



Contemporary English Language Teaching: Theory and Practice

当代英语教学 理论与实践

戴俊霞 陈宗伦 著



中国科学技术大学出版社

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章

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·合肥·

内 容 提 要

本书遵循理论与实践相结合的原则,综合介绍了英语教学史上的各种流派与方法,较为详细地分析了当代英语教学法的新发展;综合当代英语教学理论研究成果,结合我国英语教学实际,对英语语言知识、语言技能的教学以及跨文化交际能力的培养进行了广泛深入的探讨。本书为全英文著述。

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Preface

The rapid expansion in the use of English has led to prosperity and complexity in the field of **Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language**. Learners of English may be studying American English, Canadian English, Australian English, British English, or some other variety of English. They may be learning it for educational, occupational, or social purposes. Teachers of English may be native speakers of English or those for whom it is a second or foreign language. To improve the quality of English language teaching and learning is now a major concern for the community of language teaching professionals. This book represents the effort we have made with such a concern.

The book follows the practice to use **English language teaching (ELT)** to refer to the situations in which English is taught as a second language (L2), as well as those in which it is taught as a foreign language. It seeks to provide an overview of current approaches, issues, and practices in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (**TESOL**). It has the following goals:

- To provide a comprehensive overview of the teaching of English as a second or foreign language.
- To provide a source of teaching principles and classroom activities which teachers can refer to in their work.

To achieve these goals, the book covers the following topics:

- Historical overview of ELT methodology.
- Developments of communicative approaches.

- Teaching English language knowledge—grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.
- Teaching English language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking.
- Cross-cultural issues in ELT.

The overall theme of the book is to synthesize theory and practice by making links between background issues in applied linguistics where appropriate, and at the same time looking at the practical application in classroom settings. We have divided the book into four parts. Part I relates to English language teaching methodology. Chapter 1 provides a critical review of the history of approaches in English language teaching. Chapter 2 examines the growth of the communicative approaches to language teaching and analyses the “post-communicative” trends in ELT. Part II relates to teaching English language knowledge. Chapters 3 — 5 cover the teaching of grammar, of vocabulary, and of pronunciation respectively. Part III focuses on issues in teaching English language skills: listening (Chapter 6), speaking (Chapter 7), reading (Chapter 8), and writing (chapter 9). Each chapter in the two parts is organized in such a way as to provide research findings, a repertoire of basic teaching and testing techniques in the knowledge or skill area it concerns. Chapter 10 forms the fourth and final part of this book. It focuses on cross-cultural issues by examining the theoretical foundations and teaching application of integrating culture in ELT. Part I and Part II are authored by Dai Junxia, who is also the organizer of the book. Part III and Part IV are authored by Chen Zonglun.

As a relatively compact reference package, the book can be taken as a coursebook for students majoring in English and as a resource book for those researchers and teachers working in the field of ELT. We are very grateful to Anhui University of Tech-

nology for its encouragement and generous support granted in the whole writing course. Sincere gratitude also goes to University of Science and Technology of China Press, who agrees to publish this three-year effort. Most importantly, the authors are sincerely indebted to those copyright holders for giving permission to reproduce the copyright material in this book. Although efforts have been made to obtain permission, we sincerely apologize to those copyright holders whom we fail to contact for various reasons.

Dai Junxia and Chen Zonglun
Anhui University of Technology
January 2007

Contents

Preface	(I)
Part I Methodology in English Language Teaching	
Chapter 1 Historical Overview of ELT Methodology	(3)
1. 1 Traditional Approaches: Grammar -Translation Method and Direct Method	(4)
1. 2 Structuralist Approaches: Situational Language Teaching and Audiolingual Method	(12)
1. 3 Humanistic Approaches: from Community Language Learning to Suggestopedia	(21)
Chapter 2 Developments of Communicative Approaches ...	(40)
2. 1 Communicative Language Teaching	(41)
2. 2 The Natural Approach	(50)
2. 3 Task-Based Language Teaching	(57)
2. 4 Content-Based Instruction	(65)
2. 5 English Language Teaching in the Post-Method Era	(73)
Part II Focus on English Language Knowledge	
Chapter 3 Teaching Grammar	(79)
3. 1 Introduction	(79)
3. 2 Research in the Teaching of Grammar	(80)
3. 3 Approaches to Grammar Teaching	(87)

