

*English Language Teaching: Theory and Practice*

# 英语教学法· 理论与实践

刘玉梅 肖肃 编著



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## Preface

This book has been made out of a series of scripts used in our teaching of English Language Teaching Course for junior and senior college students over the past six years. Our attempt is to provide a link between theory and practice by exploring insights into views of language and language learning, main teaching methods and approaches, and models of teaching processes, and on the other hand looking at the theoretically supported practices of the teaching of language system and language skills.

The book has been divided into eight parts, each of which deals with a central theme but integrates with the other parts as a whole. Part 1 discusses the nature of language teaching and the necessity of learning language teaching methodology. Part 2 provides an overview of the theories of language and language learning which inform and underpin foreign language teaching. Part 3 outlines the main approaches in foreign language teaching, highlighting different guiding principles of teaching at different times. Part 4 introduces different models of the process of language teaching, such as the PPP Model, the ESA Model, the PPT Model and the TBL Model. Part 5 and Part 6 attempt to relate the above discussed principles and theories to the content of language teaching which includes the teaching of language system and language skills. The teaching of the language system deals with three subparts: the teaching of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. The teaching of the language skills consists of four subparts: the teaching of reading, listening,

speaking and writing. Part 7 focuses on lesson planning and classroom management. Part 8 examines in brief the significance of teacher education and development.

Each part deals with a central theme but integrates into a coherent, interdependent and uniform whole as a book. It can be used as a course book for junior or senior college students who orient their interest in teaching English as a foreign language in their future career or used in training courses for novice and experienced teachers. It can also be a hand book or reference book for in-service teachers to conduct their own self-education through an evaluation of practices in reference to theories.

In the course of editing this book, we owe credit to a considerable number of resources and materials from home and abroad. Due to the limited space, we only covered parts of the main references. We would like to thank them all. Also we would like to thank our fellow colleagues and students for their support in bringing this book to fruition.

Liu Yu-mei  
Xiao Su  
Chongqing

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# ***1*** Introduction

“Learning is finding out what you already know; Doing is demonstrating that you know it; Teaching is reminding others that they know it as well as you do. We are all learners, doers, and teachers.”

—*Richard David Bach*

This first part of the book inquires into the nature of language teaching and the necessity of learning language teaching methodology. It provides a conceptual setting for the discussions in the succeeding chapters.

## **1.1 The Nature of Language Teaching**

Teaching is an art as well as a science, which is also true to the teaching of a language. Like all sciences, language teaching has a set of underlying principles upon which it is based. However, unlike such sciences as mathematics, physics and chemistry which rely more on objectivity, language teaching, more like psychology and sociology, must rely on objectivity as well as subjectivity in order to tap into professional research and education, observe class instructions, synthesize one's own experience and others' experiences, and formulate its principles in instructional practices. In return, these guiding principles, through constant practical verification in real instructional practices, bring their own adaptation and adjustment to

accomplishment.

Through all ages, there have been different parlances about the nature of language teaching. For instance, Stern (1983) defines language teaching as the activities which are intended to bring about language learning. Widdowson (1990) investigates the nature of language teaching as a principled professional activity. In his investigation, he explores the significance of the interdependence of theory and practice. On the one hand, language teaching can be seen as a principled problem-solving activity. It is a kind of operational research which works out solutions to its own local problems in instructional practices. On the other hand, teaching theories may serve as guiding principles in real instructional practices. Only within the domain of application, namely, through the immediate activity of teaching, can the interdependent relationship between theory and practice, ideas and their actualization be realized. Therefore, in matching up theories with practices, experimentation and meditation are at least involved. Still, he sees teaching as a research activity. This research activity of teaching involves instructional activity to devise principled techniques to promote learning and experimental activity to enquire into the relationship between theory and practice. Teaching provides not only for learner development but also teacher development as well and thus in the end, this interactive development promotes learning to a higher degree. Based on this view, he proposes a model of mediation of language teaching.

Ur (1996) understands language teaching as what is intended to result in personal learning for students. Based on his observation, Ur proposes the enriched model which attaches importance not only to concrete experience from real teaching practice, but also to various input from external sources, such as other people's observation, professional research, theorizing, other people's experiments. "The

contexts of language teaching, like the more general social contexts within which they are located, are continually changing, continually challenging habitual ways of thinking and patterns of past certainty. Unless there is a corresponding process of critical appraisal, there can be no adaptation, no adjustment to change." (Widdowson, 1990)

## **1.2 The Necessity of Learning Language Teaching Methodology**

There always seems to be an argument that without any knowledge of theories or principles of teaching, one might as well be able to teach a language based on his or her own experience or intuitive sense of direction. However, teaching based only on personal experience and minimal practical skills will not go too far. Widdowson comments that "teachers tend to be referred as if they were factory workers to be provided with minimal practical skills and required to pick up on the job whatever extra expertise is necessary to keep the production line going." To reach standards of professionalism depends much on "a continual process of self-education through an evaluation of practice in reference to theory." (Widdowson, 1990)

One who knows a language well does not necessarily mean that he or she can teach that language well. We find that teaching and learning are bi-directionally interacting; teaching theory and teaching practice are mutually enhancing. On the one hand, experience, experimentation and observation in real-time teaching activities help to shape language teaching theories. On the other hand, these theories will in reverse act on instructional practice. Besides, interdisciplinary knowledge (eg. psychology, sociology, pedagogy, manage-

ment science) assists in language teaching.

