A glossary of methodology and background terminology

The following are the minimum terms and concepts with which you should be familiar to be able to understand and describe methodology and learning in English Language Teaching.

Term	Gloss
Acceptability	A judgement concerning the appropriateness or accuracy of a language item
Acculturation	The process by which people's attitudes and values may change by exposure to alternative cultural norms
Achievement test	A test designed to measure how well something has been learned
Acquisition	A term contrasted with learning referring to the unconscious acquiring of a language
Active vocabulary	The vocabulary a learner can use as well as understand
Adjacency pair	Two utterances related by function and often co-occurring. For example, accusing and apologising
Affect	Emotional effect
Affective filter	A hindrance to learning caused by stress or uncertainty
Agglutination	The tendency of some languages to combine words and add morphemes together to make new meanings
Analytic language	A language in which there are few or no inflections and which does not agglutinate
Approach	A term often used instead of *methodology* to describe a theory of language and a theory of learning. E.g., a communicative approach
Appropriateness	Descriptive of the social acceptability of a language item
Associative learning	Learning aided by associations between sounds, meanings or contrasts
Audiolingualism	A methodology associated with behaviourist language learning theory and structural linguistics
Audio-visual aid	Any chart, diagram, video sequence or audio recording etc. used in a classroom
Aural	Referring to hearing / listening
Authenticity	The degree to which teaching materials come from the 'real world'
Automaticity	The ability to use language without thinking
Avoidance	A learner's tendency to avoid using certain language items because a simpler formulation is available
Backchaining	Drilling a sequence orally beginning at the end and working in sections to the beginning
Backwash (aka washback)	The effect on teaching that testing has
Behaviourism	A theory of learning based around the acquisition of habit and reinforcement of learning
Cloze test	Technically, removing, e.g., every fifth or seventh word from a passage and asking test takers to guess the missing words. Informally, a gap-fill test
Cocktail party effect	Descriptive of the ability to filter out background noise and only focus on the information one wishes to hear

Term	Gloss
Code switching	Changing languages or varieties of the same language in a text
Cognate	A word which has the same derivation and is similar in form in more than one language (meaning may or may not vary)
Cognition	Mental processes such as thinking, remembering, recognising, inferencing, deducing and classifying
Cognitive style	A learner's preferred way of learning
Coherence	The extent to which a text or exchange makes sense in terms of logical connection
Cohesion	The extent to which a text or exchange is linked by language forms
Common core	Those language items and functions which a learner must acquire whatever the ultimate aim of learning is
Communicative	To do with the exchange of information, feelings, attitudes etc. between a Sender (the speaker / writer) and the Receiver (the listener / reader)
Communicative Language Teaching	An approach which has the ability to communicate effectively as its ultimate aim and which uses simulated or real communicative situations in teaching
Communicative competence	The ability to: a) form accurate language b) understand the rules of speaking c) know how to make and understand speech acts and perform identifiable functions in language d) know where and when to use the language (i.e., understand what is appropriate)
Community Language Learning	A methodology developed from group counselling techniques
Comparative linguistics	The study of languages and their structures in relation to each other
Competence	A person's internalised grammar
Comprehensible input	Input of language which can be understood and form the basis of learning
Computer assisted language learning (CALL)	Using computers as a major element in the teaching-learning process
Concept checking question	A display question intended to ascertain whether an idea has been understood
Concordance	A computer-generated analysis of texts intended to identify collocational and colligational patterns
Concurrent validity	The degree to which the results of a test will agree with the results of another test aimed at measuring the same ability
Connectivism	A theory of language acquisition based on the cognitive process of making connections and drawing parallels
Connotation	The additional meaning connected to a word or phrase beyond its base or denotational meaning
Consciousness raising	Alerting learners to features of the language

