

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 <i>methodology</i> to describe a theory of language and a theory of learning. E.g., a communicative approach |
| Appropriacy | A socio-linguistic term used as a measure of the social acceptability of an utterance with reference to communicative intention, style and register |
| Appropriateness | A non-technical measure of the social acceptability of a language item often used instead of appropriacy (q.v.). This is also the correct term to describe the relevance and applicability of something (e.g., a test or course) to its target audience. |
| 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 |

| Term | Gloss |
|--|--|
| Behaviourism | A theory of learning based around the acquisition of habit and reinforcement of learning |
| Bottom-up processing | An analytic approach to understanding a written or heard text which uses the reader / hearer's knowledge of the structure and lexicon of the language to piece together the import of the text (cf. top-down processing) |
| 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 |
| 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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 |

| Term | Gloss |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Concept-checking question | A display question intended to ascertain whether an idea has been understood (cf. instruction-checking question) |
| 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 |
| 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 |

| Term | Gloss |
|--------------------------|---|
| 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) |
| 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 |

| Term | Gloss |
|--|---|
| 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., <i>It's cold in here</i> = <i>Please shut the window</i> |
| 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 |
| 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 |
| Instruction-checking question | A question used by the teacher to check that an instruction has been understood and will be acted on in accordance with the demands of the procedure (cf. concept-checking question) |
| 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 | Saussure'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 |

| Term | Gloss |
|--------------------------|--|
| Meta-language | Language used to describe language. E.g., <i>This is a verb</i> |
| 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 |
| Noticing | A classroom procedure or a cognitive process whereby learners note or are encouraged to note either: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the language which is used to realise a useful communicative function (noticing the language) or b) the gap between the learner's current interlanguage and a native-speaker model (noticing the gap) |
| Notion | A mental concept such as heaviness, duration, location, time etc. (cf. function) |
| 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 <i>come</i> as <i>comed</i> . |
| 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., <i>How do you do?</i> |
| 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., <i>What's the matter?</i> |
| Prescriptive grammar | Grammar which sets out what is considered right and wrong rather than describing what people say |

| Term | Gloss |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 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 <i>He says</i> , the <i>-s</i> 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) |
| 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 |
| Top-down processing | Using knowledge of the world, the topic or the generic structure to make sense of a written or heard text (cf. bottom-up processing) |

| Term | Gloss |
|------------------------------------|--|
| 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 value, 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 |