3.4	Testing Grammar	(99)
Chapter 4	Teaching Vocabulary	(105)
4.1	Introduction	(105)
4.2	Research in the Teaching of Vocabulary	(106)
4.3	Approaches to Vocabulary Teaching	(111)
4.4	Testing Vocabulary	(124)
Chapter 5	Teaching Pronunciation	(131)
5.1	Introduction	(131)
5.2	Research in the Teaching of Pronunciation	(133)
5.3	Approaches to Pronunciation Teaching	(141)
5.4	Testing Pronunciation	(153)
 Part III Focus on English Language Skills 		
Chapter 6	Teaching Listening	(161)
6.1	Introduction	(161)
6.2	Research in the Teaching of Listening	(163)
6.3	Approaches to Teaching Listening	(168)
6.4	Testing Listening	(176)
Chapter 7	Teaching Speaking	(181)
7.1	Introduction	(181)
7.2	Research in the Teaching of Speaking	(183)
7.3	Approaches to Teaching Speaking	(186)
7.4	Testing Speaking	(193)
Chapter 8	Teaching Reading	(201)
8.1	Introduction	(201)
8.2	Research in the Teaching of Reading	(203)
8.3	Approaches to Teaching Reading	(212)
8.4	Testing Reading	(226)

Chapter 9 Teaching Writing	(233)
9.1 Introduction	(233)
9.2 Research in the Teaching of Writing	(235)
9.3 Approaches to Teaching Writing	(239)
9.4 Testing Writing	(247)
Part IV Focus on Cross-Cultural Communication	
Chapter 10 Teaching Culture	(259)
10.1 Introduction	(259)
10.2 Research in the Teaching of Culture	(260)
10.3 Approaches to Teaching Culture	(273)
References	(290)

Part I

Methodology in English Language Teaching

Chapter 1 Historical Overview of ELT Methodology

Methodology in language teaching has been characterized in a variety of ways. A more or less classical formulation suggests that methodology links theory and practice. Within methodology a distinction is often made between methods and approaches, in which methods are held to be fixed teaching systems with prescribed techniques and practices, and approaches are language teaching philosophies that can be interpreted and applied in a variety of different ways in the classroom. This distinction is probably best seen as a continuum ranging from highly prescribed methods to loosely described approaches.

In the field of ELT, the notion of teaching methods has had a long history, as is witnessed by the rise and fall of a variety of methods throughout the recent history of language teaching. Some, such as Audiolingualism, became the orthodox teaching methods of the 1960s in many parts of the world. Other methods such as the Silent Way attracted small but devoted followers in the 1980s and beyond, but attract little attention today. Many teachers have found the notion of methods attractive, since they offer foolproof systems for classroom instruction. Language teachers have displayed a great enthusiasm for methods over the last one hundred years or so. In Brown's (2002) words, in the century spanning the mid-1880s to the mid-1980s, the language teaching profession was involved in what many pedagogical experts would call a search. That search was for a single, ideal

method, generalizable across widely varying audiences that would successfully teach students a foreign language in the classroom. However, the ultimate method that would serve as the final answer was not found. In the process of the search, people have come to be aware of the weakness of the method concept. Methods are too prescriptive and overgeneralized in their potential application to practical situations. They are quite distinctive at the early, beginning stages of a language course but rather indistinguishable from each other at later stages. All the methods make assumptions, and often quite elaborate and detailed ones about the learner and ways of learning. These assumptions appear plausible in principle; they have not been tested critically and systematically against the realities of actual learning. ELT professionals have realized that what they need is not a new method, but to get on with the business of formulating an integrated approach to language teaching and of designing effective tasks and techniques informed by that approach. By the twenty-first century there has been a movement away from a preoccupation with generic teaching methods toward a more complex view of language teaching which encompasses a multifaceted understanding of teaching and learning processes.

This chapter will examine methods and approaches that are well-known in the history of ELT and that are also influential in ELT in China. It is hoped that such an overview will offer complementary perspectives on how the nature of language teaching can be understood.

1.1 Traditional Approaches: Grammar-Translation Method and Direct Method

The first method used in ELT is Grammar-Translation Method, originating from the European tradition of teaching Latin,

while the Direct Method developed in the mid-and late nineteenth century represented a step away from grammar translation and served as a turning point between traditional and modern ELT.

