

Chapter One

Methodology

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At the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

Goals

- ✓ **define** methodology.
- ✓ **explain** how methodology is related to curriculum development and syllabus design.
- ✓ **describe** the “methods” debate.
- ✓ **explain** the basic principles of communicative language teaching, and describe its current importance in language teaching pedagogy.
- ✓ **discuss** some of the research findings that have influenced language teaching methodology.
- ✓ **create** instructional sequences that incorporate the pretask, task, and follow-up cycle.

1. What is methodology?

The field of **curriculum development** is large and complex. It includes all of the planned learning experiences in an educational setting. Curriculum has three main subcomponents: **syllabus design**, **methodology**, and **evaluation**. Syllabus design has to do with selecting, sequencing, and justifying content. Methodology has to do with selecting, sequencing, and justifying learning tasks and experiences. Evaluation has to do with how well students have mastered the objectives of the course and how effectively the course has met their needs. The following diagram shows how these different elements fit together.

Curriculum component	Focus	Defining questions
Syllabus design	Content	What content should we teach? In what order should we teach this content? What is the justification for selecting this content?
Methodology	Classroom techniques and procedures	What exercises, tasks, and activities should we use in the classroom? How should we sequence and integrate these?
Evaluation	Learning outcomes	How well have our students done? How well has our program served our students' needs?

Figure 1 Subcomponents of a curriculum

This book is basically about language teaching methodology. In other words, the focus of the chapters is principally on techniques and procedures for use in the classroom, although most chapters also touch on aspects of content selection and evaluation.

The *Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics* defines methodology as ...

1. ... the study of the practices and procedures used in teaching, and the principles and beliefs that underlie them.

Methodology includes

- a. study of the nature of language skills (e.g., reading, writing, speaking, listening, and procedures for teaching them)

- b. study of the preparation of lesson plans, materials, and textbooks for teaching language skills
- c. the evaluation and comparison of language teaching methods (e.g., the audiolingual method)

2. such practices, procedures, principles, and beliefs themselves.

(Richards, et al. 1985, p. 177)

From the table of contents you will see that this book addresses most of these areas. Section 1 focuses on the language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Section 2 looks at aspects of language—discourse, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Section 3 explores elements that support the learning process, including learning styles and strategies, content-based instruction, using textbooks, using computers, fostering autonomy and independence, and classroom-based assessment and evaluation.

2. Background to language teaching methodology

The “methods” debate

A language teaching **method** is a single set of procedures which teachers are to follow in the classroom. Methods are also usually based on a set of beliefs about the nature of language and learning. For many years, the goal of language pedagogy was to “find the right method”—a methodological magic formula that would work for all learners at all times (Brown, 2002). Methods contrast with **approaches**, which are more general, philosophical orientations such as **communicative language teaching** (see page 6) that can encompass a range of different procedures.

The dominant method for much of the last century was the **grammar-translation** method. This was challenged in the 1950s and 1960s by **audiolingualism**, a method that is still very popular today, and whose influence can be seen in a variety of drill-based techniques and exercises.

Audiolingualism was the first method to be based on a theory of learning—**behaviorism**, which viewed all learning as a process of forming habits, and on a theory of language—**structural linguistics**. Behaviorism and structural linguistics provided the following key characteristics of audiolingualism:

- Priority is given to spoken rather than written language.
- Language learning is basically a matter of developing a set of habits through drilling.

- Teach the language, not *about* the language. (Avoid teaching grammar rules. Get learners to develop their skills through drill and practice—teach through “analogy” not “analysis.”) (Moulton, 1963)

In the 1960s, behaviorism and structural linguistics were severely criticized as being inadequate representations of both the learning process and the nature of language. In place of behaviorism, psychologists proposed cognitive psychology while the linguist Chomsky developed a new theory called **transformational-generative grammar**. Both approaches emphasized thinking, comprehension, memory, and the uniqueness of language learning to the human species. Methodologists seized on the theories and developed a method known as **cognitive code learning**. This approach promoted language learning as an active mental process rather than a process of habit formation. Grammar was back in fashion, and classroom activities were designed that encouraged learners to work out grammar rules for themselves through inductive reasoning. (For examples, see Nunan, Chapter 8, this volume.)

