

侯冰洁 刘希彦 ◆ 编著

英语教学 方法论

TESOL

FROM
THE METHODOLOGICAL
PERSPECTIVE

吉林大学出版社
JILIN UNIVERSITY PRESS



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图书在版编目 (C I P) 数据

英语教学方法论/侯冰洁, 刘希彦编著. —长春: 吉林大学出版社, 2008.9

ISBN 978-7-5601-3946-3

I. 英... II. ①侯...②刘... III. 英语—教学法—研究
IV. H319.3

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2008) 第 139501 号

书名: 英语教学方法论

作者: 侯冰洁 刘希彦 编著

责任编辑、责任校对: 崔小波

吉林大学出版社出版、发行

开本: 850×1168 毫米 1/32

印张: 16.75 字数: 400 千字

ISBN 978-7-5601-3946-3

封面设计: 孙群

长春市永昌印业有限公司 印刷

2008 年 9 月 第 1 版

2008 年 9 月 第 1 次印刷

定价: 32.00 元

版权所有 翻印必究

社址: 长春市明德路 421 号 邮编: 130021

发行部电话: 0431-88499826

网址: <http://www.jlup.com.cn>

E-mail: jlup@mail.jlu.edu.cn

Preface

Within the language teaching profession, TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) is a dynamic and rapidly growing field. Located at the interface of applied linguistics and education, TESOL is concerned with theoretical and practical issues in teaching English as a second or foreign language (ESL / EFL). TESOL is a vast subject, and this is a relatively short book which of necessity has had to adopt a specific and therefore limited perspective. Among the central areas of interest in TESOL, the research and development of language teaching methodologies is of vital importance. Different theories concerning the nature of language and language learning, when applied to the actual ESL/EFL situation, have always given rise to a considerable array of instructional methodologies. With a contemporary account of major trends in ELT methodology, this book is hence to offer valuable insights to teachers of English in China who may wish to keep abreast of current developments in TESOL.

The overall aim of the book is to provide a synthesis between “principle” and “practice” by making links between background issues in applied linguistics (views of language, psychological bases of language learning and so on), and at the same time looking at the practical design of methods. The fourteen chapters of the book are divided into two parts. Chapter 1 to 4 in the first part relate to the conceptual basis of language teaching by looking at the nature of language and language proficiency, the nature of language learning and teaching, and the language teaching background. The second part of the book focuses largely on different methodologies in

language teaching based on the theoretical framework discussed in Part One. Each chapter 5 – 13, is organized in such a way as to show the underlying theoretical assumptions, the salient features, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of each methodology. The last chapter in this part is to be seen as a final unifying one that offers reflections on some of the key points of the book.

This book can be used as a textbook in courses on language teaching methodology and teacher preparation, or as a reference book for teaching practice. The sequence of chapters is designed especially for people who wish to use the book as a complete course, working through it from beginning to end. The references at the end of each chapter can provide more background to the topic one is investigating.

We hope this book may fill the gap in the relevant literature in China. Our final goal in writing this book is still that of enabling readers to become better informed about contemporary ELT methods by providing a relatively compact reference package so that they can make wiser judgments about their present and future classroom practice.

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2008. 08. 08

Table of Contents

Part One The Conceptual Basis of Foreign Language Teaching	1
Chapter 1 The Nature of Language and Language Proficiency	4
1.1 Structuralism	5
1.2 Functionalism	15
1.3 Language Proficiency	23
References	33
Chapter 2 The Nature of Language Learning	36
2.1 Theories of Language Learning	36
2.2 Learning Strategies	54
2.3 Learner Factors	63
References	78
Chapter 3 The Nature of Language Teaching	82
3.1 Language Teaching Objectives	84
3.2 Syllabus	88
3.3 Roles of Teachers & Learners	96
3.4 Teaching Materials Evaluation	103
3.5 Language Testing	109
References	113
Chapter 4 The Language Teaching Background: A Brief History of Language Teaching	116
4.1 Language Teaching in the Classical Era	116
4.2 Language Teaching in the 19th Century	121
4.3 Language Teaching since 1900	136
References	151

Part Two Language Teaching Methodology	154
Chapter 5 The Grammar-Translation Method	158
5.1 Introduction	158
5.2 Theoretical Assumptions	160
5.3 Principal Features	162
5.4 Description of a Sample Lesson	171
5.5 Critique	177
References	186
Chapter 6 The Direct Method	189
6.1 Introduction	189
6.2 Theoretical Assumptions	190
6.3 Principal Features	193
6.4 Description of a Sample Lesson	201
6.5 Critique	207
References	213
Chapter 7 The Audiolingual Method	216
7.1 Introduction	216
7.2 Theoretical Assumptions	218
7.3 Principal Features	223
7.4 Description of a Sample Lesson	237
7.5 Critique	242
References	249
Chapter 8 The Natural Approach	252
8.1 Introduction	252
8.2 Theoretical Assumptions	254
8.3 Principal Features	259
8.4 Description of a Sample Lesson	276
8.5 Critique	281
References	285

