

MARY FINOCCHIARO

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fourth edition

From Theory  
to Practice

# English as a Second/Foreign Language

*From Theory to Practice*

FOURTH EDITION

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# Introduction

My experience as a teacher and teacher trainer in the United States and my assignments in many parts of the world where I have had the good fortune to work with interested, devoted teachers and prospective teachers have reaffirmed my belief that teachers everywhere share the same concerns. With only slight variations because of factors which may prevail in a local situation, teachers voice similar doubts and hopes.

Teachers who are not native English speakers have misgivings about their linguistic competence. Native English speakers who do not know the language of their students wonder whether they can nevertheless teach effectively. Teachers everywhere are uneasy about controversies over current linguistic theories and about the realistic contributions linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, and other sciences can make to language learning and teaching. They are deeply concerned about keeping abreast of the best, most modern methods of teaching, about the attention being given in the literature to individualized instruction and to performance objectives, about tests and grades, about homework, about uninterested pupils, and about “gifted” or “slow” pupils.

All of them are strikingly similar in that they want to become more effective teachers. Nonnative and native English speakers alike express the hope that they can develop communicative competence in their pupils despite what some consider their own linguistic limitations. They want to motivate their students so that they will find language learning a pleasurable, successful activity. They are deeply aware of the fact that they can help their students, their community, and their country better fulfill their needs and aspirations by providing another medium for communicating with neighbors near and far.

This book is dedicated to all those devoted teachers and to my university students whose questions and concerns have forced me to focus attention on the multiplicity of elements involved in the process of teaching and learning a language. It is designed for prospective teachers of English and also for experienced teachers who may find pleasure in confirmation of some of the techniques they have undoubtedly

been using. While bringing some current theories to the attention of teachers and other interested persons, the book states in as many ways as possible that the *real* issue is not modern versus traditional teaching, but more efficient, more effective, and more stimulating learning. Such learning will result not only from the knowledge of various, alternative theories which the teacher may bring to bear on the solution of learning problems. It will stem also from the teacher's conviction that successful language teaching is a judicious blend of science and art—art which only the teacher can provide through enthusiasm for the subject, interest in the students, and creative use of the environment and of the materials available.

This book has been written for use both where English must be learned as a second language—that is, as the major language spoken in the community or the language of instruction in the schools—or where English is taught as a foreign language. While such factors as motivation, pace, and priorities will differ, the principles underlying learning will bear understandable similarities. After all, in both situations we are attempting to add a new mode of communication to human beings who possess similar innate physical, mental, and even psychological capabilities. Adaptations for special situations are treated more fully in Chapter 6.

I have confined myself to what I call minimum essentials, written in language that lay people would understand. This has been done because increased interest in the English language throughout the world and special situations within the United States and Great Britain often make it necessary for teachers or even lay people without a special background in education and in related subjects to start teaching with little or no preparation or orientation.

It is my hope that many of you will pursue even further the facts or thoughts I will outline and that you will make use of the many excellent materials which were the source of much of my knowledge and which you will find mentioned at the end of the book. I regret that you cannot share with me the stimulating talks on language learning that I have had with such people (and how I wish it were possible to name them all!) as Virginia French Allen, of Temple University; Douglas Beakes, Education Advisor, United States Air Force; Helen Beko, USIS; Julia Burks, Deputy Director ELT, USIS, Washington; Denis Girard, Director of BEL in France; Dr. Charles Ferguson, former Director of the Center for Applied Linguistics; Prof. Albert Marckwardt of the University of Michigan; Prof. William R. Lee, Editor of *English Language Teaching*; Mme. Sczablowska of the Polish Ministry of Education; Prof. Ludwig Zabrocki and Prof. Alexander Sculz of the University of Poznan; Prof. Rudy Troike, Director of the Center for Applied Linguistics; Harold Urist, Ainslie Minor, and George McCready of the English Teaching Section of USIS; and Paul Weaver (Nigeria) and Donn Byrne (Italy) of the British Council. The list could fill many pages.

I am indebted to Dr. Jacek Fisiak of the University of Poznan in Poland and to Prof. Gerald Dykstra of the University of Hawaii for their careful reading of the first edition of the manuscript. Their comments, suggestions, and encouragement have been extremely valuable.

As you read, I hope you will keep constantly in mind the fact that all *any* book can do is recommend or suggest ideas or practices. *You*, and *only* you, can choose from among these suggestions those you know will work best for *you*, with *your* pupils, in *your* school, and in *your* community.

