well.

To this day, for better or worse, Anthony's terms are still in common use among language teachers. For example, at the approach level, a teacher may affirm the ultimate importance of learning in a relaxed state of mental awareness just above the threshold of consciousness. The method that follows might resemble, say, Suggestopedia (a description follows in this chapter). Techniques could include playing baroque music while reading a passage in the foreign language, getting students to sit in a yoga position while listening to a list of words, or having learners adopt a new name in the classroom and role-play that new person.

A couple of decades later, Jack Richards and Theodore Rodgers (1982) proposed a reformulation of the concept of "method." Anthony's approach, method, and technique were renamed, respectively, **approach**, **design**, and **procedure**, with a superordinate term to describe this three-step process, now called "method." A method, according to Richards and Rodgers, was "an umbrella term for the specification and interrelation of theory and practice" (1982, p. 154). An approach defines assumptions, beliefs, and theories about the nature of language and language learning. Designs specify the relationship of those theories to classroom materials and activities. Procedures are the techniques and practices that are derived from one's approach and design.

Through their reformulation, Richards and Rodgers (1982, 2001) made two principal contributions to our understanding of the concept of method:

1. They specified the necessary elements of language-teaching designs that had heretofore been left somewhat vague. Their schematic representation of method (see Figure 2.1) described six important features of designs: objectives, syllabus (criteria for selection and organization of linguistic and subject-matter content), activities, learner roles, teacher roles, and the role of instructional materials. The latter three features have occupied a significant proportion of our collective attention in the profession for the last decade or so. Already in this book you may have noted how, for example, learner roles (styles, individual preferences for group or individual learning, student input in determining curricular content, etc.) are important considerations in your teaching.
2. Richards and Rodgers nudged us into relinquishing the notion that separate, definable, discrete methods are the essential building blocks of methodology. By helping us to think in terms of an approach that undergirds our language designs (curricula), which are realized by various procedures (techniques), we could see that method, as the term was historically understood over the last century, is a concept that is too restrictive, too preprogrammed, and too "prepackaged." Many of the methods that form our historical milestones make the oversimplified assumption that what teachers "do" in the classroom can be conventionalized into a set of procedures that fit all contexts. We are now all too aware that such is clearly not the case.

Richards and Rodgers's reformulation of the concept of method was soundly conceived. However, their attempt to give new meaning to an old term did not catch on in the pedagogical literature. What they wanted us to call "method" is more comfortably referred to, I think, as "methodology" in order to avoid confusion with what we will no doubt always think of as those separate entities (like the Audiolingual Method or Suggestopedia) that are no longer at the center of our teaching philosophy.

Another terminological problem lies in the use of the term **design**; instead, we more comfortably refer to **curriculum** or **syllabus** when we refer to design features of a language program.

What are we left with in this lexicographic confusion? It's interesting that the terminology of the pedagogical literature in the field appears to be more in line with Anthony's original terms, but with some important additions and refinements. Following is a set of definitions that as closely as possible reflect what appears to be a consensus on current usage (Harmer, 2001; Kumaravadivelu, 2006b; Richards & Renandya, 2002).

**Methodology:** Pedagogical practices in general (including theoretical underpinnings and related research). Whatever considerations are involved in "how to teach" are methodological.

**Approach:** Theoretically well-informed positions and beliefs about the nature of language, the nature of language learning, and the applicability of both to pedagogical settings.

**Method:** A generalized set of classroom specifications for accomplishing linguistic objectives. Methods tend to be concerned primarily with teacher and student roles and behaviors and secondarily with such features as linguistic and subject-matter objectives, sequencing and materials. They are sometimes—but not always—thought of as being broadly applicable to a variety of audiences in a variety of contexts.

**Curriculum/syllabus:** Specifications—or in Richards and Rodgers's terminology, "designs"—for carrying out a particular language program. Features include a primary concern with the specification of linguistic and subject-matter objectives, sequencing, and materials to meet the needs of a designated group of learners in a defined context. (The term "syllabus" is used more customarily in the United Kingdom to refer to what is commonly called a "curriculum" in the United States.)

**Technique** (also commonly referred to by other terms\*): Any of a wide variety of exercises, activities, or tasks used in the language classroom for realizing lesson objectives.

## CHANGING WINDS AND SHIFTING SANDS

A glance through the past century or so of language teaching will give an interesting picture of how varied the interpretations have been of the best way to teach a foreign language. As disciplinary schools of thought—psychology, linguistics, and education, for example—have come and gone, so have language-teaching methods waxed and waned in popularity. Teaching methods, as "approaches in action," are of course the practical application of theoretical findings and positions. In a field such as ours that is relatively young, it should come as no surprise to discover a wide

\*There is currently quite an intermingling of such terms as "technique," "task," "procedure," "activity," and "exercise." They are often used in somewhat free variation across the profession. Of these terms, *task* has received the most concerted attention, viewed by such scholars as Nunan (2004) and Ellis (2003) as incorporating specific communicative and pedagogical principles. Tasks, according to specialists in task-based instruction, should be thought of as a special kind of technique and, in fact, may actually include more than one technique. See Chapter 3 for a more thorough explanation.

