

theory is concerned with why second language learners often fail to master the target language. It involves factors such as social distance, attitude towards the target language and motivation to learn. McLaughlin accepts that this theory has enriched second language research, but notes that it is not relevant to classroom second language learning, “where learners do not have contact with native speakers other than the teacher”. At present there is not enough information to validate or falsify the theory.

The author finally turns to Cognitive theory, which views second language learning as the acquisition of a complex cognitive skill and the automatization of component sub-skills. It stresses “the limited information-processing capacities of human learners, the use of various techniques to overcome these limitations” and the role of practice in routinizing component skills. While admitting his positive bias towards this theory, McLaughlin nevertheless notes a number of its limitations, e.g. the assumption that the acquisition of any complex cognitive skill parallels second language acquisition. Cognitive theory needs to be linked to theories of L2 acquisition, as on its own it cannot explain many of the linguistic constraints implied in other theories. Furthermore, it cannot make precise predictions for L2 learning, nor can its propositions be falsified. On the other hand, criticism is premature and “cognitive theory has been heuristically rich and deserves to be pursued”.

In a concluding chapter, the author briefly considers the role of theory in L2 research and discusses the influence of theory on the choice of research methods. He advocates an integrated approach to L2 teaching “that incorporates both the more creative aspects of language learning and the more cognitive aspects that are susceptible to guidance and training”.

It must be said that this is a most authoritative work which makes a major contribution to the field of second language learning. It succeeds admirably in stimulating critical thinking about the various theories discussed, as well as about the general nature and role of theory in L2 research. Although the author states in his preface that readers do not require an “extensive background” in this field, they do need to be reasonably well informed. This book has the virtue of being comprehensive and up to date, and while many of the issues raised in it are as yet unresolved, it certainly sharpens the reader’s awareness of just how varied, dynamic and controversial the field of second language learning is.

J.J. Swartz

Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers

Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching: A description and analysis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. (171 pp.)

When skimming through the list of contents in this publication, one inevitably recalls the earlier work of Robert Blair: *Innovative Approaches to Language Teaching* (Newbury House, 1982), for it appears to cover much the same ground. However, a closer perusal reveals several fundamental differences in organization, purpose and approach. Blair, as editor, allows the various advocates of the Silent Way, the Total Physical Response, Community Language Learning, the Natural Approach and Suggestopedia (approaches covered in both books) to write in support of methods they have designed or developed themselves. Further, in the earlier volume, these approaches are classified according to whether, for example, they apply to an acquisition or a learning environment. Blair then devotes the last section of this book to an integrated approach to language teaching: an eclectic use of the methods described in the earlier sections.

Richards (well-known for his work on error analysis in the mid-seventies) and Rodgers are not primarily concerned with an evaluation of the various approaches described in their book, nor do they recommend one method in preference to another. Acknowledging from the outset that different

methods appear to be based on very different views of what language is and how a language is learned, they have set out, in their own words

“... to depict, organize, and analyze major and minor approaches and methods in language teaching, and to describe their underlying nature . . . to provide a detailed account of major twentieth-century trends in language teaching . . . to highlight the similarities and differences between approaches and methods.” (p. vii)

To achieve this aim, they have used the same descriptive framework throughout the book (the model is presented in Chapter 2). Thus each second or foreign language teaching method is examined at three levels:

the level of approach,
the level of design, and
the level of procedure.

In Chapter 1, the authors offer a brief history of language teaching as a background for the discussion of contemporary methods. Here they note that “changes in language teaching methods throughout history” reflect “changes in the kind of proficiency learners need, such as the move towards oral proficiency rather than reading comprehension as the goal of language study” (p. 1). The Grammar-Translation Method and the Direct Method are briefly considered in this context.

The title and aim of this book necessitate a closer examination of the terms “method” and “approach”, which appears in Chapter 2. The authors use the scheme proposed by Anthony in 1963 as a starting point:

“... An approach is a set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language teaching and learning.

... Method is an overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material . . . Within one approach there can be many methods.

