



# Approaches and Methods in English Language Teaching

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## Getting Started

### 1 Read and comment on the beliefs about language learning.

Beliefs about Language Learning

I agree/disagree because...

1. "Students should never use their first language (L1) in English class."

2. "Students do not need to learn grammar rules in order to use English."

3. "Students can learn English if they memorize rules and vocabulary words."

4. "Students can learn English the same way they learned their L1."

5. "Students cannot become proficient if they don't use English to communicate."

### 2 Read the names of approaches and methods in the list. Mark (✓) the ones that are familiar to you. In this chapter, you will read more about these topics.

Grammar Translation

The Direct Method

The Audio-Lingual Method

The Situational-Structural Approach

The Silent Way

Suggestopedia

Total Physical Response

The Communicative Approach

Task-Based Language Teaching

The Lexical Approach

Dogme

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

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## Introduction

The field of English Language Teaching (ELT) is dynamic and changing. Identifying successful ways to teach English is a problem-solving mission. Throughout the past century, many people have sought to identify an ideal approach to language learning. From these efforts, new ideas emerge and influence how people teach English. In the process, less effective approaches and methods are modified and replaced by those that seem to work better. Along the way, the range of possible techniques and ways of conceptualizing language learning has expanded, and sound principles for effective teaching and learning have become more apparent. The practices that we observe today are the culmination of decades of linguistic and psychological research, innovation, and classroom application. Nonetheless, the needs and aims of students and classrooms vary, so there is no one best way to teach. There are only informed decisions based on a knowledge of past and present language teaching theory, and one's own experiences as a language teaching professional. The purpose of this chapter is to offer insight into the evolution of English Language Teaching, highlighting major developments and the rationales behind them, ultimately to inform you, the practitioner, and equip you with the widest range of options to choose from in your own problem-solving mission with your own students.

## The Development of English Language Teaching

### Grammar Translation

Over the ages, people studied languages—primarily Greek and Latin—in order to read classical texts. For this reason, the type of instruction was known as the Classical Method. Once it began to be used with modern language instruction in the early nineteenth century, it was referred to as Grammar Translation (Howatt, 1984). However, even for use in foreign language teaching, the emphasis was placed on literature and intellectual development, not communication using the target language (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). One must consider that few people then, compared to today, were in a position to use or to need a foreign language in everyday life. Early on, those who studied English were mainly European university students, wealthy individuals, refugees, or new arrivals to the British colonies (Howatt & Widdowson, 2004). Since formal language learning was a mainly academic endeavor, students' lessons did not have practical communicative objectives. In fact, the characteristics of this traditional method, as described in *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*, are fairly limiting (Celce-Murcia, 1979):

- Most instruction is in the students' native language, not the target language.
- Vocabulary is learned through lists of isolated words.
- Teachers give long, elaborate explanations of complex grammatical forms.
- Language instruction is seen as a set of rules for combining words using the correct form.
- Students often work with very challenging texts in the target language.
- There is little focus on the meaning of texts; they are for grammatical analysis.
- Practice consists of a series of drills translating isolated sentences.
- Pronunciation is not taught.

In a typical Grammar Translation lesson, the teacher might begin by writing the rules to form a specific tense on the board along with explaining, in the first language or L1, how it is formed and when it is used. Then the students are told to read a text and underline all the examples of that structure in the text. After that, the teacher asks them to write the examples on the board and translate each sentence into the students' native language. Afterwards, students receive a list of new words in the target language and their translations. Finally, they practice translating more sentences using the new structure and vocabulary. Homework would probably involve learning the new rules and words for a short test the next day.



### Ideas for the Classroom

While many ideas from Grammar Translation have become obsolete, it may still be useful (at times, and within the framework of more communicative language teaching) to provide students with simple grammar charts:

#### The verb *to be*

I	am	we	are
you (singular)	are	you (plural)	are
he / she / it	is	they	are

With some forms, it may be more practical to give students a rule and then have them apply it in an activity, which is the traditional deductive presentation style of Grammar Translation:

1. On one side of the board, write *this*. On the other side of the board, write *that*.
2. Explain that we use *this* for an object that is near us, and *that* for an object that is not near us.
3. Stand next to *this* and hold up a pencil. Say: *This is my pencil*.
4. Point to a student's pencil. (Arrange before class for a student to participate by holding up a pencil. He or she should be some distance away from the board.) Say: *That is (Alice)'s pencil*.
5. Have students do an activity where they choose *this* or *that* according to illustrations:



this / that flower



this / that flower

Note: Steps 3 and 4 would not have been part of a traditional Grammar Translation lesson, but are important for making the meaning of the form clear to students.



## Using the L1 in the Classroom

While extensive use of the L1 in the classroom should be discouraged, there is no reason to prohibit it entirely. In all cases, it is important to weigh the advantages and disadvantages. Some reasons to use the L1 might be:

- to explain rules and policies at the beginning of the school year.
- to point out cognates and false cognates.
- to compare and contrast grammar structure and use: *She's eating.* / *Está comiendo.* (Spanish)
- to check understanding and offer guidance when students appear confused and other English-only techniques have failed.

## The Direct Method

In the second half of the nineteenth century, as international trade and travel increased, so did the need for effective English language instruction. Language teachers sought to replace Grammar Translation in response to developments in the field of linguistics and students' need to learn to *speak*, rather than simply *know*, English. Phonetics and pronunciation became prominent, as did strategies modeled on L1 acquisition (Zainuddin, 2011).

The Direct Method was also known as the Reform Method. It was first publicly recognized in 1884 by F. Frankle, a German psychologist (Zainuddin, 2011). Vastly different from Grammar Translation, the Direct Method has the following characteristics:

- The use of students' native language is not allowed; students are required to speak only the target language. Translation is prohibited (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).
- Vocabulary is associated with objects and concepts rather than translations; teachers use pictures and realia to teach new words.
- It is more important for language to be grammatically correct than for it to be natural.
- Teachers don't explicitly teach grammar rules.
- Lessons are built around topics, like sports, and involve question-answer interaction patterns (Schackne, n.d.).

In a typical Direct Method lesson, the teacher might read a text aloud, for example, a girl's description of her family.

I'm Lucy. I'm nine years old. I live with my dad, my sister, and my grandmother. Dad is a taxi driver. Dad gets up early. Grandmother makes our breakfast. Dad drives me to school. Grandmother makes our lunch and helps me with my homework. My dad gets home very late. In the evening we sometimes watch TV. On Sundays, we do different things. Sometimes on the weekend we go to the movies. My dad loves music. Sometimes we listen to music. I love my family!

As the teacher reads, he or she demonstrates the meaning of that section of text by placing photos of the family members on a family tree on the board. Then the teacher has different students read the text aloud. As a student reads a sentence, the teacher places a flashcard of the activity next to the corresponding