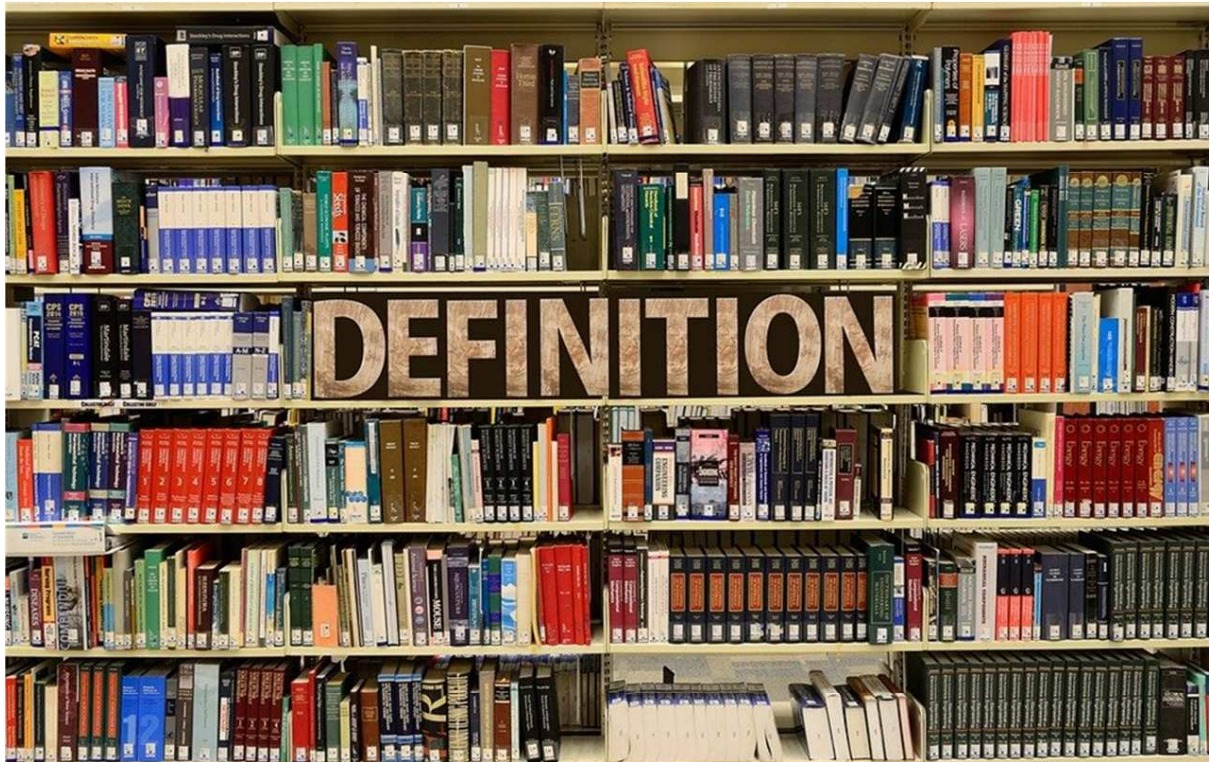# ELT Concourse.com

A glossary of methodology and background theory for English Language Teachers

The following comes without the links to guides on the site explaining in more detail what the terms mean and how they are used. For more, see the site at:
https://eltconcourse.com/training/glossaries/glossary_index.html.

