

*A practical guide to the teaching of*  
**ENGLISH**  
*as a second or foreign language*

WILGA M. RIVERS

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# *Preface*

Teaching a language is an interesting and exciting occupation. Since the nature of language and its complex operations is still a matter of controversy and since the psychologists have still much to learn about how language is acquired—the native language as well as a second or third language—we, as language teachers, have an open field. We are free to experiment and innovate. We can appropriate what has proved successful in other times and other places. We can repeat and refine what we have found to be effective in our own circumstances with our own students. We can share successes and explore failures with our colleagues, learning much from each other.

Learning to use a language freely and fully is a lengthy and effortful process. Teachers cannot learn the language for their students. They can set their students on the road, helping them to develop confidence in their own learning powers. Then they must wait on the sidelines, ready to encourage and assist, while each student struggles and perseveres with autonomous activity. Some students learn the language well, even while the teacher observes. For those who find the task more difficult, we should at least make every effort to ensure that their language-learning is an enjoyable and educational experience.

As teachers of English to students who are already accustomed to using a different language, we must not become discouraged. Our task is certainly not an easy one. We rarely see the fully developed product of our labors—the autonomous, confident speaker of English—although we will often be rewarded by the enthusiasm of those we have started along

that path, and they may pleasantly surprise us when we meet them in later years. Students interested in language and uninhibited in using whatever they have assimilated will have a foundation on which to build when further opportunity presents itself. Surely all true education is beginnings. It is the hope of the authors that this book and its companion volumes will play some part in stimulating imaginative and resourceful teaching which will arouse and sustain effective self-motivated learning.

In these books we do not provide final answers. What we have written is intended to provoke lively discussion. This is clearly an age when flexibility is a prime attribute for the young teacher. As teachers, whether prospective or experienced, consider the many techniques we have described and understand the rationale behind them, they will be establishing a solid basis for choice when they are faced, in a local situation, with a wide variety of students of different ages and personal objectives. Ultimately, their selection should accord with their educational ideals, their own personality potential, and the needs and learning preferences of their students. The one all-sufficient answer for the classroom teacher is an alluring panacea but as illusory and unattainable as the philosopher's stone.

Method books for the preparation of teachers of English abound. Some students using this book may have a background in general methodology such as is provided in *Teaching Foreign-Language Skills*\* and books of a similar nature. The range of material in that book, however, is not considered in detail in this one. Rather, many ideas implicit and explicit in the earlier book have been developed in practical detail in the light of more recent emphases in the various branches of linguistics and the psychology of language. (Teachers are provided with much information without the confusions of overly technical language.) Stress is laid throughout on using language from the earliest stages for the normal purposes of language. Attention is also paid to some contemporary developments in the study of the English language.

For all the volumes in this series of *Practical Guides* the basic theoretical discussion and the elaboration of techniques remain parallel but for every exercise or activity, and for the types of study materials discussed, examples are supplied in the language the student will be teaching. The books are, therefore, appropriate for simultaneous use in a multiple-language methods class as well as for language-specific courses for the training of teachers at the various levels. The material will also be useful for in-service training courses and institutes, enabling teachers of different languages to consider general problems together while penetrating to the heart of the matter through the language with which each is most familiar. The books will also provide a treasury from which practicing

\* Wilga M. Rivers, 1968. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

teachers can draw many ideas for individualized learning packets and for small-group activity, as well as for stimulating learning in a more conventional classroom.

A few additional explanations may facilitate the use of the book.

First of all, the terminology of the title may need some elucidation. In this book, we use the term *English as a second language* for the teaching of English to speakers of other languages in an English-speaking environment or in an area where English is widely spoken as a *lingua franca*. We retain the term *English as a foreign language* for areas where the student of English will not often hear or have opportunities to use English for communication. The term "foreign language" will sometimes be used for the target language, in this case English, where the distinction between the two situations is immaterial to the methodology.