1.1.1 Grammar-Translation Method

1.1.1.1 Introduction

Today, English is the world's most widely studied foreign language. But about five hundred years ago, Latin was the dominant language of education, commerce, religion, and government in the Western world. In the sixteenth century, Latin gradually ceased to be a normal vehicle for communication as the result of political changes in Europe. It was replaced by the vernacular languages such as French, Italian, and English. As the status of Latin diminished, the study of Latin took on a different function. Latin, as a "dead" language, became a "mental gymnastic" and was believed to be able to develop intellectual abilities, a disciplined and systematic study of which was held to be indispensable as a basis for all forms of higher education. Thus, the study of Latin grammar became an end in itself. 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 detailed analysis of grammar rules, study of declensions and conjugations, translation, and practice in writing sample sentences. Once basic proficiency was established, students were introduced to the advanced study of grammar and rhetoric.

As "modern" languages such as French and English were introduced into the curriculum of European schools in the eighteenth century, they were taught using the same basic procedures that were used for teaching Latin. By the nineteenth century, this

approach based on the study of Latin had become the standard way of studying foreign languages in school. A typical textbook in the mid-nineteenth century consisted of chapters or lessons organized around grammar points. Each grammar point was listed, with rules on its use explained, and illustrated by sample sentences. This approach to foreign language teaching became known as the Grammar-Translation Method. It dominated European and foreign language teaching from the 1840s to the 1940s.

1.1.1.2 Theory and practice

The theoretical assumption of Grammar-Translation Method is that language consists of written words and of words which exist in isolation, as though they were individual bricks, which could be translated one by one into their foreign equivalents and then assessed according to grammatical rules in the foreign language. Language learning is viewed as an intellectual activity involving rule learning, the memorization of rules and facts related to first language meaning by means of massive translation practice. The first language is maintained as the reference system in the acquisition of the second language.

The focus of the language class is on the study of written texts. Textbooks consist of statements of abstract grammar rules, lists of vocabulary, and sentences for translation. Speaking the foreign language is not the goal, and oral practice is limited to students reading aloud the sentences they had translated. These sentences are constructed to illustrate the grammatical system of the language and consequently bear no relation to the language of real communication. The basic approach of Grammar-Translation Method is to analyze and study the grammatical rules of the language, and then to practice manipulating grammatical structures through the means of translation both into and from the mother

tongue. A class working with this method would look like this:

(1) Classes are taught in the mother tongue, which is used to explain conceptual problems and to discuss the use of a particular grammatical structure. There is little active use of the target language.

(2) A vocabulary list consisting of new lexical items used in the text is presented together with the mother tongue translation.

(3) Long elaborate explanations of the intricacies of grammar are given.

(4) The grammar item is practiced by using it through writing sentences and translating them into the mother tongue.

(5) The sentence is the basic unit of teaching and language practice. Little attention is paid to the content of texts, which are treated as exercises in grammatical analysis.

(6) Accuracy is emphasized. Students are expected to attain high standards in translation.

1.1.1.3 Comments

There are certain types of learner who respond very positively to a grammatical syllabus as it can give them both a set of clear objectives and a clear sense of achievement. Other learners need the security of the mother tongue and the opportunity to relate grammatical structures to mother tongue equivalents. Above all, this type of approach can give learners a basic foundation upon which they can then build their communicative skills.

However, drawbacks to the grammar-translation approach are obvious. Virtually no class time is allocated to allow students to produce their own sentences, and even less time is spent on oral practice (whether productive or reproductive). In addition, there is often little contextualization of the grammar—although this of course depends upon the passages chosen and the teacher's

own skills. Culture, when discussed, is communicated through means of reading passages, but there is little direct confrontation with foreign elements. Perhaps most seriously, the type of error correction that this method requires can actually be harmful to the students' learning processes since students are put in a defensive learning environment where right answers are expected. It is quite natural that there have been various criticisms of the use of GT for the teaching of modern languages, and particularly English. Though in modified form it continues to be widely used in some parts of the world today, it has no advocates.

1.1.2 Direct Method

1.1.2.1 Introduction

In the mid-and late nineteenth century, a revolution in language teaching philosophy took place that is seen by many as the “dawn” of modern foreign language teaching. Teachers, frustrated by the limits of the Grammar-Translation Method in terms of its inability to create “communicative competence” in students, began to experiment with new ways of teaching language. In Germany, England, France, and other parts of Europe, new approaches to language teaching were developed by language teaching specialists, each with specific methods for reforming the teaching of modern languages. This is known as Reform Movement. The Frenchman Francois Gouin (1831—1896) is perhaps the best known of these reformers. His harrowing experiences of learning German gave him insights into the intricacies of language teaching and learning. Observing his three-year-old nephew he came to the conclusion that language learning is a matter of transforming perceptions into conceptions. Later, he devised a method of teaching languages in a natural way. The basic idea was that learning a