Term	Brief explanation
acceptability	A judgement concerning the appropriateness or accuracy of a language item.
acculturation model	The view that success in learning is related to whether and how much a learner a) wishes to communicate with speakers of the target language b) has the opportunity to do so b) wishes to integrate socially
achievement test	A test designed to discover how well the targets of a learning programme has been reached.
acquisition	A concept contrasted with **learning** which refers to the unconscious 'picking up' of a language with little if any focus on formal instruction or learning.
active construction of grammar	A theory of learning which suggests that learning is a process of developing and refining hypotheses about language structure.
active vocabulary	Describing the language which a learner can both understand and use. See also **passive vocabulary**.
adjacency pair	Two utterances related by function and often co-occurring, for example, apologising and accepting apologies.
affective filter hypothesis **affective factors**	The concept that feelings of insecurity, uneasiness and danger will negatively affect how well a learner can focus and be successful. Affective factors are the feelings, values and attitudes of learners.
affordance	The perceived possibilities in the environment and the items in it. You can use a coat hanger to hand a coat on or to bend into shape as a temporary tool.
agglutinating languages	Those languages which add morphemes together to form longer lexemes with each morpheme representing an additional meaning. Such languages have high morpheme to word ratios.
alteration	A coping strategy in whereby speakers will simply alter the message if their language resources do not allow them to express the original idea.
alternative answer item	A test which allows only two possible answers such as True/False.
analytic languages	Those languages which use few grammatical morphemes and have a low morpheme to word ratio.
analytic scoring	Scoring a mark for each component of a task.
approach	One factor in the definition of methodology, referring to the background theories of language and learning.
appropriateness	Descriptive of the social acceptability of a language item.

approximation	A coping strategy which involves either circumlocution or substitution in the face of ignorance of the correct form.
approximative system	A concept akin to **interlanguage** describing the learner's current mastery of the target language.
aptitude testing	Testing the ability to learn a subject.
audio-lingualism	An approach to language teaching which draws on structural linguistic analysis of language and behaviourist theories of learning. A development is audio-visual teaching making use of images, moving or otherwise.
audio-visual aid	Any chart, diagram, object, 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' and are used as originally intended. Materials may be authentic in terms of not having been designed for use in a classroom but inauthentic in terms of how they are used. Full authenticity is achieved if the material is not designed for a pedagogical purpose and is used in the way it was intended by its producer.
autonomy	The state of being in independent control of your own life.
avoidance strategy	One of a range of **coping strategies** which involves expressing things, usually more simply, and avoiding the use of lexis and grammar with which the learners is unfamiliar or insecure.
backchaining	A drilling technique which involves working back from the end of an utterance.
back-channelling	The responses of a listener intended to show e.g., rapport, interest and attention.
backwash	Also washback. The effect that the construction and content of a test or examination has on the content and activities of a teaching programme.
barrier test	A test designed to filter candidates for certain course programmes on the basis of their current ability.
Bayesian processing	A form of inferencing in which the learner makes and discards hypotheses as the data get richer.
behaviourism	A theory of learning which asserts that learning occurs in a stimulus-response-reinforcement cycle.
Bloom's taxonomy	A way of categorising and describing educational objectives in terms of the cognitive difficulty of tasks.
bottom-up processing	Using one's knowledge of the grammar, phonology and lexis to understand or produce a text. Compare **top-down processing**.