Term	Gloss
Construct validity	In testing, the ability of the test constructor to describe what exactly is being tested
Content-based instruction	Language teaching which focuses on the skills and knowledge required in other school subjects
Content validity	The degree to which a test measures what it is intended to measure
Co-text and Context	The first refers to the language around an item, the second to the broader setting in which the language occurs. The term context is often used for both.
Contrastive analysis	Analysing the differences between two languages or varieties
Conversational analysis	An analysis of natural conversation intended to identify its characteristics
Conversation maxim	One of four maxims devised by Grice to describe the conventions of communication
Co-operative / Collaborative learning	An approach in which learners are organised into groups or pairs to work together
Corpus	A database of linguistic information which can be analysed using computers
Correlation	The agreement or otherwise between two variables (e.g., learning time and learning success)
Course design	The design of a teaching programme
Creative construction theory	The hypothesis that learners are active in constructing theories to explain the data they are exposed to
Criterion referencing	Measuring the outcomes of a test against an external set of criteria such as task completion, accuracy, communicative effect etc.
Critical period hypothesis	The theory that there is a critical period for learning language which ceases around the age of 12
Curriculum	The content, often externally imposed, of a syllabus
Deductive learning	Learning based on being given the rule and from that to produce acceptable language
Delayed correction	A technique which avoids the interruption of an activity and leaves correction of language until its completion
Descriptive grammar	Grammar which describes what native speakers do rather than attempting to say what is right or wrong
Developmental error	An error made which is the result of developing a grasp of a rule
Diagnostic testing	Testing to discover a learner's strengths and weaknesses
Direct method	Teaching a language in the language
Discourse analysis	Analysing language above the level of the sentence
Discovery learning	Learning through being led to the rules by observation and noticing
Discrete-point testing	Testing which involves assessing ability to produce / understand individual language items
Distractor	Any of the wrong responses in a multiple-choice test
Drill	Any technique based on repetition or cueing
EAP	English for Academic Purposes (i.e., studying in the language)

Term	Gloss
Eclecticism	The selection of whatever practice seems appropriate from a range of theoretical perspectives
EGP	English for General Purposes. Contrasted with English for Science and Technology (EST), ESP (English for Special Purposes) etc.
Ethnographic approach	Study of a phenomenon in its cultural setting
Expectancy theory	A theory of motivation concerned with a learner's view of the efficacy and value of the methodology and targets of learning respectively
Extensive	Reading or listening in quantity rather than to limited amounts of language
Face validity	A measure of how much a learner recognises that a test is fair and reliable
FLA	First Language Acquisition
Formative evaluation	Testing or assessment designed to contribute to learning and improving teaching
Framing (aka transition)	Any technique which explicitly signals the end of an activity and the beginning of the next stage of a lesson
Functional linguistics	An approach to language study which focuses on language as a social interaction (aka Systemic Functional Linguistics)
Generative grammar	An approach to grammar analysis which focuses on the underlying rules allowing acceptable language to be produced
Genre	Language forms which share purpose, text staging and many linguistic elements. E.g., discussions, expositions, narratives, explanations etc.
Genre approach	An approach to teaching, especially, writing which focuses on analysing the structure and content of a model text. It may be combined with a process or product approach (q.v.)
Global motivation	A learner's general reason for learning
Grammar translation	An approach to teaching which focuses on accessing the culture and literature of the target language using translation and grammatical study
Humanism	A term referring to the importance of human values, self-awareness, sensitivity and cultural appropriateness in teaching methodologies
Hypothesis testing	Describing how learners create hypotheses or theories about the language and test them against the data they receive
Illocutionary force	An utterance's intended or perceived meaning. E.g., *It's cold in here = Please shut the window*
Imitation theory	A theory of learning which assumes that language is learned by imitating language heard
Inductive learning	A learning theory which assumes that people can arrive at a language rule by being given access to sufficient examples of it in action
Information gap	A communicative task based around a difference of information provided to the task doers

