

# THE FUTURE OF LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODOLOGY

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Abstract : This paper reviews the current state of ELT methodology, particularly in respect to a number of current views suggesting that the profession is now in a "post-methods" era in which previous attention to Methods (Total Physical Response, Silent Way, Natural Approach, etc.) has given way to a more generic approach to ELT methodology. Ten potential future courses of ELT methodology are outlined and three of these are considered in some detail. Particular consideration is given as to how past insights from the "methods era" might be incorporated in possible future approaches to ELT methodology.

Key words : language teaching methodology, "post-methods" era, future approach.

In a recent paper on teacher education, Tessa Woodward states that the metaphor of the "teacher as researcher" is in line with "current 'post-method' thinking" (Woodward, 1996). What, in fact, is 'post-method thinking' and what are the indicators that we are currently in such a period? The expression "post method thinking" seems to be borrowed from current buzzwords like "post-modernism". Is an understanding of "post-modern-ism" necessary to an understanding of "post-method thinking"? One hopes not. This paper attempts to look at the current state of ELT methodology, partially in an attempt to define and trace the evolution of "post-method thinking" and, more generally, to examine what the indicators are for where ELT methodology is headed as we approach the next millenium.

## THE METHODS ERA

In a 1997 international email survey of MATEFL (MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language) programs, one of my recent graduate students found that the most widely offered course in these programs was one

focusing on methodology. She found further that these methodology courses most often focused on the study and analysis of particular methods. Previous studies suggest that for the last fifteen years or so, the study of LT methodology has most often focused on study of particular methods, and, particularly, the so-called "Designer Methods" e.g., Silent Way, Counselling Learning, Natural Approach, Total Physical Response and Suggestopedia (e.g., Oller and Richard-Amato, 1983; Richards and Rodgers, 1986; Larsen-Freeman, 1986).

Such Methods share some common characteristics. They have a central, founding-father-figure guru; they assume a universal applicability; they are idiosyncratic, and they are commercially packaged and marketed. In the glory days of Methods, teacher trainees studied these Methods in an attempt, one assumes, to form an allegiance to one of them.

I celebrated these Glory Days of the Multiple Methods Era with the following upbeat ditty.

#### Mad about Methods (Tune: Poor Little Buttercup)

Firstly, translational  
Then, situational,  
Mim-memorizational, too. Come functional,  
notional, Ego-emotional,  
Some deeply devotional view.

Role educational, Soul inspirational, Non-  
perspirational, true?

Mental suggestional, Physical, gestional, Task-  
based and testional, too.

Counselling, communing, Drama-ing, song  
crooning, Even some spoon feeding stew.

Naturally approachable, Silent and  
coachable,  
Even body-encroachable...You?

#### METHOD DETRACTORS

However, a number of criticisms have been raised against methodology being seen as the study of Methods. The result of these criticisms has been a recent enthusiasm to remove Methods from methodology altogether. We noted Woodward's assumption that we are in a period of "post-method thinking". H. Douglas Brown summarizes what he holds to be the shared negative view in America in his comments in text and teleconference telling us, "The era of Methods is over". (Brown, 1994b).

A reasonable question then seems to be, "If Methods should no longer comprise the focus of methodology, what should?" My graduate student's results would seem to suggest that Methods are still the focus of most MATEFL methodology courses, regardless of what the critics say about the "current post-method thinking".

One issue that confounds the discussion of the future of LT methodology - and it is not a new one - is that there seems to be little agreement as to what the term "Language Teaching Methodology" means and what a course with this name could/should focus on. I suggest that there appears to be a host of senses in which the term "methodology" has been understood and/or interpreted. I review these next.

#### MEANINGS OF METHODOLOGY

1. Methodology comprises various individual techniques for teaching of the basic skill areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking. (Cohen: 1990)
2. Methodology comprises a universal technique for teaching of any linguistic material in any skill area - e.g., Presentation, Practice, Production (PPP) (Rivers, 1968) or Observe, Hypothesize, Experiment (Lewis, 1993).
3. Methodology comprises descriptions of various "Designer Methods" and instruction on how to execute them - Silent Way, Natural Approach, Suggestopedia, etc. (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).
4. Methodology comprises an eclectic, teacher-personalized collage of techniques and methods (Rivers, 1981)..