cautious writing	See **hedging**.
circumlocution	A coping strategy involving the avoidance of unknown or little-known items to achieve communication by talking around the item. E.g., using *The thing which opens cans* instead of *The tin opener*.
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning.
closed pairs	A way of grouping learners so they are all working in pairs and not paying attention to other pairs. Compare **open pairs**.
Cloze test	A test in which words are removed regularly (every fifth or seventh, for example) from a text for the learners to complete. Casually, a **gap-fill** task.
cognate	A word similarly derived in at least two languages which is related in meaning and recognisable in form. Cognate words are sometimes **false friend**s (not false cognates, a term which refers to words which look similar in two languages but which are wholly unconnected in derivation).
cognition **cognitive (adj.)**	Thinking.
communication strategies	Any of a range of resources which a learner uses to communicate. They include coping strategies.
communicative competence	A term variously defined which includes at least: linguistic competence (knowledge of the systems of the language), sociolinguistic competence (knowledge of the rules of speaking), discourse competence (knowing how to use and respond to different types of speech acts) and strategic competence (knowing how to use language appropriately).
Communicative Language Teaching	A methodology which has as its aim the ability to communicate effectively and which uses simulated or real communicative situations in teaching.
Community Language Learning	An approach to teaching which draws heavily on theories of counselling (and, some would argue, group therapy sessions).
compensation	The ways in which speakers may compensate for a lack of language skills and knowledge. See **coping** strategies.
competence	A term contrasted with **performance** which refers to the speaker's intrinsic knowledge of the language, its lexicon, phonology and structures.
comprehensible input	Language which can be understood and form the basis of learning. This often refers to language which is just above the learner's current knowledge but still comprehensible.
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.
concurrent validity	A measure of how well a test performs in comparison with other tests targeting the same knowledge and skills.
connectionist theory	The theory which holds that people can make guesses and hypotheses about language structure based on statistical probabilities rather than analogy.
construct validity	Descriptive of a test-setter's ability precisely to determine and explain what is being tested.
content validity	A measure of how far and how accurately a test targets the content of what a learner has encountered.
context	The social situation in which language is set. The term is often used loosely to refer to **co-text**.
contrastive analysis	Analysis of the similarities and differences between languages.
conversation frame	A set of instructions concerning the content and stages in a practice dialogue.
conversational analysis	An approach to the study of social interaction concerned with verbal and non-verbal behaviours.
coping strategies	Various communicative strategies which help learners compensate for a lack of knowledge or skill. They include: **circumlocution**, paraphrasing, asking for repetition or clarification and **avoidance**.
corpora	Large, computerised databases of language samples used for research.
co-text	The language items which surround a target item and can be used to aid understanding of it. The term **context** is often used loosely to refer to co-text.
course plan	A list of the content and ordering of a schedule of work to be covered by a group of learners and their teacher(s). Such lists are usually drawn up by teachers and/or academic managers and based on a syllabus which, in turn, may be based on a curriculum.
coverage	A measure of how broad an area a lexeme can refer to. For example, vehicle has greater coverage than car although it is less frequent.
creativity	A coping strategy in speaking which involves the use of first language, direct translation from first language or simple invention of terms and structures.
criterion referenced testing	Measuring learners' ability in a test against a set of criteria. Compare **norm referencing**.
critical period hypothesis	The concept of there being a period of childhood and adolescence beyond which a first language cannot be acquired with success.
Cuisenaire rods	Coloured rods of various lengths used in **Silent Way** teaching and elsewhere as a visual representation of structures and stress patterns etc.

curriculum	An externally imposed and prescribed set of learning objectives and content. Such lists are often drawn up by ministries or other external powers such as examination boards.
deductive learning	Learning based on being given the rule and from that to produce acceptable language. Compare **inductive learning**.
delayed correction	A technique which avoids the interruption of an activity and leaves correction of language until its completion.
descriptive grammar	A grammar reference which describes what native speakers do rather than attempting to say what is right or wrong.
diagnostic test	A test to discover learners' strengths and weaknesses for planning purposes.
dictogloss	An activity in which learners use their knowledge of structure, collocation, colligation and lexis to re-construct a heard text.
differentiation	Varying tasks and procedures to allow for different level of skill and knowledge in the individuals in a group.
direct method	Teaching a language in the language.
direct test	Testing a skill by requiring the test-taker to demonstrate it.
discourse analysis	Analysing language above the level of the sentence.
discovery learning	Learning through being led to the rules by observation and noticing. There are two forms: a) independent discovery learning in which the task is set and the learners work alone (or with other learners only) until it is time for feedback. b) assisted discovery learning which is akin to **Guided discovery** and involves the teacher throughout. See also **inductive learning**.
discrete item / point test	A test format with many items requiring short answers which each target a defined area.
discrimination	Either: The ability to distinguish closely related lexemes, sounds or structures. Describing the need for a test to make a clear difference between learners.
discussion	A type of text which seeks to discuss the issue rather than to persuade the reader / hearer of the truth of a proposition.
display question	A question to which the teacher knows the answer and is intended as a check on a learner's understanding and knowledge.
distractor	These are the wrong answers in a multiple-choice test task. The closer the distractors are to the correct answer, the more difficult the test is.
Dogme	A communicative methodology which involves the avoidance of dependency on materials and excessive planning averring that the targets and syllabus emerge from the needs of the learners.