—M.F.

## Introduction to the Fourth Edition

Among the many colleagues, associates, and friends who contributed to this edition, I would like to thank Helen Beko, Joseph Bertot, Julia Burks, Gloria Kreisher, George McCready, Ruth Montalvan, Anne Newton, and Lois Roth, all of the United States Information Agency. Virginia French Allen, William R. Lee, Betty W. Robinett, Peter Strevens, Rudi Troike, and Muriel Saville-Troike have each added to my sources of knowledge. British Council officers in Italy in the last twenty years have inspired and challenged me. Paul Weaver, George Preen, Donn Byrne, Kevin Flanagan, Shelagh Rixon, Harley Brooks, and James McCafferty have given me a feeling of belonging by inviting me to give lectures at the British Council and by speaking at United States Information Service and TESOL-Italy (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) functions.

I am indebted to Dr. Jacek Fisiak of the University of Poznan and to the late, dearly beloved linguist, also of Poznan, Dr. Ludwig Zabrocki, who encouraged me to give public demonstration lessons and to publish in the university journal.

It is with a feeling of deep gratitude and humility that I express my sincere thanks to Ms. Brenda White, the editor of this book, and to Prof. Joseph Virrilli who read the manuscript several times and made numerous excellent suggestions which I incorporated into the text. Many thanks, also, to two anonymous reviewers who made worthwhile comments, not all of which I could use because of the increasing length of the manuscript. I did, however—thanks to them—update the glossary (Appendix IV) and the bibliography (Appendix V). Recently published American, British, and Italian texts will be found in the Bibliography. Appendix VI, listing the names of language associations and language journals with their addresses, has been added.

—M.F.

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# 1

## Learning a Second Language

### The Communicative Purposes of Language

The focus on language and language learning today centers primarily on what human beings do with language and how they use it in their lives. What, for example, do they want to clarify in their minds? What messages do they wish or need to communicate to their listeners? In other words, what functions of language do they want to convey?

In order to express a message so that it can be easily understood, speakers must make sure not only that their purpose in speaking is clear and coherent but also that the language they use—particularly in talking with others—is appropriate for the person or persons for whom it is intended. Appropriateness will entail a number of situational elements: (1) the person or persons to whom the communication is addressed, for example, their age, background, and the language they speak and understand; (2) where the communication is taking place; (3) when the communication is taking place (Is it, for example, a conversation that occurs regularly or frequently?); (4) the topic that is being discussed. More will be said about these elements later in this chapter. Here we will point out that these situational elements are subsumed under the term *pragmatics* and that the functions of language have been subdivided—for the sake of simplicity—into six major categories. While not all writers use the same terms, the communicative purposes intended under each function are similar.

What are these functions?

1. *Personal*. To express one's emotions, needs, thoughts, desires, or attitudes; to clarify or classify ideas in one's mind.
2. *Interpersonal*. To establish and maintain good social relations with individuals and groups; to express praise, sympathy, or joy at another's success; to inquire about health; to apologize; to invite.

3. *Directive*. To control the behavior of others through advice, warnings, requests, persuasion, suggestions, orders, or discussion.
4. *Referential*. To talk about objects or events in the immediate setting or environment or in the culture; to discuss the present, the past, and the future.
5. *Metalinguistic*. To talk about language, for example, "What does \_\_\_\_\_ mean?" "Is 'hand' a noun or a verb in the utterance 'Please hand me that book'?"
6. *Imaginative*. To use language creatively in rhyming, composing poetry, writing, or speaking.

*Notions*, specific vocabulary items, complete the functions; in other words, they clarify the communicative purpose of the speaker.

## Second Language Acquisition: Some Hypotheses

The last twenty years have seen the publication of a wide range of books and articles on second/foreign language acquisition. A number of these have been based on in-class observation and research; others have been based on observations of those who acquired language through various out-of-class, informal experiences. Some have been longitudinal studies. These are process-oriented studies in which the researcher concentrates on the learner's state of knowledge, that is, the learner's linguistic competence and interaction with the linguistic environment in which he or she exists. Others have been cross-sectional studies. These are based on the product, that is, the language that the learner can produce at the time of the study. I have reread books by Ellis, Seliger and Long, Hatch, Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (see Appendix V) and numerous recent articles. I have found that a number of theories are still highly tentative. Moreover, the sampling of subjects in some studies is not large enough to really differentiate among the factors which are important in second/foreign language acquisition, for example, age, personality, first language, time in the English-speaking country, curriculum, method, and others.

