

# **APPROACHES AND METHODS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING**

**THIRD EDITION**

Jack C. Richards and  
Theodore S. Rodgers



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Theodore S. Rodgers



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## Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Introduction to the third edition</i>	<i>ix</i>
<b>I Major trends in twentieth-century language teaching</b>	<b>1</b>
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
<b>II Current approaches and methods</b>	<b>81</b>
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
<b>III Alternative twentieth-century approaches and methods</b>	<b>259</b>
14 The Natural Approach	261
15 Total Physical Response	277
16 The Silent Way	289
17 Community Language Learning	303
18 Suggestopedia	317

<b>IV The teaching and learning environment</b>	<b>329</b>
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.<sup>1</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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

into speech processes. Linguists emphasized that speech, rather than the written word, was the primary form of language. The International Phonetic Association was founded in 1886, and its International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) was designed to enable the sounds of any language to be accurately transcribed. One of the earliest goals of the association was to improve the teaching of modern languages. It advocated

1. the study of the spoken language;
2. phonetic training in order to establish good pronunciation habits;
3. the use of conversation texts and dialogues to introduce conversational phrases and idioms;
4. an inductive approach to the teaching of grammar;
5. teaching new meanings through establishing associations within the target language rather than by establishing associations with the native language.

Linguists too became interested in the controversies that emerged about the best way to teach foreign languages, and ideas were fiercely discussed and defended in books, articles, and pamphlets. Henry Sweet (1845–1912) argued that sound methodological principles should be based on a scientific analysis of language and a study of psychology. In his book *The Practical Study of Languages* (1899), he set forth principles for the development of teaching method. These included

1. careful selection of what is to be taught;
2. imposing limits on what is to be taught;
3. arranging what is to be taught in terms of the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing;
4. grading materials from simple to complex.

In Germany, the prominent scholar Wilhelm Viëtor (1850–1918) used linguistic theory to justify his views on language teaching. He argued that training in phonetics would enable teachers to pronounce the language accurately. Speech patterns, rather than grammar, were the fundamental elements of language. In 1882 he published his views in an influential pamphlet, *Language Teaching Must Start Afresh*, in which he strongly criticized the inadequacies of Grammar Translation and stressed the value of training teachers in the new science of phonetics.

Viëtor, Sweet, and other reformers in the late nineteenth century shared many beliefs about the principles on which a new approach to teaching foreign languages should be based, although they often differed considerably in the specific procedures they advocated for teaching a language. In general the reformers believed that

1. the spoken language is primary and that this should be reflected in an oral-based methodology;
2. the findings of phonetics should be applied to teaching and to teacher training;
3. learners should hear the language first, before seeing it in written form;
4. words should be presented in sentences, and sentences should be practiced in meaningful contexts and not be taught as isolated, disconnected elements;

5. the rules of grammar should be taught only after the students have practiced the grammar points in context – that is, grammar should be taught inductively;
6. translation should be avoided, although the native language could be used in order to explain new words or to check comprehension.

These principles provided the theoretical foundations for a principled approach to language teaching, one based on a scientific approach to the study of language and of language learning. They reflect the beginnings of the discipline of applied linguistics – that branch of language study and research concerned with the scientific study of second and foreign language teaching and learning. The writings of such scholars as Sweet, Viëtor, and Passy provided suggestions on how these applied linguistic principles could best be put into practice. None of these proposals assumed the status of a method, however, in the sense of a widely recognized and uniformly implemented design for teaching a language. But parallel to the ideas put forward by members of the Reform Movement was an interest in developing principles for language teaching out of naturalistic principles of language learning, such as are seen in first language acquisition. This led to what have been termed *natural methods* and then ultimately to the development of what came to be known as the Direct Method.

## The Direct Method

Gouin had been one of the first of the nineteenth-century reformers to attempt to build a methodology around observation of child language learning. Other reformers toward the end of the century likewise turned their attention to naturalistic principles of language learning, and for this reason they are sometimes referred to as advocates of a “natural” method. In fact, at various times throughout the history of language teaching, attempts have been made to make second language learning more like first language learning. In the sixteenth century, for example, Montaigne described how he was entrusted to a guardian who addressed him exclusively in Latin for the first years of his life, since Montaigne’s father wanted his son to speak Latin well. Among those who tried to apply natural principles to language classes in the nineteenth century was L. Sauveur (1826–1907), who used intensive oral interaction in the target language, employing questions as a way of presenting and eliciting language. He opened a language school in Boston in the late 1860s, and his method soon came to be referred to as the Natural Method.