drill	Any technique based on repetition or cueing. Also referred to as pattern practice.
EAP	English for Academic Purposes.
eclecticism	Selecting from a range of theories approaches and materials.
EFL	English as a Foreign Language. Now usually ESOL or ESL.
EIL	English as an International Language.
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca.
elicitation	Drawing out information and good guesses from learners rather than simply informing them
ELT	English Language Teaching.
emergent language	Language which arises during the course of teaching and may, or may not, need some expansion, feedback or response.
ENAP	English for No Apparent Purpose. Often this describes the English required by young learners on general English courses.
encyclopaedic knowledge	What a person knows about the world in general.
EOP	English for Occupational Purposes
error	Distinguished from slips, mistakes or lapses and descriptive of a true lack of knowledge causing mal-formed or unacceptable language production.
ESL	English as a Second Language.
ESOL	English to Speakers of Other Languages.
ESP	English for Special Purposes (such as Science, Business, Academic study etc.).
expectancy theory	The theory that the level of motivation is determined by: the value of the outcome, the learner's expectation of being able to learn the targets and the likelihood of success.
exposition	A type of text which seeks to persuade the reader / hearer of the truth of a proposition rather than discuss the issue.
extensive	Reading or listening in quantity rather than to limited amounts of language.
extrinsic motivation	Motivation which comes from outside the learner.
face validity	A measure of how much like a proper and reliable test an assessment procedure looks.
facilitation	The ways in which speakers can make their message easier to understand. See also **language facilitation**.
false friend	A word in the target language derived from the same source as in the learner's first language but whose meaning is no longer (or was never) synonymous. This is <u>not</u> a false **cognate**.

field (in)dependence	The theory that people can be divided into those who are strongly or weakly influenced by the surroundings of what they perceive.
field of discourse	The topic or register area of a text of any kind.
FLA	First Language Acquisition. See also **SLA**.
flooding	Adapting or constructing texts in which the target language occurs repeatedly as an aid to **noticing**.
fluency	The ability to speak or write smoothly with the minimum of hesitation, backtracking and rephrasing.
formative assessment	Testing and assessment during a teaching programme intended to inform planning for the following parts. Compare **summative testing**.
fresh start	Ensuring that test items are discrete and the performance in one task will not be dependent on success in a previous task.
function functional syllabus	a) The social purpose for which language is produced. b) The grammatical role of an item. A functional syllabus, often combined with **notion**al categories focuses on the first of these definitions.
gap-fill task	A task or test item in which words or longer units are removed and which the learner must insert. See also **Cloze test**.
genre genre approach	Texts which share the same communicative intentions will exhibit cultural conventions concerning language and information staging common to other tests in the genre in which they can be placed.
gist reading / listening	Reading or listening to get a general overview of the topic and structure of a text. See **skimming**. See **monitor listening**.
Gouin Series, The	Teaching in which language is presented as a series of logically sequential steps in undertaking everyday activities.
grammar translation	An approach to teaching which focuses on accessing the culture and literature of the target language using translation and grammatical study.
group work	An activity in which learners work cooperatively in groups larger than two.
guided discovery	A technique which consists of allowing or requiring learners to do their own research and investigation to arrive at the knowledge they need. The term 'guided' refers to the fact that the teacher's responsibility is to direct learners to the most useful sources of information rather than making them find their own way. See **noticing** and / or **inductive learning**.