There exist areas in which researchers are in agreement; there are others in which there are basic disagreements. I will outline both areas, as well as their teaching implications, briefly. Many of these implications are based on hypotheses and not on proven fact. Nevertheless, some of these hypotheses will be reflected in the competence and performance of the learners.

### AREAS OF AGREEMENT

1. A natural order of language acquisition at a beginning level is the same across cultures and across ages. Both children and adults follow the same route of development.

2. The simplest speech to learn at beginning levels is formulaic speech, that is, utterances learned as wholes and not derived from creative rules. These are em-

ployed for particular occasions, for example, greeting, leave taking, apologizing, and requesting directions. Such formulaic speech helps ease processing difficulties.

3. Formulaic utterances are often termed prefabricated *routines*. They differ from prefabricated *patterns* in that the latter are partly memorized and partly creative (novel) utterances.

4. Every human being is born with a language acquisition device (LAD) which consists of two parts: (a) the general, universal “rules” of all natural languages, and (b) a set of lower-level rules for finding out how the universal rules (e.g., to form the interrogative or negative) are realized (expressed) in the language to be learned.

5. Second language acquisition (SLA) is a universal process which reflects the properties of the human mind. The innate mechanism operates (more or less) as a result of input (hearing normal, comprehensible, conversational language).

6. Learning is fairly regular in its development: imitation, intonation, routines, *wh* and yes-no questions, creative *wh* and yes-no questions, inversion rules (e.g., *Is that a new story?*).

7. Variables are found both in the rate and route of learning. For example, age, classroom environment, motivation, and personality affect both the rate and the route.

8. Interaction plays a role in the rate (not the route) of second language development, as does age. Adults tend to learn at a faster rate.

9. There is a natural order of acquisition, according to studies by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen. The order of acquisition of eleven morphemes has been tested on several populations and has been replicated. The natural order emerged primarily when the data were elicited through natural communicative tasks. The order is as follows: (a) nominative and accusative cases, word order of simple sentences; (b) singular copula, plural copula, singular auxiliary, *ing*; (c) past irregular tense forms, possessive forms, conditional auxiliary, *es* plural, *s* in third person singular present-tense verbs; (d) perfect auxiliary, past participle in *en*, possessive *s*. The acquisition sequence for children and adults has been found to be similar and holds for both the oral and written modes.

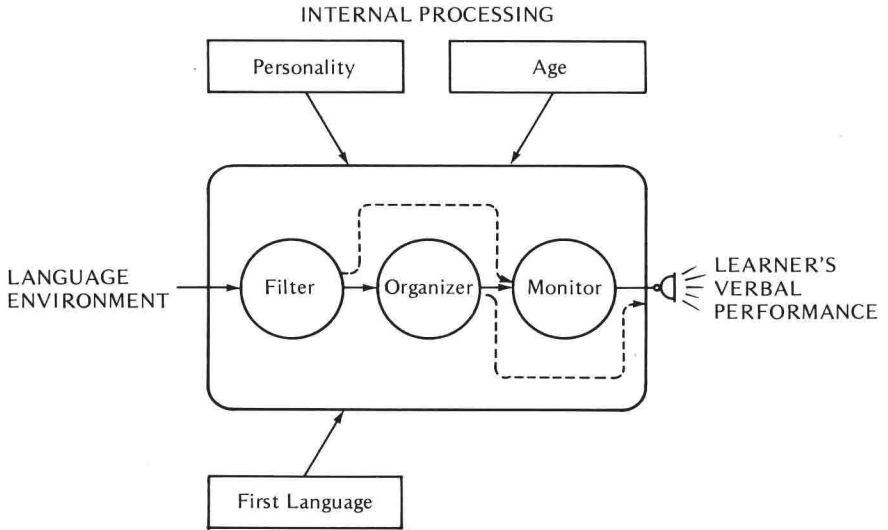
10. Burt and Dulay have prepared a working model for creative construction in second language (L2) acquisition. (See Figure 1.)

## AREAS OF DISAGREEMENT

1. Hatch (1978) feels that the innate mechanism operates independently of the input factors. She posits that second language development depends on two-way conversations that learners engage in.