Sauveur and other believers in the Natural Method argued that a foreign language could be taught without translation or the use of the learner’s native language if meaning was conveyed directly through demonstration and action. The German scholar F. Franke wrote on the psychological principles of direct association between forms and meanings in the target language (1884) and provided a theoretical justification for a monolingual approach to teaching. According to Franke, a language could best be taught by using it actively in the classroom. Rather than using analytical procedures that focus on explanation of grammar rules in classroom teaching, teachers must encourage direct and spontaneous use of the foreign language in the classroom. Learners would then be able to induce rules of grammar. The teacher replaced the textbook in the early stages of learning. Speaking

began with systematic attention to pronunciation. Known words could be used to teach new vocabulary, using mime, demonstration, and pictures.

These natural language learning principles provided the foundation for what came to be known as the Direct Method, which refers to the most widely known of the natural methods. Enthusiastic supporters of the Direct Method introduced it in France and Germany (it was officially approved in both countries at the turn of the century), and it became widely known in the United States through its use by Sauveur and Maximilian Berlitz in successful commercial language schools. (Berlitz, in fact, never used the term; he referred to the method used in his schools as the Berlitz Method.) In practice it stood for the following principles and procedures:

1. Classroom instruction was conducted exclusively in the target language.
2. Only everyday vocabulary and sentences were taught.
3. Oral communication skills were built up in a carefully graded progression organized around question-and-answer exchanges between teachers and students in small, intensive classes.
4. Grammar was taught inductively.
5. New teaching points were introduced orally.
6. Concrete vocabulary was taught through demonstration, objects, and pictures; abstract vocabulary was taught by association of ideas.
7. Both speech and listening comprehension were taught.
8. Correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasized.

These principles are seen in the following guidelines for teaching oral language, which are still followed in contemporary Berlitz schools:

Never translate: demonstrate  
Never explain: act  
Never make a speech: ask questions  
Never imitate mistakes: correct  
Never speak with single words: use sentences  
Never speak too much: make students speak much  
Never use the book: use your lesson plan  
Never jump around: follow your plan  
Never go too fast: keep the pace of the student  
Never speak too slowly: speak normally  
Never speak too quickly: speak naturally  
Never speak too loudly: speak naturally  
Never be impatient: take it easy

(cited in Titone 1968: 100–1)

The Direct Method was quite successful in private language schools, such as those of the Berlitz chain, where paying clients had high motivation and the use of native-speaking teachers was the norm. But despite pressure from proponents of the method, it was difficult

to implement in public secondary school education. It overemphasized and distorted the similarities between naturalistic first language learning and classroom foreign language learning and failed to consider the practical realities of the classroom. In addition, it lacked a rigorous basis in applied linguistic theory, and for this reason it was often criticized by the more academically based proponents of the Reform Movement. The Direct Method represented the product of enlightened amateurism. It was perceived to have several drawbacks. It required teachers who were native speakers or who had native-like fluency in the foreign language. It was largely dependent on the teacher's skill, rather than on a textbook, and not all teachers were proficient enough in the foreign language to adhere to the principles of the method. Critics pointed out that strict adherence to Direct Method principles was often counterproductive, since teachers were required to go to great lengths to avoid using the native language, when sometimes a simple, brief explanation in the student's native language would have been a more efficient route to comprehension.

The Harvard psychologist Roger Brown has documented similar problems with strict Direct Method techniques. He described his frustration in observing a teacher performing verbal gymnastics in an attempt to convey the meaning of Japanese words, when translation would have been a much more efficient technique (Brown 1973: 5).

By the 1920s, use of the Direct Method in noncommercial schools in Europe had consequently declined. In France and Germany it was gradually modified into versions that combined some Direct Method techniques with more controlled grammar-based activities. The European popularity of the Direct Method in the early part of the twentieth century caused foreign language specialists in the United States to attempt to have it implemented in US schools and colleges, although they decided to move with caution. A study begun in 1923 on the state of foreign language teaching concluded that no single method could guarantee successful results. The goal of trying to teach conversation skills was considered impractical in view of the restricted time available for foreign language teaching in schools, the limited skills of teachers, and the perceived irrelevance of conversation skills in a foreign language for the average American college student. The study – published as the Coleman Report – argued that a more reasonable goal for a foreign language course would be a reading knowledge of a foreign language, achieved through the gradual introduction of words and grammatical structures in simple reading texts. The main result of this recommendation was that reading became the goal of most foreign language programs in the United States (Coleman 1929). The emphasis on reading continued to characterize foreign language teaching in the United States until World War II.