Figure 2.1 Components of method (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 33)

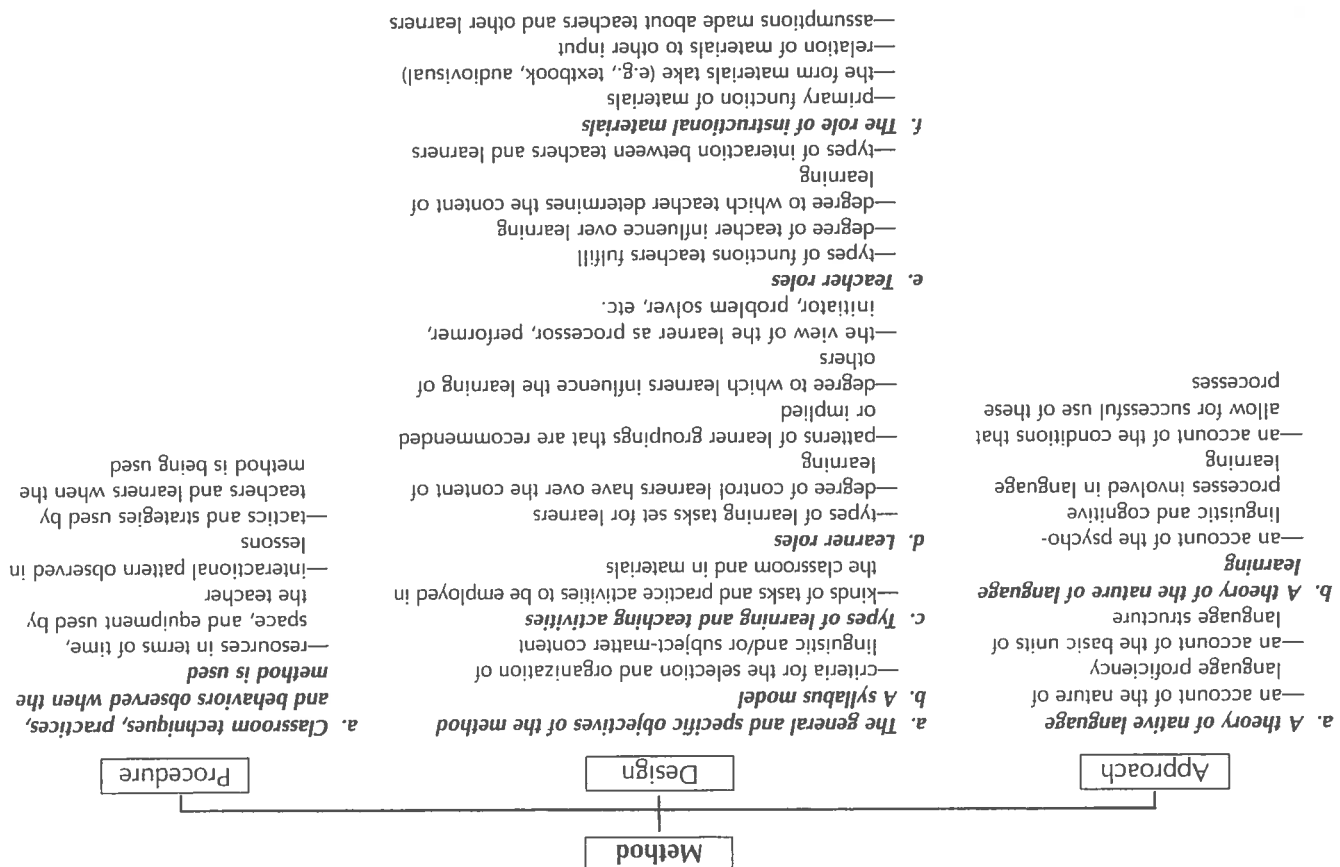


Table 2.1. An overview of methods (adapted from Nunan, 1989a)