2. Hatch states also that (a) the frequency of syntactic forms heard influences the forms the learner produces, (b) conversation provides the learner with larger units which are incorporated into the sentences he or she constructs, and (c) conversations with different interlocutors provide a desirable variety of input.

3. Cooperative styles of pupil-pupil interaction may be better suited to SLA than teacher-dominated activity.



**Figure 1. Working model for creative construction in L2 acquisition.**

4. Instruction does not appear to influence the order of acquisition of the morphemes studied. They appear early or late depending on the natural order.

5. Krashen states that there is no transfer of knowledge from acquisition (sub-conscious language knowledge acquired through comprehensible input—natural listening and speaking activities) to learned knowledge, that is, material learned in a formal class situation. The interface hypothesis assumes that knowledge can be transferred from one source to the other. The noninterface hypothesis posits that knowledge cannot be transferred.

6. Krashen states that acquired knowledge is stored by the learner and is therefore available for automatic processing and uninhibited performance. Learned knowledge, on the other hand, requires time for processing, focus on form, and knowledge of the rules.

## THE MONITOR THEORY

Stephen Krashen's monitor theory, as well as others on SLA, created excitement in educational circles. His work with Dulay, Burt, and Terrell has given us some insights into novel hypotheses which have implications for teachers, though not everyone is in total accord with all their premises.

1. The central hypothesis of Krashen and Terrell is that we acquire language when we obtain comprehensible input, that is, when we understand what we hear or read.

2. The learning/acquisition distinction is primarily for adult learners. Learning (in a formal situation) is useful as an editor—as a monitor—to give the speaker feedback.

3. A lower affective filter, particularly in a formal learning environment, is crucial. The atmosphere must be one of positive attitudes, low anxiety, and self-confidence built on a base of successful achievement.

4. The  $i + 1$  principle is important in acquiring language. The learner can move from  $i$  (his or her level of competence at the time of instruction) to  $i + 1$  (where 1 is the stage immediately following in the natural order). A new word or expression is added to a familiar context. The new item need not be in the natural order.

5. Input should be *roughly* tuned. The teacher should use much known language in context so that there is constant recycling and review of known material.

6. The affective filter hypothesis is realistic: input  $\rightarrow$  filter  $\rightarrow$  LAD  $\rightarrow$  acquired competence. Notice that input does not become intake when the filter rejects it.

7. The monitor is used by learners to obtain feedback on any errors made and to self-correct. Time is needed as well as (a) a knowledge of the rule, (b) a knowledge of first language (L1), and (c) a knowledge of the world.

## TEACHING IMPLICATIONS

Implications for teaching culled from various sources of SLA hypotheses are briefly outlined below.

1. Teach a subject in English or use English as a medium of instruction (with bilingual teachers if at all possible).

2. Simplify lexical items through paraphrase, circumlocution, gestures, miming, and demonstrations.

3. Elaborate and expand a learner's response so that he or she is able to end a conversation with what is called a *vertical construction*, that is, an utterance that has been built up gradually by brief questions or comments made by the teacher in response to the learner's question, statement, or comment (cf. Ellis, 1985, 1986).

4. Expansion by the teacher will facilitate the rate of SLA.

5. At beginning levels (a) accept nonverbal or one-word responses; (b) use short, simple sentences; (c) repeat and expand the learner's response; (d) use the here-and-now principle (discuss what the learners can see and touch, not the outside world nor past or future events).

6. Interaction should be reciprocal, not one-way.

7. Make the learners aware of core goals (the activity and the topic) as well as framework goals; that is, (a) input must become intake through the performance of a wide variety of tasks or activities in pairs or small groups, and (b) the learner must be helped to feel the need to communicate. He or she must have control, where feasible, of the topic being discussed. The input must be rich in directives (instructions to be carried out). It must make continuous provision for extending and elaborating the learners' utterances. It must be uninhibited. Learners should not be interrupted when errors are made unless comprehension has come to a standstill.

8. In teaching grammar, in the formal operations stage (over about the age of twelve), allow for different degrees of explicitness, depending on the learners'

developmental levels. Provide for enough time to elaborate rules and examples in context.

9. The learnability of a rule depends on formal and functional simplicity. For example, whereas definite and indefinite articles are formally simple, they are functionally difficult.

10. Remember the importance of a silent (nonverbal) period. The learner must have minimum competence in L2 before he or she can begin to communicate.