Although the Direct Method enjoyed popularity in Europe, not everyone embraced it enthusiastically. The British applied linguist Henry Sweet recognized its limitations. It offered innovations at the level of teaching procedures but lacked a thorough methodological basis. Its main focus was on the exclusive use of the target language in the classroom, but it failed to address many issues that Sweet thought more basic. Sweet and other applied linguists argued for the development of sound methodological principles that could serve as the basis for teaching techniques. In the 1920s and 1930s, applied linguists systematized the principles proposed earlier by the Reform Movement and so laid the foundations for what

developed into the British, or Oral Approach to teaching English as a foreign language, which emphasized the need to grade language items according to difficulty and to teach language through a focus on its core structures and grammar (see Chapter 3). Subsequent developments led to Audiolingualism (Chapter 4) in the United States and Situational Language Teaching (Chapter 3) in Britain.

However, what assumptions underlie the concept of *method* in language teaching as it emerged as a significant educational issue in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? We have seen from this historical survey some of the questions that prompted innovations and new directions in language teaching in the past:

1. What should the goals of language teaching be? Should a language course try to teach conversational proficiency, reading, translation, or some other skill?
2. What is the basic nature of language, and how will this affect the way we teach it?
3. What are the principles for the selection of language content in language teaching?
4. What principles of organization, sequencing, and presentation best facilitate learning?
5. What should the role of the first language or languages be?
6. What language acquisition processes do learners use in mastering a language, and can these be incorporated into a method?
7. What teaching techniques and activities work best and under what circumstances?

Particular teaching approaches and methods differ in the way they have addressed these issues from the late nineteenth century to the present, as we shall see throughout this book. The Direct Method can be regarded as the first language teaching method to have caught the attention of teachers and language teaching specialists, and it offered a methodology that appeared to move language teaching into a new era. It marked the beginning of what we can refer to as the “methods era.”

## The methods era

One of the lasting legacies of the Direct Method was the notion of “method” itself. The controversy over the Direct Method was the first of many debates over how second and foreign languages should be taught. The history of language teaching throughout much of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century saw the rise and fall of a variety of language teaching approaches and methods, the major examples of which are described in this book. The distinction between an approach and a method will be covered in depth in Chapter 2; for the purposes of this chapter, however, the terms are used indistinguishably. Common to most approaches and methods are the following assumptions:

- An approach or method refers to a theoretically consistent set of teaching procedures that define good practice in language teaching.
- Particular approaches and methods, if followed precisely, will lead to more effective levels of language learning than alternative ways of teaching.
- Teacher training should include preparing teachers to understand and use the best available language teaching methods.

The different teaching approaches and methods that have emerged since the 1950s and 1960s, while often having very different characteristics in terms of goals, assumptions about how a second language is learned, and preferred teaching techniques, have in common the belief that if language learning is to be improved, it will come about through changes and improvements in teaching methodology. This notion has been reinforced by professional organizations that endorse particular teaching approaches and methods, by academics who support some and reject others, by publishers who produce and sell textbooks based on the latest teaching approaches and methods, and by teachers who are constantly looking for the “best” method of teaching a language. Lange (1990: 253) comments:

Foreign language teacher development ... has a basic orientation to methods of teaching. Unfortunately, the latest bandwagon “methodologies” come into prominence without much study or understanding, particularly those that appear easiest to immediately apply in the classroom or those that are supported by a particular “guru.” Although concern for method is certainly not a new issue, the current attraction to “method” stems from the late 1950s, when foreign language teachers were falsely led to believe that there was a method to remedy the “language teaching and learning problems.”

Hunter and Smith (2012: 430) suggest that the notion of methods has also been established by the fact that accounts (such as this one) represent “a general tendency in the profession to ‘package up’ the past by assigning methods labeled to bounded periods of history. Past methods are presented as fixed sets of procedures and principles, with little attention paid to the contexts in which these were developed, the way alternatives were debated at the time, or indeed the extent to which there was continuity with previous period.” This should be kept in mind in reading the accounts presented here.

Notwithstanding the note of caution above, debate over the teaching methods and approaches that will be covered in this book has been a dominant theme in language teaching since the 1950s. The 1950s and 1960s saw the emergence of the Audiolingual Method and the Situational Method, which were both superseded by the Communicative Approach (Chapter 5). During the same period, other methods attracted smaller but equally enthusiastic followers, including the Silent Way (Chapter 16), the Natural Approach (Chapter 14), and Total Physical Response (Chapter 15). Since the 1980s and 1990s, Content-Based Instruction (Chapter 6), and task-based and text-based approaches (Chapters 9 and 10) were developed as well as movements such as Competency-Based Language Teaching (Chapter 8) that focus on the outcomes of learning rather than methods of teaching. Other approaches such as Cooperative Language Learning (Chapter 13), Whole Language (Chapter 7), and Multiple Intelligences (Chapter 12), originally developed in general education, have been extended to second language settings. And more recently CLIL (Chapter 6) has attracted considerable interest in Europe, as has the Common European Framework of Reference which shifts focus to the outcomes of learning.