This book is intended for a very varied readership: teachers of English to groups with a homogeneous language background who may or may not speak the language of their students; teachers of English to groups from diverse language backgrounds, some, or one, of whose languages the teacher knows or none of which the teacher knows. These programs may be in a country where the student's native language is spoken and English never heard, in an English-speaking country, or in a country where English is a second language. We address teachers of English in bilingual programs; teachers of English to beginners whether they be children, adolescents, adult students, or adult immigrants, teachers of English to students with a high school background of English who wish to study in English at undergraduate or graduate levels; and teachers of English to civil servants or service personnel who expect to fill posts abroad. The objectives of the students in these programs may be partial bilingualism or full bilingualism. They may have as their personal objectives a cursory reading knowledge of English, a thorough reading knowledge, a high degree of listening comprehension and reading ability, or a high degree of aural-oral proficiency. Clearly, all the techniques discussed in this book are not applicable to each of these situations; some will obviously be inappropriate. The teacher of English as a second or foreign language is a professional who must diagnose and select according to the particular situation of a specific class of students and adapt materials and techniques accordingly. In the teacher-training class, the appropriateness of the material being studied to particular situations will be one source of fruitful discussion.

Although there is some detailed discussion of points of English syntax and phonology, these are subordinate to the discussion of the preparation of teaching and testing materials and the elaboration of techniques; no attempt has been made to treat them systematically or exhaustively. Other books and other courses are available to meet this need and many of these are listed in the footnotes and the bibliographies. On the other hand,

material used in the examples has been selected with a view to opening up discussion of areas of language about which the less experienced teacher of English may not be quite clear, particular emphasis being laid, in a number of places, on the differences between spoken and written language.

The symbols used for phonemic transcription in this book are set out in Appendix A. They follow closely those currently in use in American and British materials for teachers. The vowel symbols we use for General American (GA) are almost identical with those used by C. H. Prator and B. W. Robinett in their *Manual of American English Pronunciation*, 3d ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972), and by J. D. Bowen in *Patterns of English Pronunciation* (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House, 1975); the consonant symbols are the same as those used in the Lado-Fries materials from the English Language Institute at the University of Michigan. Symbols for transcribing distinctively different General British (GB) pronunciation are also given in Appendix A. The differences among the various transcribing alphabets in current use are not great, as can be seen from the Table of Transcribing Alphabets in Appendix B. Our final choice of symbols was made on pedagogical and practical grounds. We wished to provide for our readers useful guidance with teaching problems, rather than long discussions of differing opinions among linguists. Our choice, then, is not intended to reflect support of any doctrinal or methodological position regarding phonological analysis, beyond indicating our belief that some alphabetic system for representing the sounds of the language is useful in the study of a new language and in considering the problems of teaching it.

Whenever it seemed appropriate, attention has been drawn to differences between General American (GA) and General British (GB) usage. In some examples, American and British usage are juxtaposed. In these cases a slash (a diagonal line) indicates the alternative usage, the order in each case being American/British, e.g., *apartment/flat*; *gas/petrol*. Where examples have been drawn from British sources, British spelling has been retained. Examples, as given, are not intended to be complete but illustrative of technique. The suggested exercises, indicated by an asterisk \*, then draw the application into other areas of possible confusion or difficulty. One cannot teach what one does not fully understand. Teachers in training will thus have a further opportunity to clarify matters which have worried them in the past.

It should be noted, at this point, that it is the intention of the authors that the asterisked activities be assigned, so that students actively participate in creation of new materials and in the adaptation and refinement of those provided in current textbooks. The close examination and judicious adaptation of text, test, and taped materials should be part of every trainee teacher's experience, along with the trying out in actual teaching situations of what has been developed (whether in micro-lessons or in

practice teaching with a class). Students should be encouraged during their training period to begin a permanent indexed file of personally culled teaching materials, together with ideas for activities and projects. They should keep on file reading passages, informative cuttings from newspapers and magazines, cultural insights, poems, scenes from plays, songs, and games appropriate for various ages and levels, informal visual aids, interesting and amusing variations of techniques, practical activities in which their students can use the language informally and spontaneously, and sources of information and supplementary assistance. If students share what they gather during this important period of preparation, they will not approach their first year of full-time teaching empty-handed.