5. Methodology comprises learning to put into practice certain general principles of good language teaching derived from research or observation. (Brown, 1994a).
6. (In Brown's case, 12 such principles exist - The principle of authenticity, The principle of giving students advance preparation, etc.)
7. Methodology comprises conscious modelling by less experienced teachers of the practices of expert or experienced teachers, whatever practices these may be. (Richards, 1987; Freeman, 1992)

It may be germane to note here, that "LT methodology" has become a cover term for a far larger set of issues than those concerning how teachers organize language instruction in their classrooms. For example, Adrian Holliday (1994) in his book entitled *Appropriate Methodology and Social Context*, extends the reach of LT methodology considerably. For Holliday, there are three "basic types of ELT methodology".

The first concerns what teachers do in the classroom and how they are trained to do this. This is the methodology of approaches and methods - of doing ELT. The second concerns the methodology of designing and managing ELT. This is the methodology defined broadly as curriculum development. The third concerns the methodology of collecting information about the social context in which ELT is conducted. The focus of this methodology is ethnographic action research.

Finally, to complete this survey, N.S. Prabhu (1995) writes of LT methodology as having four components - which he labels an ideational component, an operational component, an ideological component and a management component. This model is really a total educational systems design model labelled as "LT methodology".

#### THE FUTURE OF METHODOLOGY

If we are, indeed, in the "post-method" era, what view of methodology will come to dominate the field in the decade ahead? While I cannot claim to know the answer to this question, I have several speculations as to who the "candidates" might be and what some of the costs and benefits might attend the "election" of any one of these candidates as "Chief" of LT methodology. I would like to share these speculations next in several brief outline sketches.

I have given the candidates designations in the occasionally tongue-in-cheek style of yesteryear's Methods. Proponents of these ideas may reject the association with Methods and my labels as well. When better

designations are offered, I will gracefully withdraw mine in their favor. The candidate proposals are as follows:

1. Teacher/Learner Collaborates - Match-making techniques which link learners and teachers with similar styles and approaches to language learning.
  2. Method Synergistics - Cross-breeding elements of various Methods to find those practices which best support effective learning.
  3. Curriculum Developmentism - Viewing methodology as an integrated component in a larger view of instructional design.
  4. Content-Basics - Assuming that language learning is a by-product of focus on meaning - on acquiring some specific topical "content".
  5. Multintelligence - Basing instruction on a "multiple- intelligences" view in which different approaches play to different learner talents.
  6. Total Functional Response - Reconstructing the Notional/Functional idea with some new systemic twists.
  7. Strategopedia - Teaching learners the strategies they need so that they can learn on their own.
  8. Lexical Phraseology - Re-crafting both the nature and substance of language learning to focus on lexical phrases and collocations.
  9. 0-zone Whole Language - Engaging all aspects of language study - literature, language history, linguistic analysis, etc.- in support of second language learning.
  10. Full-frontal Communicativity - Engaging all aspects of human communicative capacities - expression, gesture, tone, etc. - in support of second language learning.
- Since space prohibits even a minimally adequate treatment of all of these, let me focus on the first three, since these may be the less familiar of the ten.

#### TEACHER/LEARNER COLLABORATES

I should acknowledge that the first two of my candidates derive from a bias I have which might be labelled "Anti-Baby-with-Bathism". It seems to me appropriate to move beyond a view of methodology restricted to the study of Designer Methods, as Brown and Woodward (and others) pro-posed. This move does not seem to me to require complete abandonment of any and all insights or interesting classroom practices that might have been adopted/adapted from these Methods over the twenty years of their ascendancy. Thus, I have taken as a starting point, views which derive from a re-consideration of Methods (as, say, described in Richards and Rodgers (1986).

I insert the chapter titles of this text as a reminder of its organization and the Methods analyzed.

The nature of approaches and methods in language teaching  
The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching (SLT)  
The Audiolingual Method (ALM)  
Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)  
Total Physical Response (TPR)  
The Silent Way (SW)  
Community Language Learning (CLL)  
The Natural Approach (NA)  
Suggestopedia (S)  
Comparing and evaluating methods: some suggestions. (Richards and Rodgers, 1986)

While I have been so bold as to demonstrate major features of all of these methods in a single two hour class (and even to give an example of a class exercise in which all methods were featured simultaneously), I hesitate to try to characterize these briefly in print. Such attempts often turn out to be more burlesques than characterizations. For those unfamiliar with the major features of these Methods, I refer you to Nunan's (1988) one page outline of the Richards and Rodgers text. You may also be able to infer what I feel the principle features of these models to be as they are represented in the next two sections of this paper.