	Theory of Language	Theory of Learning	Objectives	Syllabus
<b>Audio/lingual</b>	Language is a system of rule-governed structures hierarchically arranged.	Habit formation; skills are learned more effectively if oral precedes written; analogy, not analysis.	Control of structures of sound, form, and order; mastery over symbols of the language; goal: native-speaker mastery.	Graded syllabus of phonology, morphology, and syntax. Contrastive analysis.
<b>Total Physical Response</b>	Basically a structuralist, grammar-based view of language.	L2 learning is the same as L1 learning: comprehension before production is "imprinted" through carrying out commands (right-brain functioning); reduction of stress.	Teach oral proficiency to produce learners who can communicate unintelligibly and intelligibly with native speakers.	Sentence-based syllabus with grammatical and lexical criteria being primary, but focus on meaning, not form.
<b>The Silent Way</b>	Each language is composed of elements that give it a unique rhythm and spirit. Functional vocabulary and core structure are key to the spirit of the language.	Processes of learning a second language are fundamentally different from L1 learning. L2 learning is an intellectual, cognitive process. Surrender to the music of the language, silent awareness, then active trial.	Near-native fluency, correct pronunciation, basic practical knowledge of the grammar of the L2. Learner learns how to learn a language.	Basically structural lessons planned around grammatical items and related vocabulary. Items are introduced according to their grammatical complexity.
<b>Community Language Learning</b>	Language is more than a system for communication. It involves the whole person; culture; educational; developmental; and communicative processes.	Learning involves the whole person. It is a social process of growth from childlike dependence to self-direction and independence.	No specific objectives. Near-native mastery is the goal.	No set syllabus. Course progression is topic-based; learners provide the topics. Syllabus emerges from learners' intention and the teacher's reformulations.
<b>The Natural Approach</b>	The essence of language is meaning. Vocabulary, not grammar, is the heart of language.	There are two ways of L2 language development: "acquisition"—a natural subconscious process, and "learning"—a conscious process. Learning cannot lead to acquisition.	Designed to give beginners and intermediate learners basic communicative skills. Four broad areas: basic personal (oral/written); academic learning skills (oral/written).	Based on selection of communicative activities and topics derived from learner needs.
<b>Suggestopedia</b>	Rather conventional, although memorization of whole meaningful texts is recommended.	Learning occurs through suggestion, when learners are in a deeply relaxed state. Baroque music is used to induce this state.	To deliver advanced conversational competence quickly. Learners are required to master prodigious lists of vocabulary pairs, although the goal is understanding, not memorization.	Ten unit courses consisting of 1,200-word dialogues graded by vocabulary and grammar.
<b>Communicative Language Teaching</b>	Language is a system for the expression of meaning; primary function—interaction and communication.	Doing activities that involve real communication, carrying out meaningful tasks, and using language which is meaningful to the learner promote learning.	Objectives will reflect the needs of the learner; they will include functional skills as well as linguistic objectives.	Will include some/all of the following: structures, functions, notions, themes, tasks. Ordering will be guided by learner needs.

Activity Types	Learner Roles	Teacher Roles	Roles of Materials
Dialogues and drills, repetition and memorization, pattern practice.	Organisms that can be directed by skilled training techniques to produce correct responses.	Central and active teacher-dominated method. Provides model, controls direction and pace.	Primarily teacher-oriented. Tapes and visuals, language lab often used.
Imperative drills to elicit physical actions.	Listener and performer, little influence over the content of learning.	Active and direct role; "the director of a stage play" with students as actors.	No basic text; materials and media have an important role later. Initially voice, action, and gestures are sufficient.
Learner responses to commands, questions, and visual cues. Activities encourage and shape oral responses without grammatical explanation or modeling by teacher.	Learning is a process of personal growth. Learners are responsible for their own learning and must develop independence, autonomy, and responsibility.	Teachers must (a) teach (b) test (c) get out of the way. Remain impassive. Resist temptation to model, remodel, assist, direct, exhort.	Unique materials: colored rods, color-coded pronunciation and vocabulary charts.
Combination of innovative and conventional. Translation, group work, recording, transcription, reflection and observation, listening, free conversation.	Learners are members of a community. Learning is not viewed as an individual accomplishment, but something that is achieved collaboratively.	Counseling/parental analogy. Teacher provides a safe environment in which students can learn and grow.	No textbook, which would inhibit growth. Materials are developed as course progresses.
Activities allowing comprehensible input, about things in the here-and-now. Focus on meaning, not form.	Should not try to learn language in the usual sense, but should try to lose themselves in activities involving meaningful communication.	The teacher is the primary source of comprehensible input. Must create positive low-anxiety climate. Must choose and orchestrate a rich mixture of classroom activities.	Materials come from realia rather than textbooks. Primary aim is to promote comprehension and communication.
Initiatives, question and answer, role play, listening exercises under deep relaxation.	Must maintain a passive state and allow the materials to work on them (rather than vice versa).	To create situations in which the learner is most suggestible and present material in a way most likely to encourage positive reception and retention. Must exude authority and confidence.	Consists of texts, tapes, classroom fixtures, and music. Texts should have force, literary quality, and interesting characters.
Engage learners in communication; involve processes such as information sharing, negotiation of meaning, and interaction.	Learner as negotiator, interactor, giving as well as taking.	Facilitator of the communication process, participants' tasks, and texts; needs analyst, counselor, process manager.	Primary role in promoting communicative language use; task-based materials; authentic.