... A technique is implementational – that which actually takes place in the classroom.” (p. 15)

This classification is found wanting and the authors supply their own outline of the elements and sub-elements that constitute a method. Here they distinguish between *approach* (the theory of the nature of language and language learning), *design* (objectives, syllabus model, learner and teacher roles, the role of instructional materials and types of learning and teaching activities) and *procedure* (classroom techniques, practices and behaviours observed when the method is used). These three categories are then used consistently to describe and analyse each of the methods dealt with in the book.

Unlike Blair, Richards and Rodgers include earlier methods such as the Oral Approach, Situational Language Teaching and Audio-lingualism in their discussion. These are useful as they reveal how, as a result of the shifting of views about the nature of language and language learning, these three related methods gave rise to the development of Communicative Language Teaching. Particularly useful is their listing of 22 distinctive features of both the Audiolingual Method and Communicative Language Teaching for the purposes of contrast (pp. 67-68). The presentation of the chapter on CLT is particularly lucid and supports the conclusion that CLT “is best considered an approach rather than a method”. Despite its theoretical consistency, “at the levels of design and procedure there is much greater room for individual interpretation and variation than most methods permit” (p. 83).

The next two chapters are devoted to Total Physical Response and the Silent Way. The authors conclude that although the former method, developed by James Asher, is consistent with Krashen’s views on comprehensible input and reduction of stress, it is best used in conjunction with other methods, as it offers the teacher only “a useful set of techniques”. An analysis of the latter, devised by Caleb Gattegno, reveals that many of the features of the Silent Way are characteristic of more traditional methods. The innovations lie in the way in which classroom activities are organized and in the roles that teachers and learners are now required to assume.

Chapter 8 considers Charles Curran's so-called "humanistic" method: Community Language Learning. While an analysis and description of this method lead the authors to praise its "sensitivity to learner communicative intent", some grave reservations are also noted with regard to coping with learner aggression, the training required by teachers, the lack of a syllabus and the validity of the counselling processes on which this method is based.

Tracy Terrell's Natural Approach is covered in Chapter 9, a method more evolutionary than revolutionary in its principles; one "that emphasizes comprehensible and meaningful practice activities, rather than production of grammatically perfect utterances and sentences." It is followed by a closer look at Lozanov's Suggestopedia: "a method which attempts to harness man's nonrational and nonconscious influences . . . and redirect them so as to optimize learning". The authors note the dramatic claims for suggestopedic learning and the enthusiasm and critical response it has elicited. The nature of the approach is such that it is virtually impossible to prove or disprove the premises on which it is based, thus they suggest that language teachers "try to identify and validate these techniques from Suggestopedia that appear effective and that harmonize with other successful techniques in the language teaching inventory" (p. 152).

The final chapter contains useful suggestions for comparing and evaluating language teaching methods, using some of the methods described in the previous chapters as examples.

A great deal has been and doubtless will still be written about innovative methods of language teaching. Language teachers need to be made aware of recent research and of new developments in this field. This book certainly fulfils that need. There are others: I have already noted Blair's contribution in 1982 and more recently Diane Larsen-Freeman covered the same ground in *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching* (Oxford University Press, 1986). (The latter, however, is pitched at a much more elementary level.) I feel bound to recommend *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, for the clarity and objectivity with which it has been written, an achievement made possible by the use of the same descriptive model in presenting each method. The authors show no prejudice: in some ways their refusal to evaluate each method critically may be considered a shortcoming. However, the discerning reader will be able to reach his own conclusions and make assessments from the clear, concise treatment given to each method. Often criticism is implied in the conclusions reached at the end of each chapter, but as neither author is advocating a method which he himself developed, their analysis is consistently balanced. As most of the methods described were developed more than ten years ago, the authors are able to draw on recent research and have the benefit of a clearer perspective in their analysis of each method.

I have no doubt that this book achieves the aims the authors set themselves: "to enable teachers to become better informed about the nature, strengths, and weaknesses of methods and approaches so they can better arrive at their own judgements and decisions". Every serious second language teacher should have this excellent book on his shelf.

J.J. Swartz