The model within which Richards and Rodgers (1986) analyzed Methods, included the elements Approach, Design and Procedure. The sub-elements of Design in the model were given as Objectives, Syllabus, Role of Activities, Learner Roles, Teacher Roles and Role of Instructional Materials. In a paper on learner and teacher styles and strategies in Methods (Rodgers, 1989b), I attempted to synopsise the characterizations of Learner Roles and Teacher Roles for each of the Methods analyzed and to suggest a "match-making" procedure by which individual teachers might consider the appropriacy of recommended Method procedures in respect to how they characterize themselves and their students. In other words, I tried to suggest how teachers might identify "good-fit" Method techniques to adopt or adapt for use in their own teaching/learning situations.

An idea of how this proposal is framed can be gleaned from an inspection of the short-hand identification of Learner Roles and Teacher Roles in the two charts following. In application, teachers were encouraged to characterize their own teaching style (or to characterize the teaching style to which they aspired) and to characterize the learning styles they found

amongst their students. With this information in hand, they then matched styles to Learner Roles and Teacher Roles in the charts. Closest matches led to an examination of the Procedures associated with the Methods of the Learner and Teacher Role matches. Such procedures were assumed to be likely candidates for individual teacher adoption or adaptation.

#### A. Methods and Learner Roles

Method	Learner Roles
Situational Language Teaching	Imitator Memorizer
Audio-lingualism	Pattern Practicer Accuracy Enthusiast
Communicative Language Teaching	Improvisor Negotiator
Total Physical Response	Order Taker Performer
The Silent Way	Inventor Problem Solver
Community Language Learning	Collaborator Whole Person
The Natural Approach	Guesser Immerser
Suggestopedia	Relaxer True-Believer

## B. Methods and Teacher

Method	Teacher Roles
Situational Language Teaching	Context Setter Error Corrector
Audio-lingualism	Language Modeller Drill Leader
Communicative Language Teaching	Needs Analyst Task Designer
Total Physical Response	Commander Action Monitor
The Silent Way	Pantomimist Neutral Observer
Community Language Learning	Counselor Paraphraser
The Natural Approach	Actor Props User
Suggestopedia	Auto-hypnotist Authority Figure

### Method Synergistics

As noted previously, "A Method" has typically been presented as the inspiration of a single guru - unique in its properties and unprecedented in its insights. The search for commonalities has been discouraged. It is clear, however, that such commonalities exist. For example, one sub-class of Methods proposes that a prolonged listening period should precede production

and the other, that production should be a first target. Some methods are predicated on an underlying view of language and the other set on an underlying view of learning. One set of methods see L2 learning as similar, in the main, to L 1 learning, and the other set sees L2 learning as unlike L 1 learning in any significant way. And so on. However, the commonalities internal to these sub-sets are somewhat too abstract to help a language educator in search of insights into the language learning process or in search for suggestions for improving classroom teaching.

In several earlier papers (Rodgers, 1978, 1989b, 1990) I examined Method statements and practices in an attempt to extract those assumptions about language learning which were held to be critical to learner success. The result of these analyses are summarized in a chart, or rather two charts, which I have referred to as the Big B's Analyses.

The first chart attempts to identify those features in the general literature which are held to influence positively the learning of second languages but which are outside the context of the classroom and the control of the teacher. I have called these "External" influences. The more interesting claims are those presented in the second chart which shows those features held to influence language learning positively and which are within the context of the classroom and the control of the teacher. I have called these "Internal" influences. In the second chart these features are labelled and defined and those Methods associated with the feature claims are coded with the features.

#### The Big b's of Language Learning Influence

##### 1. Classroom External

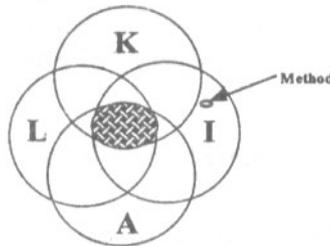
Birth	Native intelligence and aptitude
Bloom	Optimal biological period(s) for language learning
Background	Home and community past experience
Bath	Immersion in a second language situation
Badge	High status of second language in the community
Bridge	Desire of the learner to join a new culture
Bedroom	Language acquired from love partners
Bread	Financial rewards for language learning
Bullets	Physical threat for not learning a new language
By-Product	LL in association with other important learning

2. Classroom Internal (See chapter headings in previous section for coding of Methods)  
The claim here is that having identified with one or more of these purported positive influences on language learning, the practitioner can then look to the Methods which underwrite these influences, as cited, as sources of ideas for classroom practice .

#### CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENTISM

I take as starting point a curriculum development model which has been used quite extensively in project design in the institution for which I have served for several years as Associate Director. The model is called, familiarly, the KILA Model and is diagrammed below. The claim is that educational design is comprised of four kinds of considerations which we have called Knowledge, Instructional, Learner and Administrative Considerations. The further claim is that successful educational design is achieved only in the area in which all considerations are in synchrony.

#### Program Design



K = Knowledge Considerations  
I = Instructional Considerations  
L = Learner Considerations  
A = Administrative Considerations

The components of the model are briefly outlined below. More complete discussion of the model and its ramifications for language education are discussed in detail in Rodgers (1989a).

#### "K", Knowledge Considerations

Knowledge considerations involve both the input and output forms of instructional content. They include the derivation and organization of content (input) as well as the anticipated learner outcomes, whether these are skills, capacities, changed behaviors, or appreciations. In language education, Knowledge Considerations involve the assumptions about what language is - a set of habits, sentences, rules, predispositions or whatever. It also includes the content - the substantive range - of the instructional language examples or texts be these Arithmetic, Social Studies, Chemical Engineering, Waiter Talk, or English for Baggage Handlers.

#### "I", Instructional Considerations

Instructional considerations include those factors which impact on the design and delivery of instruction and reflect the input not only of teachers, but also of paraprofessionals, resource people, content specialists and other staff involved in the program. They involve most conspicuously, from the point of view of this paper, instructional methods. Instructional Considerations also include programs and materials, technologies, educational environments, time and scheduling techniques and plans for reporting on learning progress to learners, teachers, sponsors, administrators and other interested parties.

#### "L", Learner considerations

Learner considerations involve the ages, proficiency levels, and developmental stages of the learner or learners. They include as well social background characteristics, world views and learning expectations. Considerations include learners' self-perceptions and prior learning experiences as well as preferred learning styles, strategies, environment, and groupings. If group or class learning is contemplated, characteristics of the group size, homogeneity, history, collective aspirations—are of concern.

#### "A", Administrative Considerations.

In studies of programmatic educational change, three administrative influences are typically identified—those from the central office, those from the 'program', and those from the schools. Administrative considerations at all levels will determine the scale, pace and style of educational delivery. Administrative agents are involved in the establishment, interpretation and implementation of policy. This includes dissemination of policy plans to pub-

lic and political as well as to educational representatives. Plans for and execution of teacher and learner selection, evaluation and promotion as well as environmental development and institutional image are also administrative considerations. Institutional operations, reputation and style are also included as administrative considerations.

It is relevant to note that what has been called Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has, in fact, reflected preoccupation with different kinds of considerations at various points in its brief history. The changing nature of CLT has, in fact, made definition and description of CLT often difficult to formulate and confusing to follow (e.g., Yalden 1983). In its first phase - the Wilkins Period - CLT concerned itself with attempts to redefine the knowledge base, principally by defining language organization in terms of notions and functions rather than in terms of grammatical structures. In the second phase - the Munby Period - CLT focused on determination of learner needs through various mechanisms proposed for needs assessment. In its third phase - the Prabhu Period - CLT was defined by the kind of instructional techniques employed—group work, task accomplishment, meaning negotiation, caring and sharing and the like. Thus, CLT in its short history has focused on Knowledge considerations in Phase 1, Learner considerations in Phase 2 and Instructional considerations in Phase 3.

As the diagram suggests, methodology (or Methods) represents only a small subset of those considerations in the area I have labelled "Instructional". The view proposed in this section, is that methodology (Methods) needs to be in consonance with other Instructional Considerations, just as Instructional Considerations need to be in consonance with the other three elements of the KILA model.

Despite some early proposals in respect to a curriculum development view for language education (e.g., Richards, 1984) and some more recent texts devoted to this topic (e.g., Johnson, 1989; Brown, 1995), the curriculum development perspective in language education, and particularly in methodology courses, is rare in mention and unformed in conceptualization.

## Conclusion

This brief view of methodology futuristics has considered three of several possibilities. Others proposals, as suggested, also hold promise. Which of these, if any, will come to take its place as principal focus in methodology courses of the next decade only the future itself will tell.

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