In real teaching context of a language, regardless of the common senses which teaching requires, a lot more factors have to be taken into account: the nature of the language to be taught, teaching content and its sequence to be carried out in teaching practice, individual differences, the interpersonal relationships that exist between either the teacher and the student or the student and other students or even students and the learning environment, the instruction setting, the management of the equipment, the time available for instruction, assessment, the teaching results, etc.

In consideration of the variety and complexity of all these factors in teaching practice, one can hardly do a better job without resorting to some guiding principles. Contrarily, without retrospection of and reflection on the experiences in real instructional practice, one cannot bring the guiding principles into full play.

It seems that the development of professional competence probably is the most important and most difficult part of the making of a good language teacher from whom adequate qualifications for the profession are demanded, such as a good mastery of that language, know-how of language theories and learning theories, specific skills, strategies and ability, a general range of interdisciplinary knowledge, etc.

Therefore, teacher training and education sounds as equally important as student development for the former imposes direct impact on the latter and vice versa. This is what the making of a successful language teacher counts.

### **1.3 Overview of This Book**

It is too huge a task to cover all principles and theories of lan-

guage teaching and learning in one book. And it is all the more impossible to note down all the practical experiences of each individual teaching case. The overall aim of this book is to provide some theories and practices in brief which may shed light on our understanding of theory and practice in language teaching and learning.

The contents of this book have been organized as follows. Part 1 discusses the nature of language teaching and the necessity of learning language teaching methodology. Part 2 provides an overview of the theories of language which inform and underpin foreign language teaching. Part 3 outlines the main approaches in foreign language teaching, highlighting different guiding principles of teaching at different times. Part 4 introduces different models of the process of language teaching. Part 5 and Part 6 attempt to relate the above discussed principles and theories to the content of language teaching which includes the teaching of language system and language skills. Part 7 focuses on lesson planning and classroom management. Part 8 examines the significance of teacher education and development.

## 2 Views on Language and Language Learning

“Language is a process of free creation; its laws and principles are fixed, but the manner in which the principles of generation are used is free and infinitely varied. Even the interpretation and use of words involves a process of free creation.”

——Noam Chomsky

This part of the book is to provide an overview of the theories of language which inform and underpin foreign language teaching.

When we discuss language teaching and learning, there is a necessity for us to first answer “What is language?” How we understand language may be the basis for syllabus design, teaching methods used in instructional practices, teaching procedures in the classroom, and even the techniques used in the class. Based on different views on language, teaching methodologies may vary to some degree.

### 2.1 Views on Language

“What is language?” may at first sound like a simple question that does not deserve effort to answer, for we always take it for granted that it should be part of life as walking and eating. Modern linguists have defined language in various ways with each having its

own special emphasis and its own limitations. Generally, language involves at least three activities: a neural activity in the brain, a muscular activity in the human body, and a social activity which engages individuals interacting with one another and with the written language. (胡壮麟, 2002)

People take different views at the study of language from different angles. A summary made by Richards & Rodgers (1986) of the most influential ones are the structural view, the functional view and the interactional view. In addition to the above three views, there are also the instrumental view, the innate view and the experiential cognitive view. 王寅 (2005) explains in brief in his *Explorations on Cognitive Linguistics* how these views are influenced by other disciplines and in turn influences the formation and development of language teaching methodology. The following part explains the axioms and theoretical framework that may motivate a particular teaching method.

#### ● The Instrumental View

Before the 19th century, people took a prescriptive study of language which prescribes what should be done and should not be done in a language. Language is seen as static and descriptive. In the 19th century, people took a historical comparative study of language. This view of language is embodied in the Grammar-Translation Method (in 3.1). (王寅, 2005) This approach was historically used in teaching Greek and Latin for the purpose of gaining access to classical literature.

#### ● The Structural View

The structural view takes a rigid descriptive approach in linguistic study, which has its influence from some other disciplines such as analytic philosophy, behaviorism. It sees language as a system of structurally related elements for the transmission of meaning,



a linguistic system made up of various subsystems: phonological, morphological, lexical, and syntactical. Therefore, the target of language learning is seen to be the mastery of elements of this system. (Richards & Rodgers, 1986)

Based on this view of language, some of the language learning methods are generated, eg. the Audiolingual Method (in 3.3). (Richards & Rodgers, 1986) Some contemporary methods which embody this view of language are the Silent Way (in 3.4) and Total Physical Response (in 3.7). (Rodgers, 2001; Nunan, 2004)

#### ● The Functional View

The communicative or functional view of language takes a communicative and functional approach in linguistic studies, which is influenced by other disciplines such as sociology, behaviorism. It views language as a vehicle for the expression of functional meaning. The semantic and communicative dimensions of language are more emphasized than the grammatical characteristics, although these are also included. (Richards & Rodgers, 1986) This view of language is embodied in the language learning method the Communicative Approach, or Functional-Notional Approach (in 3.9) which later leads to the emergence of Task-Based Language Teaching (in 3.10) and Learner-Centered Education (in 3.11). (Nunan, 2004)

#### ● The Interactional View

The interactional view of language sees language primarily as the means for establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships and for performing social transactions between individuals. Language teaching content may be specified and organized by patterns of exchange and interaction or may be left unspecified, to be shaped by the inclinations of learners as interaction. Therefore the target of language learning in this view is learning to initiate and