In addition to methods based on theories of learning and language, there emerged a number of methods that were based on a humanistic approach to education. These methods emphasized the importance of emotional factors in learning, and proponents of these methods believed that linguistic models and psychological theories were less important to successful language acquisition than emotional or affective factors. They believed that successful learning would take place if learners could be encouraged to adopt the right attitudes and interests in relation to the target language and target culture. The best known of these methods were **the silent way**, **suggestopedia** and community language learning. The best introduction to humanistic learning within language education is Stevick (1997). Stevick became interested in humanism after he observed both audiolingual and cognitive code learning in action. He found that both methods could either be quite successful or extremely unsuccessful. “How is it,” he asked, “that two methods based on radically different assumptions about the nature of language and learning could be successful or unsuccessful, as the case may be?” He concluded that particular classroom techniques mattered less than establishing the right emotional climate for the learners.

Communicative language teaching (CLT)

During the 1970s, a major reappraisal of language occurred. Linguists began to look at language, not as interlocking sets of grammatical, lexical, and phonological rules, but as a tool for expressing meaning. This reconceptualization had a profound effect on language teaching methodology. In the earliest versions of CLT, meaning was emphasized over form, fluency over accuracy. It also led to the development of differentiated courses that reflect-

ed the different communicative needs of learners. This needs-based approach also reinforced another trend that was emerging at the time—that of **learner-centered education** (Nunan, 1988).

In recent years, the broad approach known as CLT has been realized methodologically by **task-based language teaching** (TBLT). In TBLT, language lessons are based on learning experiences that have nonlinguistic outcomes, and in which there is a clear connection between the things learners do in class and the things they will ultimately need to do outside of the classroom. Such tasks might include listening to a weather forecast and deciding what to wear, ordering a meal, planning a party, finding one's way around town and so on. In these tasks, language is used to achieve nonlanguage outcomes. For example, the ultimate aim of ordering a meal is not to use correctly formed wh-questions, but to get food and drink on the table.

Research

During the “what's the best method?” phase of language teaching, several studies were carried out to settle the question empirically. For example, Swaffar, Arens and Morgan (1982) set out to decide which was superior, audiolingualism or cognitive code learning. The results were inconclusive, and it appeared that, at the level of classroom teaching, few teachers adhered rigidly to one method rather than the other. Instead, they evolved a range of practices that reflected their own personal teaching styles. Among other things, it was studies such as these that gradually led people to abandon the search for the “right method.”

In the 1970s, a series of investigations were carried out that had (and continue to have) a great deal of influence on methodology. These came to be known as the **morpheme order studies**. These investigations set out to examine the order in which certain items of grammar were acquired. (For a more detailed description, see Nunan, Chapter 8, this volume.) The researchers concluded from their investigations three significant points: one, that there was a “natural order” in which grammar was acquired; two, that this order did not reflect the order in which items were taught; and three, that the natural order could not be altered by instruction. According to one of the researchers, the implications for the classroom were clear: it was not necessary to drill grammar (Krashen, 1981, 1982). All that was needed in order to teach another language was to engage learners in “natural” communicative tasks that were roughly pitched at their level of proficiency (Krashen and Terrell, 1983).

As you will see in the chapter on grammar, subsequent research has demonstrated that a grammar focus in class *does* seem to be beneficial for most learners. However, the insights provided by Krashen and others did

2. Develop your own personal methodology.

As we saw in the background section of this chapter, the search for the “one best method” was elusive and ultimately proved to be futile. When researchers looked at what teachers actually did in the classroom as opposed to what proponents of one method or another said they ought to do, they found that teachers had a range of practices that were widely used regardless of the method that any given teacher was supposed to follow. The major difference lies, not in the tasks themselves, but in the ordering and prioritizing of the tasks. In other words, in terms of actual classroom practices the same techniques might be used, but their ordering and emphasis would be different.