Term	Gloss
Innatist theory	A theory which proposes that language learning ability is genetically determined
Input hypothesis	The hypothesis that for input to be effective for learning it should be understandable and just above the learner's current mastery level
Interaction	The use of language to maintain social relationships
Interlanguage	A learner's current ability on a scale of knowing none of the language to full mastery
Inter-lingual error	An error resulting from the influence of a learner's first language
Isolating language	A language in which words are not inflected or combined and in which meaning arises from word order and function words
Kinaesthetic	Relating to touch and movement
Language acquisition device	A hypothesised in-built ability to learn language
Language transfer	The effect of one language on the learning of another
Language typology	The cross-language study of form and ordering in languages
Language universal	A posited phenomenon which occurs in all languages. E.g., the existence of noun phrases, subjects, verbs etc.
Langue	Suassure's term for the shared knowledge of a language within a speech community. It is akin (but not the same as) Chomsky's concept of competence. The former is based on the speech community's knowledge, the latter on the individual's knowledge
Lexicon	A learner's total knowledge of words in a language
Locutionary act	Saying something that is meaningful rather than performing any express function (cf. illocutionary act)
Meaningful drill	A type of drilling in which it is necessary for the learner to understand the meaning of the cue to be able to respond
Mechanical drill (aka meaningless drill)	A type of drill in which it is possible for the learners to produce a correct response even if they do not understand the meaning of the cue
Meta-language	Language used to describe language. E.g., *This is a verb*
Method	A way of teaching based on principles and theory
Modelling	Providing an example to imitate
Monitor hypothesis	A posited process by which learners actively apply the rules they have learned to their own output (after the event)
Motivation	The willingness to expend effort in doing something
Multiple-choice test	A form of testing which requires the test taker to select a correct response from several alternatives
Natural approach	An approach to teaching which emphasises spoken language, the use of realia
Natural order hypothesis	The theory that children and older learners acquire items in a fixed order
Notion	A mental concept such as heaviness, duration, location, time etc. (cf. function)

Term	Gloss
Open-ended item	A test item which allows the test taker to respond in his / her own way
Oral	Concerned with speaking
Order of acquisition	See acquisition order
Orthography	Spelling or 'correct' spelling
Overgeneralisation	Extending a learned rule into areas where it will not work. E.g., making the past tense of *come* as *comed*.
Paralinguistic	Of non-verbal communication
Parole	What is said in a language. Cf. langue
Pedagogic grammar	A grammar designed for learners and for teachers to use
Performance	What people actually say in a language. Cf. competence
Perlocutionary force	The effect of an utterance
Phatic communication	Communication which does not and is not intended to convey information. E.g., *How do you do?*
Phonemics	The study of the sound units of a language
Phonetics	The study of all speech sounds
Pragmatics	The study of the use of language to communicate
Prefabricated language	Language learned and used as a single concept or chunk, e.g., *What's the matter?*
Prescriptive grammar	Grammar which sets out what is considered right and wrong rather than describing what people say
Process approach	An approach to teaching (especially of writing) which focuses on subskills such as drafting, proofing, expanding and so on rather than the end product
Product approach	An approach to teaching (especially of writing) which focuses on producing a text based on a model provided
Proficiency test	A test intended to measure language competence regardless of any teaching programme, e.g., public examinations
Readability	A measure of the accessibility of a text concerning, especially, the number of new words, lexical density, length of sentences and grammatical complexity
Redundancy	Describing the fact that a message will contain more information than is required for comprehension. For example, on *He says*, the *-s* ending is redundant because the pronoun already carries the third person singular information
Register	The speech variety used by members of the same profession or a shared interest
Reliability	A measure of how consistent and trustworthy a test's results are
Sapir-Whorf hypothesis	The theory that the language we speak determines what we can speak about
Scanning	Looking through a text to locate specific information
Schema (pl. schemata)	A mental framework in which information is ordered and classified
Semantics	The study of meaning (cf. pragmatics)

Term	Gloss
Simulation	An elaborate role-play in which learners take on specific functions in, e.g., solving tasks
Situational Language Teaching	An oral approach to teaching which sets language in a social context and focuses on function words in particular
Sociolect	The variety of language used by a social group
Sociolinguistics	The study of language in society
Speech act	An utterance which performs a specific communicative function
Speech community	A group who share a language or language variety
Strategic competence	The ability to use compensation to keep communication effective or to produce a desired effect on the listener
Structural linguistics	The study of language from a structural point of view involving phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases, clauses, sentences and texts as a hierarchy
Style	Variation in formality
Summative evaluation	Assessment which happens at the end of a teaching unit
Synthetic language	A language which uses inflections rather than separate words or particles to express meaning. Cf. analytic or isolating language
Task-based teaching / learning	An approach organised around tasks to perform in the language rather than tasks concerning the language
Topic sentence	The sentence in a paragraph, usually the first, which sets out the theme of the paragraph
Transition	See framing
Use / Usage	The former refers to an utterance's communicative vale, the latter to its significance or form
Wait time	The amount of time a teacher waits after asking a question before moving on
Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)	Following Vygotsky, the ZPD is the area in which the learner can perform a task only with some support