At the same time, applied linguists have also questioned the assumptions implicit in the views of teaching underlying the concept of approaches and methods. For example, Holliday (1994) argued that a communicative approach, as taught to teachers who are native



speakers of English, reflects a view of teaching and learning that is culturally bound and reflects assumptions from dominant Western cultures – Britain, Australasia, and North America (see Chapter 20). Kumaravadivelu presents a more radical critique of the influence of Western methods, also known as “inner-circle” based or “center-based” methods, which take as their starting point “the native speaker’s language competence, learning styles, communication patterns, conversational maxims, cultural beliefs, and even accent”:

Briefly, Center-produced methods are based on idealized concepts geared toward idealized contexts. Since language learning and teaching needs, wants, and situations are unpredictably numerous, no idealized teaching method can visualize all the variables in advance to provide situation-specific suggestions that practicing teachers need to tackle the challenges that confront the practice of their everyday teaching. As a predominantly top-down exercise, the conception and construction of methods have been largely guided by a one-size-fits-all cookie-cutter approach that assumes a common clientele with common goals.

(Kumaravadivelu 2012: 18)

Others have suggested that the history of methods is often presented as evidence of self-proclaimed progress, with little consideration of the successes achieved by teachers using superseded methods that are depicted as “failures.” Since the 1990s, many applied linguists and language teachers have consequently moved away from a belief that newer and therefore “better” approaches and methods are the solution to problems in language teaching. Alternative ways of understanding the nature of language teaching have emerged that are sometimes viewed as characterizing the “post-methods era” (Chapter 20). These newer approaches to understanding language teaching are discussed in Part IV of this book.

## **Approaches and methods in teacher preparation programs**

Despite the changing status of approaches and methods in language teaching, the study of past and present teaching methods continues to form a component of many teacher preparation programs. This is discussed more fully in Chapter 20. There are several reasons why methods are a component of many teacher-education programs. The study of approaches and methods

- provides teachers with a view of how the field of language teaching has evolved and forms part of the disciplinary knowledge expected of language teachers today;
- introduces teachers to the issues and options that are involved in planning and developing a language course;
- introduces a variety of principles and procedures that teachers can review and evaluate in relation to their own knowledge, beliefs, and practice.

This is the orientation we adopt toward the teaching approaches and methods described in this book. In order to understand the fundamental nature of methods in language

teaching, however, it is necessary to conceptualize the notion of approach and method more systematically. This is the aim of the next chapter, in which we present a model for the description, analysis, and comparison of methods. This model will be used as a framework for our subsequent discussions and analyses of particular language teaching methods and philosophies.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have looked at the emergence of methods, which in the early years included an emphasis on Latin and the Grammar-Translation Method. The Reform Movement then led to an emphasis on the spoken language and development of the Direct Method, a “natural method” emphasizing native-speaker input as a way for the learner to induce language patterns in the target language. Criticisms that the Direct Method lacked a thorough methodological underpinning led to the birth of the “methods era” and the many approaches and methods that will be covered in this book. More recently, some educators have criticized the better-known approaches and methods as “Western-centric,” and applied linguists have begun to conceptualize new ways of understanding language.

## Discussion questions

1. What changes in approaches to language teaching have you experienced? What prompted the changes you have witnessed?
2. Have you ever been trained in, or have you ever studied, the use of a “new” language teaching method? What are your recollections of the experience? Has it had a lasting impact on your approach to teaching?
3. “The goal of foreign language study is to learn a language in order to ... benefit from the mental discipline and intellectual development that result from foreign language study” (p. 6). What do you think are examples of this “mental discipline” and “intellectual development”? Are these relevant to language learning today?
4. Have you experienced grammar-translation instruction yourself? How was your experience? Were there any aspects of it that you enjoyed or thought were useful for your own teaching?
5. Review the beliefs of Viëtor, Sweet, and other reformers in the late nineteenth century presented on page 10. To what extent do these differ from your own?
6. Can you think of situations where the use of translation and a heavy reliance on the learner’s first language can be fruitful?
7. What are some ways in which first and second language learning are similar? In what ways are they different?
8. The Coleman Report, published in 1929, recommended a focus on reading as the basis of language instruction. In some countries today, language classes meet for only two or

three hours per week and most of the learners will not move or travel overseas. Could a similar argument be made for a focus on reading skills?

9. What do you think is the value of studying approaches and methods, including older and more current ones? What factors contributed to the development of the methods era? Do you perceive a Western bias in current approaches and methods that you are familiar with?

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