Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching- Third Edition

Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers

The third edition of this popular and well-known book is an up-dated and easy- to-use resource for any teacher or teacher trainer who wants to discover or re-discover the principles underlying approaches and methods in language teaching.

This new edition has some interesting additions. The changes are explicitly described in the *Introduction to the third edition*. The book is divided into four different parts. Part I, *Major trends in twentieth-century language teaching,* is subdivided into 4 different chapters. Some of the chapters included on Part II of the book, *Current approaches and methods*, have been expanded: chapter 5 on Communicative Language Teaching, chapter 6 on Content- Based Instruction and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and chapter 8 on Competency-Based Language Teaching, standards, and the Common European Framework of Reference. A chapter on Text-Based Instruction has been added to this edition. Part III, *Alternative twentieth-century approaches and methods*, has been expanded and the chapter on NLP, part of the second edition, has been taken out from this edition. Part IV, *The teaching and learning environment,* a new addition, is divided into three different chapters which propose "current views of the roles of learners and teachers" in the different approaches and methods, and how they "can be viewed in relation to the process of curriculum development"(p.ix). This edition also includes an Appendix with a chart comparing approaches and methods, which is very clear and easy to read.

Each *Part* in the book is introduced by a brief summary explaining what each chapter will tackle, a real guidance for those readers who want to be selective in their reading. Each chapter ends with a Conclusion, with Discussion Questions and with a section on References and further reading. I highly recommend this last section as a guidance for additional research on any of the topics presented in the book. To conclude, I would say that the organization of the book is an important asset.

Part I*,* as I have said before, is divided into 4 chapters. Chapter 1 is a brief introduction to the emergence of methods in language teaching. It emphasizes the idea of how change and innovation have been so influential in the area of language teaching. Chapter 2 presents a model for describing teaching methods in terms of approach, design and procedure. Chapters 3 and 4 describe the Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching, and the Audiolingual Method in terms of the model presented in Chapter 2.

Part II could be very interesting for anyone who wants to have an overall description of current approaches and methods in language teaching. Communicative Language Teaching, Content-Based Instruction and Content and Language Integrated Learning, Whole Language, Competency-Based Language Teaching, standards, and the Common European Framework of Reference, Task-Based Language Teaching, Text-Based Instruction, Lexical Approach, Multiple Intelligences and Cooperative Language Learning are described in terms of the model presented in Chapter 2: approach (theory of language and language learning), design (objectives, syllabus, types of learning and teaching activities, learners´roles, teachers´roles and the roles of materials) and procedures. Some chapters have been expanded as the one on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which includes its new interpretations as well as its recent criticisms. Among these, the authors state that CLT "promotes fossilization" as there is an "over- emphasis on communication … at the expense of accuracy", that it reflects the cultures of the countries of origin- Britain, Australasia and North America- and consequently, it is difficult to implement it in "different cultures of learning" (p.104) as it does not "capture the diversity of students´needs and cultures" (p.105). Chapter 6 on Content-Based Instruction now includes Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), a related approach which also merges content and language (p.81). This chapter is worth reading as it offers an overview of

these approaches which are a growing trend around the world. Anyhow, there are still many unsolved issues around them. Are language teachers trained to teach a content subject?; are team- teaching proposals feasible?. Chapter 8, *Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT), standards, and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)*, has also been broaden, it deals now with outcomes-based approaches, widely criticised but still attractive for "those seeking accountability" (p.169). An addition to this part of the book is chapter 10, in which there is a brief description on text-based instruction (TBI) "*Text* here is used in a special sense to refer to structured sequences of language that are used in specific contexts" (p.200). Once again the conclusion includes the claims made by its critics: if TBI is used exclusively, then, it may turn to be repetitive and it leaves no place for creative expression.

Part III, *Alternative twentieth-century approaches and methods* includes chapters on the Natural Approach, Total Physical Response, the Silent Way, Community Language Learning and Suggestopedia. As the authors state, these approaches and methods "were either developed outside of mainstream language teaching or represent an application in language teaching of educational principles developed elsewhere". "Many of these methods are consequently relatively underdeveloped in the domain of language theory" (p. 259) with the exception of the Natural Approach. Many of its principles on acquisition, learning and the role of the monitor "continue to be debated today" (p. 274). It is interesting to mention that the authors state that some of the activities or techniques proposed by these myriad of approaches and methods are still compatible with current approaches to language teaching and even vindicated today.

Part IV of the book is divided into three chapters. The first chapter focuses on learner autonomy, learning strategies, learning styles and the role of technology in promoting learner-initiated learning. The second chapter in this part considers the role of the teacher with three different standpoints: teachers being prescribed by a method or an approach, teachers adapting their teaching to the local context or situation and teachers theorizing upon their own practice. The last chapter in this part, *Approaches, methods, and the curriculum*, analyses different perspectives to curriculum design. Teachers and curriculum planners should ask themselves how they will tackle curriculum design: which will be the starting point: the output, the input or the processes to be used (forward, central or backward design)?

In the Postscript (Chapter 22) the authors go back to explaining the main terms of the tilte, i.e. 'approach' and 'method'.

> *"This book describes approaches and methods in language teaching. We have described an approach as a set of beliefs and principles that can be used as the basis for teaching a language. An approach, however, does not lead to a specific set of prescriptions and techniques … approaches tend to have a long shelf life … On the other hand, a method … refers to a specific instructional design or system based on a theory of language and of language learning. It contains specifications of content, roles of teachers and learners, and teaching procedures and techniques. It is relatively fixed in time and there is generally little scope for individual interpretation"* (p. 382- 383).

The book includes possible criticisms to language teaching methods, which may not be applicable in certain contexts or cultures as they are not able to cater for specific learners´needs in specific learning environments. These concepts are in line with the principles claimed by the post- method, "language teaching methods are based on idealized concepts geared towards idealized contexts" and "the conception and construction of methods […] assumes a common clientele with common goals" (Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p.10). At the end of this chapter, there is an enumeration of some of the factors that have influenced language teaching in the past and that are expected to maintain its impact in the future: government policy directives, trends in the profession, guru-led innovations, responses to technology, influences from academic disciplines, research influences, learner-based innovations, crossover educational trends, crossovers from other disciplines.

As regards the chart presented in the Appendix, it could be relevant reference material to any project focused on related topics. It presents key characteristics, influences on current language

teaching, teacher role, learner role and common classroom activities for each method in the book.

As a conclusion, I may say that this book is worth reading. It is extremely useful for teachers, teacher trainers and/ or researchers who want to have an overview of how the field of language teaching has evolved. It is also a valuable contribution for those who want to further read about approaches and methods, and its possible advocates or critics.

References

Kumaravadivelu, B. 2012. *Language Teacher Education for a Global Society.* New York: Routledge.

Gabriela Tavella is a graduate English language teacher from Universidad Nacional del La Plata, Argentina. She holds an MA in Professional Development for Language Education from Leeds Metropolitan University, UK and a Postgraduate Diploma in Education from UEA, UK.
Gabriela is an ESP lecturer at Universidad Nacional del Comahue, Argentina. She is vice-president of FAAPI (Federación Argentina de Asociaciones de Profesores de Inglés), a member of the AJAL (Argentinian Journal of Applied Linguistics) editorial board and a regular presenter at national/ international conferences. She is mainly interested in methodology and learning issues.