Chapter 9 Total Physical Response	289
9.1 Introduction	289
9.2 Theoretical Assumptions	291
9.3 Principal Features	295
9.4 Description of a Sample Lesson	300
9.5 Critique	306
References	314
Chapter 10 Community Language Learning	317
10.1 Introduction	317
10.2 Theoretical Assumptions	319
10.3 Principal Features	326
10.4 Description of a Sample Lesson	333
10.5 Critique	337
References	341
Chapter 11 The Silent Way	344
11.1 Introduction	344
11.2 Theoretical Assumptions	346
11.3 Principal Features	353
11.4 Description of a Sample Lesson	365
11.5 Critique	368
References	371
Chapter 12 Suggestopedia	374
12.1 Introduction	374
12.2 Theoretical Assumptions	376
12.3 Principal Features	386
12.4 Description of a Sample Lesson	393
12.5 Critique	398
References	401

Chapter 13 Communicative Language Teaching	403
13.1 Communicative Language Teaching: An Overview.....	403
13.2 Theoretical Assumptions	419
13.3 Principal Features.....	437
13.4 Description of a Sample Lesson.....	461
13.5 Critique.....	465
References.....	476
Chapter 14 Final Comments on the Methodology in TESOL.....	482
14.1 Overall Evaluation of the Methods	482
14.2 Principled Eclecticism.....	485
14.3 Postmethod Pedagogy	494
14.4 Modern-Day Issues and Predictions of the Future	503
References.....	513

Part One

The Conceptual Basis of Foreign Language Teaching

As teachers of English as a foreign or second language (EFL/ESL), we are members of an established worldwide profession. As Richards (1985: 1) reminds us, “the current status of English has turned a significant percentage of the world’s population into part-time users or learners of English”. Wherever we work, we share many assumptions about what we do; we prepare and use teaching materials and classroom methods based on similar, or at least comparable, principles. Despite this commonality, different countries have widely differing educational systems and philosophies, resulting in teachers being subject to different expectations and pressures. In this part, however, we shall take some time to look beyond our individual teaching circumstances to what can be thought of as a professional “common core”, which has relevance to all teachers.

The idea of a “common core” is dealt with in considerable depth by Stern who, in his *fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching* (1983), proposes a very detailed “conceptual framework”, designed as a model that is intended to capture what he sees as the complexity of language teaching. After surveying a number of earlier models, he then sets out his own scheme. Its main components are:

TESOL from the Methodological Perspective

1. Views of the nature of language

Language teaching requires a concept of the nature of *language*. Implicitly or explicitly the teacher works with a theory of language. Therefore, one of the central questions to ask of a language teaching theory is: What is the view of language in this language teaching theory? The main disciplines that can be drawn upon to deal with this question are linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and the study of particular languages.

2. Views of the language learner and language learning

Language teaching demands a view of the *learner* and of the nature of *language learning*. The fundamental questions are: What language learner does this theory envisage, and how does it view language learning? The disciplines that most directly relate to this question are psychology, particularly educational psychology, and psycholinguistics for language learning and language use.

3. Views of the language teacher and language teaching

Language teaching implies a view of the *language teacher* and *language teaching*. The question to ask is: How does the theory interpret teaching? What role and function does it assign to the teacher? How can teaching be described or analyzed? The discipline that most directly relates to this concept is the study of education.

4. The whole context

Finally, language teaching occurs in a given *context*. The interpretation of context is an essential part of a theory. Language, learning, and teaching must always be viewed in a context, setting, or background. Accordingly, there are three

The Conceptual Basis of Foreign Language Teaching

elements: (a) the language context. (b) the educational setting. (c) the language teaching background.

(Stern, 1983:48)

The chief characteristics of the model are that it is comprehensive, covering any type of language teaching operation; that all factors under each heading are interdependent, so that no “single factor, for example, the teacher, the method, the materials, a new concept, or a technological device, can by itself offer a general solution to most language learning problems” (Stern, 1983: 47); and that it sees language teaching as multidisciplinary. Stern’s perspective will be evident in most chapters of this book.

In what follows, this notion of a “framework” is set out in a little more detail. We then subdivide it under the four headings of “The Nature of Language and Language Proficiency”, “The Nature of Language Learning”, “The Nature of Language Teaching”, and “The Language Teaching Background: a Brief History of Language Teaching”. The theories and principles explored in this part serve as an organizer for the discussion of theory and practice that unfolds in the rest of this book.

Chapter 1

The Nature of Language and Language Proficiency

Strevens, one of the foremost theoreticians in Britain to make linguistics known to language teachers, advocates that: “The teaching of English as a foreign language has become a joint activity, containing on the one hand both education and methodology... and on the other hand, a sound background of linguistic thought and up-to-date descriptions of the present-day language...” (Strevens, 1981: 19). The theory of language with which the teacher operates may not be consciously formulated; it may simply be implicit in the teaching traditions, in the concepts employed to talk about languages, in the way textbooks are arranged, or in the content and format of dictionaries and grammars; but “it is hardly imaginable that a language could be taught without some underlying conception of the general nature of language” (Stern, 1983:219).