habituation	The supposed process by which language becomes automatic allowing the speaker to focus on content not form.
hedging	Writing and speaking especially in English for Academic Purposes which deploys a number of shielding devices and modality to make tentativeness clear.
hierarchy of needs	The arrangement of human needs on a scale which may determine levels of motivation.
Honey-Mumford	See **Mumford-Honey**.
human language	Human language differs in fundamental ways from animal communication.
humanism	A term referring to the importance of human values, self-awareness, sensitivity and cultural appropriateness in teaching methodologies.
imitation theory	The theory which holds that children and/or adults acquire language by imitating what they see and hear around them.
indirect test	A test which seeks to assess the underlying skills and knowledge required in the use of language rather than testing a skill directly.
Indo-European languages	A large family of languages (which includes English, most European and many Asian languages) presumed to have originated in the Caucasus.
induced error	An error which is caused by poor explanation, incomplete explanation, poor materials or misinformation.
inductive learning	A learning procedure involving scrutiny of multiple examples of a form or system to arrive at the rule. Compare **deductive learning**.
inferencing	Working out meaning or gaining other information by a cognitive approach to making logical connections.
information gap	A type of activity in which learners hold different information which they must pool to achieve the task target.
innateness theory	The theory that the ability to learn a language is genetically determined.
input hypothesis	The assertion that the data a learner encounters should be both comprehensible and just above the learner's current level to lead to successful language acquisition.
instrumental motivation	Motivation which arises from the need to do something else with the language.
integrative motivation	Motivation which stems from the need to fit in to the target-language culture.
integrative testing	Combining many language elements to do the task. Public examinations contain a good deal of this sort of testing with marks awarded for various elements: accuracy, range, communicative success etc.

intensive	Reading or listening in detail rather than trying to get an overall idea of a text.
interaction	Language use to maintain social relationships rather than achieve ends. Compare **transaction**.
interference	The negative effect of a learners first language(s) on the learning of a target language. Also called first-language interference.
interlanguage	A concept akin to an **approximative system** describing the learner's current mastery of the target language.
intrinsic motivation	Motivation which comes from within the learner.
intuition	A native speaker's judgement of correctness and/or appropriacy.
isolating languages	Languages which very few or no grammatical morphemes and rarely inflect lexemes. They have very low morpheme to word ratios.
language acquisition device	A theory positing the existence of a genetically endowed mental template or mind module for allowing the rapid acquisition of a person's first language(s).
language and thought	Describing the debate concerning whether one's first language determines the way one thinks or *vice versa*.
language facilitation	The way in which similarities in the lexicon and structure of a learner's first language(s) may help in the learning of another language.
lathophobic aphasia	Remaining silent for fear of making an error.
learner-generated syllabus	A syllabus which relies on learners knowing what they need to do in English and what they need to learn to master the skills they need. The syllabus is negotiated between the students and the teacher/institution.
learning	The purposeful acquisition of knowledge. In language terms, this is sometimes contrasted with **acquisition** which refers to the more-or-less unconscious picking up of a language through exposure to meaningful input.
learning strategies	Any approach a learner takes to making learning more successful personally.
learning styles	Generally discredited theories concerning how individuals may have preferred learning styles.
lexical syllabus	A syllabus which focuses on lexical patterns and common ways to express meaning.
lexicon	a) A learner's total knowledge of words in a language. This includes both active and passive vocabulary. b) the complete set of all the lexemes in a language. The English lexicon is reckoned to contain many hundreds of thousands of words as well as prefixes and suffixes.
lockstep	Descriptive of activities in which all learners are doing the same thing at the same time.