Another related observation is that just as learners have their own learning styles, so teachers have their own teaching styles. They are derived from their professional training and experience as well as their own experiences as learners. While one teacher might correct errors overtly, others might do it through modeling the correct utterance. These two styles are exemplified in the following examples.

Example 1

Student: *I go home at three o'clock, yesterday.*

Teacher A: *No. Remember Luis, the past tense of go is went.*

Example 2

Student: *I go home at three o'clock, yesterday.*

Teacher B: *Oh, you went home at three, did you Luis?*

Similarly, one teacher may prefer to give explicit explanation and practice of a new grammar point before getting students to use it in a communicative activity. Another teacher may prefer to introduce the grammar point in the form of a contextualized dialogue and only draw the attention of the student to the grammatical form after they have used it communicatively or pseudocommunicatively.

What is important, then, is that teachers develop their own preferred classroom practices based on what works best for them in their own particular situation and circumstances and given the learners they have at the time. As circumstances, students, and levels of experience change, so will the practices. (If you are teaching large classes, it may not be feasible to do much pair or group work, no matter how highly you think of them.)

This is not to say that all practices are equally valid for all learners. Experiment with different practices. Try out new ideas. Record your lessons, observe your teaching, if possible have a peer observe your teaching, and above all reflect on what happens in your classroom. If you have time, keep

a reflective journal and set out observations, questions, challenges, and puzzles. Even if you have relatively little experience, you will be surprised at how much you can learn about processes of teaching and learning by systematically reflecting on what happens in your classroom.

Action



Principle 2 (pages 10-11) mentions self-observation, peer observation, and reflective journals. Brainstorm other ways of obtaining information and feedback on your teaching. Design a plan for getting feedback on your teaching.

3. Build instructional sequences based on a pretask, task, and follow-up cycle.

Successful instructional sequences share certain things in common, regardless of the methodological principles or approaches that drive them. First of all, the main task, whether it be a drill, a role-play, or a listening comprehension, is set up through one or more pretasks. Pretasks have several functions: to create interest, help build students' **schema** in relation to the topic, introduce key vocabulary, revise a grammatical point, etc.

Following the pretasks comes the task itself. This will usually consist of several steps or subtasks. In the communicative classroom, the teacher will seek to maximize the time that the students are processing the language or interacting with each other (although, of course, this will depend on the rationale for the instructional sequence). The teacher will also carefully monitor the students to ensure that they know what they are supposed to do and are carrying out the tasks correctly.

Following the task proper, there should be some sort of follow-up. This also has a number of functions: to elicit feedback from the students about their experience, to provide feedback to the students on how they had done, to correct errors that the teacher might have noticed in the course of the instructional sequence, and to get students to reflect on the tasks and engage in self-evaluation.

Action



Select a language-learning task from a textbook or other source and design a pretask and follow-up to it.

4. Classroom techniques and tasks

In this section, we look at some of the techniques and ideas that have been introduced in the preceding sections. There are so many of these that I

have had to be highly selective. I have chosen to organize this section in terms of pretask, task, and follow-up.

Pretask As we have seen, pretasks have several functions: to create interest, help build students' schema in relation to the topic, introduce key vocabulary, and revise grammar items prior to the introduction of the task proper. There is almost no limit to the number of things that can be done at the pretask stage. Here are some examples:

Have students

- look at a list of comprehension questions and try to predict the answers before carrying out a listening task;
- classify a set of words for describing emotions as "positive," "negative," and "neutral" before reading a magazine article about emotions;
- practice a model conversation and then introduce their own variations before doing a role-play;
- study a picture of a group of people at a party and try to guess which people are married/going out with each other before hearing a conversation about the couples;
- brainstorm ways in which cities of the future will be different from now before writing a newspaper article;
- match newspaper headlines and photos before reading articles;
- check off words in a vocabulary list that are associated with living in a foreign culture before listening to a person recounting their experiences of living abroad;
- rank from most to least important a list of factors predicting if a relationship will last before listening to a minilecture on the subject;
- discuss the best year they ever had before taking part in an information gap exercise;
- look at pictures taken from advertisements and guess what the ads are trying to sell before listening to the ads.