In other words, one cannot teach or learn a language for long without being faced with some of the great puzzles about the nature of language. What is language? How should we set about learning a language? What is the best way of dividing up this enormous task and of arranging the various features that we recognize as parts of a language? Most of us in the foreign and second language field consider teaching for proficiency our ultimate goal. Yet what does the term “language proficiency” mean precisely? What does one have to know in terms of grammar, vocabulary, sociolinguistic appropriateness, conventions of discourse, cultural understanding, and the like in order to know a language well enough to use it for some real-world purpose?

The Nature of Language and Language Proficiency

To explore these questions is what we set out to do in what follows. In the present chapter different theories about the nature of language and language proficiency that serve as the source of practices and principles in language teaching will be considered as a study in its own right. Points of contact with language teaching will be examined as well.

1.1 Structuralism

Instead of reviewing all trends in linguistic theory, we only look closely at those models that have exercised a great influence on language teaching. The first, and the most traditional one, is structuralism, which views language as a system of structurally related elements for the coding of meaning.

1.1.1 The Structural View of Language

One of the earliest and most significant contributions of modern linguistics to foreign/second language teaching was structural linguistics. In the earlier part of the 20th century the structural or descriptive linguistics school emerged. It dealt with languages at particular points in time (synchronic) rather than throughout their historical developments (diachronic). Structural linguists stress language as an abstract system with a certain structure: “The linguist must take the study of linguistic structure as his primary concern, and relate all other manifestations of language to it” (Saussure, 1983: 4). The basic ideas of structuralism were developed in Ferdinand de Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916).

Rather than looking at language as a set of names for things, or even as a set of words with meanings, Saussure’s structuralism considers language as a multitude of signs, where each sign links a

TESOL from the Methodological Perspective

phonic sound (the signifier) with an idea (the signified). One characteristic of Saussure's synchronic analysis of the language system is a series of binary oppositions or differences and the most notable distinction is that between:

la Parole – the utterance, the act of speech;

la Langue – the underlying system of language.

The significance of any element in a language lies in its relation to other elements in the language system. There are two sorts of relations between the elements:

distributional – the relationship between elements at the *same* level;

integrative – the relationship between elements at *different* levels.

An example of a distributional relation may be found in the relation between parts of speech within a sentence. An example of integrative relation may be found in the vertical relation between phrase-word-morpheme-phoneme.

Saussure sees the sentence as the maximal unit whose form is the constituent structure. The meaning of a constituent at this level is its contribution to the sentence. Within the sentence there are two fundamental modes of relationship:

syntagmatic – the possibility of combination: e.g. s.v.o., noun verb noun.

paradigmatic – the possibility of substitution. In the language system the role of an item depends on the difference between it and other items that might have filled the same place in a given sentence. A verb goes in one slot, a noun in another.

The Nature of Language and Language Proficiency

It is Saussure's view of language as social fact and for the most part, language is quite arbitrary. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is conventional, and tacitly accepted by a speech community. Thus language is a system of signs accepted by a society.

Saussure's assumptions can be reduced to three points: the *systematic* nature of language, where the whole has priority over the parts; the *relational* conception of the elements of language, where linguistic "entities" are defined in relationships of combination and contrast with one another; and the *arbitrary* nature of linguistic signs, where they are defined in terms of the function and purpose they serve rather than in terms of their inherent qualities.

In America, a structural approach was continued through the efforts of Franz Boas and Edward Sapir, who worked primarily with Native American languages, and Leonard Bloomfield, whose methodology required that nonlinguistic criteria should not enter a structural description. Rigorous procedures for determining language structure were developed by Kenneth Pike, Bernard Bloch, Charles Hockett, and others.

American structuralism eschewed the prevailing classicist approaches to grammatical description. The categories of Greek and Latin were fine for Greek and Latin, but should not be applied to Kwakiutl or English. American structuralists were also influenced by the scientific empiricism of the early 20th century. Each language should be described in its own terms, on the basis of objective data in the form of transcribed texts collected from native speakers. American structuralists had the following as their aims:

TESOL from the Methodological Perspective

- To describe the current spoken language of an individual or of a community;
- To limit the area of language to be described by emphasizing language form as the single objective, observable and verifiable aspect of language, thus relegating meaning to a subordinate place;
- To carry out this programme of description by means of a systematic and objective procedure allowing the analyst to derive the grammar of a language from a corpus of recorded data in a quasi-mechanical way. The process usually follows three stages:
 - Field recording of a corpus of data as representative as possible of the language under study;
 - Segmentation of the utterances of the corpus at different levels: phoneme, morpheme, word, phrase, clause, and sentence;
 - Listing of an inventory of forms thus obtained from each level and stating the distribution of the forms.

In this way, an inventory is obtained of grammatical structures that occur systematically in the form of a framework of slots. Grammar is no longer made up of a collection of rules, but rather consists of a list of structures.

According to structural approach to language, language is divided into several levels and each level is dependent on the level immediately above it. In this way of formation, distinctive features combine to form contrasting phonemes, phonemes combine to form