meaningful drill meaningless drill	The former refers to drill in which the learner can get the right answer without understanding the language at all, the latter to those in which some understanding is necessary. A meaningless drill is sometimes called a mechanical drill.
metalanguage	The language we use to talk about language.
method methodology	Used loosely, method means methodology but more technically it is just a part of a methodology. A methodology proper has a fully worked out theory of language allied to a theory of learning.
mistake	See **error**.
mode of discourse	In genre theory, this refers to the type of text that is produced and the medium of communication which is used.
monitor hypothesis	The theory that users of the language can monitor their own output for acceptability but that the system only works retrospectively.
monitor listening	A process akin to scan reading in which the hearer monitors a test for relevance before switching to **intensive** listening.
motivation	The willingness to expend effort in doing something.
multiple intelligence theory	The theory that humans have a range of different intelligence types in different proportions.
multiple-choice test	A test which requires the taker to select from a range of possibilities for the right answer (usually more than two).
Mumford-Honey categorisation	A categorisation of people into four types: activists, pragmatists, reflectors and theorists. Now discredited.
narrative texts	A text designed to relate a dramatic series of events.
nativism	The theory that the ability to acquire language is hard-wired into the human brain.
natural approach	A teaching approach which is based on a theory of how people acquire rather than learn a language.
natural order hypothesis	The theory that language systems are learned or acquired in a fixed and unalterable sequence.
needs analysis	Discovering learners' needs and wants.
norm referencing	Measuring test takers' performance against each other rather than a set of criteria for task achievement. Compare **criterion referencing**.
noticing	Actively comparing what you see and hear with what you produce and making yourself aware of language form and function.

notion **notional syllabus**	Language which expresses concepts such as lateness, height, temperature, frequency etc. A syllabus based on such items often in conjunction with **functions**.
objective test	A test which is mechanically marked without calling on the judgement of the marker.
open pair	A pair performing a task while the other learners watch.
oral	Referring to speaking.
overgeneralisation	A source of error stemming from the overgeneralisation of a learned rule. This is also referred to as ignorance of rule restriction. See **analogy**.
passive vocabulary	The vocabulary a learner can understand but not use. See also **active vocabulary**.
pedagogic grammar	A grammar designed for learners and for teachers to use.
performance	A term contrasted with **competence** which refers to the speaker's actual language production.
personalisation	Making the topic of tasks personally relevant to learners.
placement test	A test designed to group learners into appropriate study groups or classes.
polysynthetic languages	Those languages which have a very high morpheme to word ratio as they add both inflexional and meaningful morphemes together to make longer lexemes.
PPP	Presentation, Practice, Production.
practicality	A measure of how easy and practical a test is to administer and mark.
predictive validity	A measure of how well a test results will predict learners' actual ability to perform language tasks and communicate.
prescriptive grammar	Grammar which sets out what is considered right and wrong rather than describing what people say.
problematising	Leading learners to realise that there is something worthwhile to be learned by encouraging error.
procedural syllabus	A syllabus which focuses on tasks to be accomplished. See also **Task-based Learning and Teaching**.
procedure text	A text designed to explain how something is done.
process approach	An approach to teaching (especially of writing) which focuses on writing subskills rather than the end product.
product approach	An approach to teaching (especially of writing) which focuses on producing a text
productive skills	Writing and speaking. These are also referred to as motor skills.

proficiency test	A test aimed at assessing a learner's current abilities in English.
progress test	A test to check progress as part of **formative** assessment.
question types	Teachers are able to ask questions in a variety of ways: closed, open, yes-no and so on.
realia	Items brought into the classroom from the 'real world'.
receptive skills	Reading and listening.
recount texts	A text designed to relate a simple series of events.
reform movement	The general term for those involved in the reaction against grammar and literature based language teaching methodologies.
register	The field of interest in which language occurs.
reliability	A measure of how trustworthy a test is.
role play	A communicative activity in which the learners play out a role.
rubric	The instructions for a test item.
Sapir-Whorf hypothesis	The hypothesis that the language we speak determines the way we think. This is also called linguistic relativity.
scaffolding	The help and support given to learners working in the **Zone of Proximal Development**.
scanning	Reading through a text to locate specific information only.
schema (plural schemata)	A mental framework in which information is ordered and classified.
Silent Way, The	An approach to teaching in which the teacher remains as silent as possible. The main reason for this is to devolve as much autonomy and decision making as possible to the learners.
Situational Language Teaching	An oral approach to teaching popularised in Britain.
situational syllabus	A syllabus which covers the settings in which learners will have to deploy appropriate language.
skills-based syllabus	A syllabus which targets language abilities rather than the formal aspects of language.
skimming	Reading quickly to get the gist of a text.
SLA	Second Language Acquisition. See also **FLA**.
social constructiveness / construction theory	The theory that children learn to use appropriate and accurate language by participating in social interactions with adults and by analogy that adults can learn a second language is a similar fashion.
structural linguistics	The study of language from a structural point of view involving phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases, clauses, sentences and texts as a hierarchy.