Task The number of tasks that can be used to activate language in the classroom is also large. Some of the more popular task types in the communicative classroom include: role-plays, simulations, problem-solving, listening to authentic audio/video material, discussions, decision-making, and information gaps. Information gap tasks in which two or more students have access to different information that they have to share in order to complete the task are popular because

- they work well with learners at most levels of proficiency from post-beginner to advanced;
- students participate actively;



- all students have to take part if the task is to work;
- they work well with mixed level groups.

Here is an example of an information gap task. This task is personalized in that the students create their own information gap based on content from their own lives.

Example

Make a note of the things you have to do this week. Leave two spaces free.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Afternoon					
Evening					

Now work with two other students. Arrange a time to see a movie. You might have to change your schedule.

Reflection



1. What level of proficiency do you think the task above is designed for?
2. What language do you imagine that students will need to use?
3. What language functions are the students practicing?

Action



Design your own information gap task. Specify the vocabulary, grammar, and structures that you think the students will need in order to complete the task.

Follow-up As already indicated, the follow-up phase also provides lots of scope. The teacher can give feedback to the students, debrief them on some aspect of the preceding task, or encourage them to reflect on what they learned and how well they are doing.

Here are some examples of reflection tasks.

Example

1. Write down five new words you learned in today's lesson. Write sentences using three of these new words. Write down three new sentences or questions you learned.
2. Review the language functions you practiced in this lesson. Circle your answers.

Can you...

talk about past events?	Yes	A little	Not yet
give and receive messages?	Yes	A little	Not yet

3. What would you say?

Your best friend invites you to his/her birthday party, but you can't make it.

You say _____

You want someone to get you a book from the library.

You say _____

4. Review the language we practiced today. In groups, brainstorm ways to use this language out of class. Imagine you are visiting an English-speaking country. Where and when might you need this language?

5. Methodology in the classroom

Reflection



What is going on in Extract 1 (page 15–16)? Is the extract taken from a pretask, task, or follow-up? What is the purpose of the instructional sequence?

Extract 1

T stands for teacher

S1: Tourist, vi

S2: Student

S1: Yeah

S2: Mu'

T: Wh

S2:

S?

f

S1: Determin

S3: Yeah, because

S1: Synonymous, synonymy

S3: ...means to know something

S1: Third. Elderly, intelligent, stupidly, a
you know. I think they have, er, some re
is the opposite meanings.

S3: How about, er, elderly and talkative?

S2: Talkative—what means talkative?

S1: Yeah, too much.

S2: Talkative.

S1: How about the elderly?

S3: Adjective.

S1: Had a more experience and they get the more ...

S3: Intelligent, stupidly—maybe that the part of the human being ... which
is, I think ... OK. Oh...

S1: Wait. Wait a minute. OK, this is, this is different ad ... kind of adjective
that the

S2: OK, all right.

T: So, which one did you decide?

likely topics. Using both bottom-up data (the
data (likely language function), I was able
up integration happened by accident. In
a good way to make sure it happens.
brainstorm vocabulary related to a
functions such as giving directions
formation on their knowledge of
abulary and sentences (bottom-
processing. The learners are
combination of top-down
essing (Peterson, 2001).
You understood the par
word at a time, as you are
individual word. Howev
ing of the passage.
While reading, you ha
processing, you had
of it. This is simil
language learn
wrestle with the
tive listening
The o
life know
of buyir

Extract 1

T stands for teacher. *S* represents a particular student. *Ss* stands for students.

S1: Tourist, visitor, traveler, student.

S2: Student.

S1: Yeah.