We, as authors, have tried to make a further contribution to the continuing growth in professionalism of our readers in the preparation of the two bibliographies. These are not mere listings of references for the various chapters, since the details of the books and articles consulted or recommended in specific contexts can be readily retrieved from the Notes. The bibliographies are intended rather as guides to references of quality in many central and peripheral areas of concern, while providing useful information for those wishing to update or expand a personal or institutional library.

The artificiality of dealing with various aspects of language use in separate chapters is apparent (e.g., the separation of listening and acceptable production of sounds from communicative interaction and both of these from knowledge of the rules of grammar). Students will need to hold certain questions in abeyance until they can see the whole picture. For those who wish to consider questions in a different order from that supplied, numerous cross-references are included in the text, in addition to the comprehensive information in the detailed list of contents and the index. To facilitate the finding of examples dealing with various aspects of language use, initial letter classifications have been used throughout different sections, viz., C: Communicating, both speaking and listening; G: Grammar; S: Sounds; R: Reading; and W: Writing.

Examples go beyond the elementary course. Although it is difficult to establish a level of difficulty in the abstract, E has been used to indicate the elementary level, I for intermediate level, and A for advanced level. This classification is non-scientific and indicative only. It will be for the instructor, the student, or the experienced teacher to adjust the interpretation of levels of difficulty to particular situations.

Many of the ideas developed and discussed in this text clearly imply an English-language program which embodies a sequential and coherent course of study. Teachers in loosely organized programs and institutes may read these descriptions of stages of development and a careful progression of exercises with a certain envy, not to say skepticism, wondering if such well-ordered worlds exist. We recognize that the variety of situa-



tions in which English is taught around the world surpasses classification. We are also aware of the myriad cases where a teacher, often unguided, is confronted with a group of students who are heterogeneous in nearly every respect (native language and culture, ability and experience in English, educational level, classroom expectations, and personal goals), united only by the fact that they meet regularly for their English class. They may not even share the motivation: "wanting to learn (more) English," since it is not unknown for students to be in a language class under duress, at the order of some higher authority or seeking only a formal prerequisite for some other course of study. Whatever the circumstances in which they find themselves, realistic teachers (of any subject) will try to assess accurately two aspects of the situation that bear on what they will do: on one hand, the "givens" (the things over which as teachers they have no control) and, on the other, the matters which they themselves can determine. Among the "givens" may be such physical elements as the number and length of class hours and out-of-class study time available to each student, along with textbook or syllabus to be "covered" and psychological realities such as the attention span of individual students and the degree of cooperation which they are willing to offer. Our hope is that once teachers have made a realistic appraisal of the unalterable features of their situation, however anomalous it may be, they will find among the many methods and techniques discussed in this text some useful additions to their resources.

In conclusion, the authors wish to thank most warmly the numerous persons, scholars and teachers in the field, who have contributed to the development of their thinking through discussion, demonstration, or published work, and particularly to their co-authors in the series. Special thanks must, however, go to Tobie Kranitz for her careful and intelligent preparation of the manuscript; to Jean Praninskas for helpful suggestions for improving several sections of the text; to Nicholas Temperley for unfailing support and for help in preparing the sections on British English; to members of the faculty and staff of the Division of English as a Second Language at the University of Illinois, in particular to Wayne and Lonna Dickerson for their generosity in sharing ideas and materials and their critical reading of Chapter 5, to Lubitsa Katz for help of many kinds, to Pearl Goodman for allowing easy and constant access to the DESL Library, to Barbara Casterline for providing ready and pertinent examples; to Willard D. Sheeler for his help in supplying vocabulary lists; and to Wayne Ishikawa for his help with the index.

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W.M.R.  
M.S.T.