structural syllabus	A 'traditional' syllabus, listing formal language items to be learned. The ordering of items usually depends on a judgement concerning their complexity rather than communicative utility.
style	Variation in formality.
subjective test	A test which is not mechanically marked and calls on the judgement of the marker.
Suggestopedia / Desuggestopedia	An approach (sometimes referred to as a method by its proponents) to language teaching based on the work of Georgi Lozanov. The name is a portmanteau word taken from 'suggestology' and 'pedagogy'.
summative testing	Testing at the end of a programme to see how well the targets have been achieved. Compare **formative testing**.
syllabus	A list of the topics to be covered on a course. This is usually drawn up by the institution in which teaching takes place sometimes with input from both internal sources (students, teachers, academic managers etc.) and external sources (sponsors, examination boards, ministries etc.).
synthetic languages	Languages which employ considerable inflexions for case, number, tense and gender to make lexemes carry these signals.
Task-based Learning and Teaching	A communicative methodology which focuses on the achievement of tasks rather than language analysis.
taxonomy of educational objectives	See Bloom's taxonomy.
teacher roles	The taking on of different roles and responsibilities to suit the nature of the phase of a lesson.
teacher talk	The language a teacher uses in class.
teacher-induced error	Errors caused by poor or insufficient explanation or information about language or by poorly designed and targeted materials.
tenor of discourse	In genre theory, this refers to the relationship between the speaker / writer and the hearer / reader.
tonal languages	Languages in which the tone placed on a lexeme alters its meaning.
top-down processing	Using knowledge of generic structure allied to knowledge of the world and the text's topic to aid understanding. Compare **bottom-up** processing.
topic sentence	The sentence in a paragraph, usually the first, which sets out the theme of the paragraph.
topic-based syllabus	A syllabus organised around topic rather than language structure.
Total Physical Response	A structural teaching methodology.

transaction	Language use to achieve ends rather than maintain social relationships. Compare **interaction**.
transfer	The extension of first-language patterns or items to the target language which may aid production and comprehension (facilitation) or hinder it (interference).
transformational-generative grammar	An approach to grammar analysis which attempts to find the rules for the production of all possible correct utterances.
TTT	Test-Teach-Test or Teacher Talking Time. The latter is sometimes contrasted with TTQ (Teacher Talk Quality).
turn-taking	One of the ways conversation is managed.
universal grammar	The theory that suggests that all human language is structured in the same way.
use / usage	The former refers to an utterance's communicative value, the latter to its significance or formal meaning.
U-shaped learning	Descriptive of the fact that both children learning their first languages and some learning a second will acquire a correct irregular form before applying the rule indiscriminately and producing the wrong form before realising the limitations and reverting to the correct form.
validity	A measure of how well a test actually tests what it says it does.
VARK	The discredited theory that people have a mixture of visual, audio, reading and kinaesthetic learning styles.
wait time	The amount of time a teacher waits after asking a question and before moving on.
washback	See **backwash**.
xenolinguistics	The field of study concerned with imagining what an alien language may be like.
ZPD	The Zone of Proximal Development. The theory is that learners are successful when operating in a zone where they can complete tasks only with small amounts of judicious help.