S2: *Must be that one, yeah.*

T: *Why do you think—why is student the odd one out?*

S2: *Oh, tourist, visitor, traveler ... They are moving.*

S3: Yeah.

S1: *They are going.*

S2: *They have something in common, no?*

T: *Yeah, yeah. But I'd like you to say what it is that they have in common, you know? How would you describe it?*

S3: *OK, second. Investigate, determine, explore, inquire. I think, determine ...*

S1: Determine.

S3: *Yeah, because investigate, inquire, explore is ...*

S1: *Synonymous, synonymous.*

S3: *...means to know something. Mmm. OK.*

S1: *Third. Elderly, intelligent, stupidly, and talkative. Intelligent and stupidly, you know. I think they have, er, some relations between because there is the opposite meanings.*

S3: *How about, er, elderly and talkative?*

S2: *Talkative—what means talkative?*

S1: *Yeah, too much.*

S2: Talkative.

S1: *How about the elderly?*

S3: Adjective.

S1: *Had a more experience and they get the more ...*

S3: *Intelligent, stupidly—maybe that the part of the human being ... which is, I think ... OK. Oh...*

S1: *Wait. Wait a minute. OK, this is, this is different ad ... kind of adjective that the*

S2: *OK, all right.*

T: *So, which one did you decide?*

Ss: Elderly, elderly.

T: Why's that?

S2: *Because, er, it's quite different this, because this match with your age, with your age, and the other one is with your... kind of person that you are.*

T: Personality.

S2: Personality, yeah.

S1: *Er, utilize, uncover, reveal, disclose. Yeah, this is utilize. Uncover, reveal, disclose—all of them the same meaning. Uncover, reveal, disclose.*

S2: Uncover? What's uncover?

S1: *You know, cover and uncover (gestures).*

S2: *Oh. Reveal. OK.*

S3: Good.

T: *But how would you define ... how would you define those three words? What is ... what would be the dictionary definition of those three words?*

S3: *You mean the uncover and reveal?*

T: *Reveal and disclose. What is the ... what is the meaning that they share?*

S2: *To find something and to...*

S1: Uncover, revealed.

S3: *And the other one doesn't have anything to do with find. The other one means the opposite of doing something.*

Commentary The sequence is taken from a pretask designed to present and review some key vocabulary that the students would encounter in the task proper—a selective listening task.

Here is the handout they were working from:

Spot the "odd word out." [The word that doesn't belong in each list.]

Example: (radio), computer, video, television

Discuss the following words. Put a circle around the odd word out and say why it is the odd word.

1. tourist, visitor, traveler, student
2. investigate, determine, explore, inquire
3. elderly, intelligent, stupidly, talkative
4. utilize, uncover, reveal, disclose



Extract 1 is interesting from a number of perspectives. The students negotiate and collaborate well to complete the task. The teacher also does a good job of keeping the students on track and pushing them to describe what the words have in common.

In the extract, the two participants have heard two different interviewing committees discussing the relative merits of three applicants for a job. Their task is to share their information and decide which of the three would be the best person for the job.

Extract 2

- A:** Are you talking about Alan or Geoffrey? Just the first name.
- B:** Well, I understood I was talking about Geoffrey, yeah? Is that correct?
- A:** Not at all.
- B:** Not at all. So I have confused the man, have I? I've made a mistake here. Who ... who are you ... can you ...? What notes do you have on Richards? See if we can get this sorted out first.
- A:** We're talking about Geoffrey, right? And he's certainly the man that had a very good report. He knows the job, and I don't see why we should at all discuss this because it is so obvious to me.
- B:** Well, it could very well be that I'm confusing the names of the people involved, so let's make sure we're talking about the same people.
- A:** How about Alan?
- B:** But he's a foreman rather than a supervisor, I understand, and this is basically a union job ... I mean I ... my information is that all these people are occupying more or less the same rank.
- A:** Yes, but I mean, er, I agree, they are all, erm, foremen. Supervisor, by the way, is the same to me. Isn't it to you?
- B:** Um, no, it's not quite the same thing to me. A foreman is, uh, somewhat lower on the range, right?