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# I COMMUNICATING

## ***Communication acts***

In Part I, speaking and listening are discussed in separate chapters, although in a communication act one clearly complements the other. The reader will bear in mind that being able to speak a language without understanding what is being said by native speakers is of limited use, while being able to understand a language but not speak it can have specialized utility (for the enjoyment of foreign-language films, broadcasts, plays, and songs, or for professional monitoring purposes) but is very frustrating in normal communication situations. Being able to speak comprehensibly does not necessarily ensure ability to comprehend normal native speech; on the other hand many people develop a very high level of aural comprehension without being able to express themselves freely. Both areas require serious attention.

In a well-rounded program, success in each will be recognized as a separate achievement and given equal importance in the eyes of the students. Nevertheless, practice of each should normally be in relation to the other if communicating is the ultimate goal.

## ***Developing skill and confidence in communication***

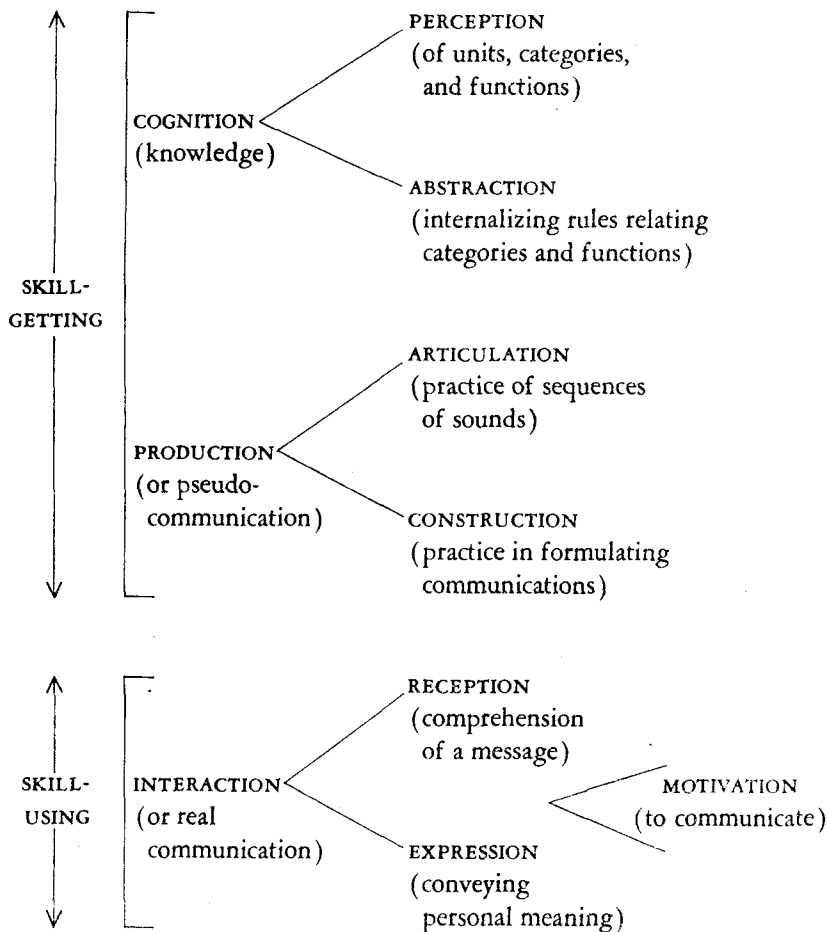
When selecting learning activities, we must always remember that our goal is for the students to be able to interact freely with others: to understand what others wish to communicate in the broadest sense, and to be able to convey to others what they themselves wish to share (whether as a reaction



to a communication or as an original contribution to the exchange). To do this effectively, however, the students must understand how the English language works and be able to make the interrelated changes for which the system of the language provides mechanisms.

The following schema will help us to see the essential processes involved in learning to communicate.

## C1 Processes involved in learning to communicate



Note: 1. This is not a sequential but a parallel schema, in the sense that skill-getting and skill-using<sup>1</sup> are continually proceeding hand in hand. There is genuine *interaction from the beginning*, with students exploring the full scope of what is being learned.