11. Ellis (1986) advocates a variable competence model. Encourage learners to use an alternative L2 rule (for either planned or unplanned discourse) at any point. Moreover, encourage them to use formulaic speech and routines which can be developed into patterns. He believes in teaching, first, reduced speech (lexicon only), then syntactic utterances, later marked morphemes, and at more advanced levels complex utterances (logical connectors, embedding, clefting). He believes, moreover, that expansion, paraphrasing, and repetition facilitate language learning.

## Methodology Today

Many theories and methods favored at the turn of the century are still in use in classes today in many parts of the world. Moreover, and this is another truth about language teaching and learning, few theories and methods practiced in the past have disappeared completely.

We improve them, discard the nonproductive features in them, but much remains, which is then integrated into a succeeding approach. To take a fairly recent example, we still utilize some facets of the audio-lingual method with its emphasis on structural linguistics and behaviorist psychology. We have not done away with dialogues, but those found in texts today are shorter and more lifelike. Moreover, we now make certain that learners comprehend the meaning of all utterances through pictures, gestures, dramatization, or native language equivalents (in classes where all the learners understand the same language). We enable learners to remember dialogue utterances through role playing and other forms of dramatization but never through brute memorization. We still make time, where necessary, to engage in pattern drills, but utterances today are usually contextualized, leading to ease in habit formation and, therefore, to fluency. We still believe—and recent research does not disprove this—that a student response which is rewarded by the teacher is reinforced and learned, while negative, insensitive teacher reaction or feedback can be detrimental to learning since the affective filter will be raised and will thus reject the material.

It is very difficult to select from the plethora of hypotheses, theories, and methods or techniques in use in the twentieth century those which are significant. However, I shall mention those aspects of teaching theory and methods which I have used myself or have seen good teachers use in some fifty countries. Sometimes the results were gratifying; sometimes they were unsatisfactory. The following methods have made an impression on me for a variety of reasons.



1. *The Gouin method.* In this method, sequential actions are accompanied by utterances which describe the action being performed, first by the teacher and then by individual learners. This technique has been quite effective with the younger learners and is still in use today.

2. *The direct method.* In this method, chunks of language are taught in the target language. I loved it as a student of French because I had a superb teacher. However, learners, especially older ones, often find that the overweening preoccupation with pronunciation and intonation, the time often spent in getting a meaning across, and the tension caused by the exclusive use of the target language are frustrating to them.

3. *Basic English* (or other language). I was forced to use basic English for two years in the New York City schools. In this system, language is simplified to include only 16 verbs and 800 content words. The tasks students were asked to perform (e.g., Use these words to write a correct sentence: I/basket/with/go/the/to/park/a.) were time-wasting puzzles and did not lead to even the suspicion of interaction or communication. In basic English one is forced to render Churchill's famous words "blood, sweat, and tears" as "red water from the body, white water from the body, and white water from the eyes."

4. *The grammar-translation method.* This method has been with us through the centuries and is still with us. I hear it used all around me in my work assignments. Here again, there are excesses which are deplorable. Only the deductive approach to grammar learning is used. (In German, I memorized the rule, "Aus, bei, mit, nach, and so on, take the dative," but I never heard or produced an example with any of these prepositions!) Translations of meaningless sentences were found in texts, for example, "The pen of my grandfather is on the dresser of my grandmother" or "The ice is not hot." These exaggerations can be laid not only at the door of textbook writers but also at the door of teachers who are afraid to use their intuition and common sense to modify and adapt the presentation of material and practice activities in a method or text in fashion.

5. *The reading method* (used primarily in the United States and Canada). In the late 1920s, people concerned with education began to realize that few students spoke any foreign language correctly and fluently upon leaving high school or even college. A commission headed by Algernon Coleman prepared a report by American and Canadian educators in which they stated that research and observation indicated that no one could learn to understand or use a spoken language in the limited time for language study given in schools. They recommended that reading skill be given emphasis—both intensive and extensive reading—and that only the grammatical structures found in reading selections be presented, primarily to ensure recognition. Readers (instead of grammar texts) containing simplified and adapted or original stories were used. If the books selected were interesting and at the appropriate reading level, many students derived a positive feeling of achievement from the reading method. It is interesting to note that the market has recently begun to be flooded again with simplified readers at the 1000-word, 1500-word, and 2000-word levels and higher. In some instances, the words are simple, but the sentences in