Reflection



In Extract 2, the learners seem confused about the identities of the individuals. In what ways does this help their language development? In what ways does it hurt it?

Commentary At first sight, it appears that the teacher in Extract 2 has probably not set up this task very well. There is considerable confusion over the identity of the individuals being interviewed. However, this was exactly the purpose of the task. Both students had different, and slightly conflicting, information on the three participants, and this led to considerable negotiation between the two students. As we saw in the background section, such negotiation is hypothesized to be healthy for language acquisition.

Reflection



Extract 3 is a feedback session following a task. What do you think the task was? What do you notice about the way the teacher conducts the session? What is the purpose of the follow-up?

Extract 3

T: OK, let's check your responses. At school?

Ss: Yes, yes.

T: At a party?

S: Yes.

S: No.

T: Never been to a party? Oh, you poor thing. (laughter) At the movies?

Ss: No, no.

T: No? Why not?

Ss: (Inaudible comments and laughter.)

T: What about at a shopping center?

Ss: No.

T: Sports event?

Ss: Yes. No.

T: Why?

S: Not at sports event.

S: What sports event?

S: Baseball game. Stadium.

S: Stadium. Stadium. Yes.

T: You mean watching?

S: Watching, yeah.

S: Or playing tennis.

(There is some confused discussion among the students.)

T: OK, difference of opinion there. What about at a concert?

S: No.

T: No?

(Laughter)

T: What about at a friend's house?

Ss: Yes. Yes.

S: No. (Laughter)

T: No as well. Don't you have any friends either?

S: I didn't meet new people.

T: New people. OK. What other, what other places can you meet?

S: Part-time job.

T: Part-time job.

(Excited murmuring)

T: Yeah! Good one. Yeah. Any more?

S: Church.

T: Church.

(Scattered Laughter)

S: Travel, travel, traveling.

T: Traveling.

S: Some people meet new people at beach or, er, swimming pool.

T: OK.

(Laughter and teasing of student making this remark.)

T: Is this where you meet new people? (Laughter)

S: Huh?

T: Is this where you meet new people?

S: Yeah. (Laughter)

T: Any others?

S: Er... organizations.

T: Organizations? What kind?

S: Oh, like, er, environmental group or...

T: Environmental groups—that's good. OK. I think I'll have to put some of these on my list because they're very interesting.

Commentary In this section, the teacher is conducting a debriefing and eliciting feedback from the students. Students had completed a reading task about how and where single men and women in the United States meet each other and then took part in a pair and group work task based on the following worksheet.

Pair work. In your country, where can you meet new people?		
	Yes	No
At school		
At a party		
At the movies		
At a shopping center		
At a sports event		
At a concert		
At a friend's home		
Your idea:		
Your idea:		
Your idea:		

6. Conclusion

In this section, I have provided a basic introduction to language teaching methodology, sketching out how the field has evolved over the last forty years, and then looked at contemporary approaches within the context of a communicative approach to language teaching. This had to be a selective introduction. A comprehensive text on language teaching methodology would be hundreds of pages in length. I hope, however, that it provides a platform you can build on when you read the rest of the chapters in this volume.

Further readings



Celce-Murcia, M. (ed.) 2001. *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*. Third Edition. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.

This edited volume is one of the standard works in the field. It covers all aspects of language teaching methodology, and many chapters would be excellent follow-up reading to the chapters in this volume.

Nunan, D. 1999. *Second Language Teaching and Learning*. Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.

This book provides an introduction, rationale, research basis, and classroom procedures for task-based language teaching.

Richards J. and W. Renandya (eds.) 2002. *Methodology in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

An edited collection of reprints on all aspects of methodology, this volume provides an overview of current approaches, issues, and practices in teaching English to speakers of other languages.

Helpful Web site



Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington DC
(<http://www.cal.org/ericcll>)

This Web site has many useful resources, including papers, bibliographies, and links to other Web sites of relevance to language teaching methodology.

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