

Lect. univ. dr. Doina Ivanov

TEACHING ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE

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FOREWORD

This course is for anyone who is planning to teach English as a foreign language in Romania, or anywhere in the world, but especially for those who: are non-native speakers of English, have little formal training as English teachers and are teaching in the students' own country, not an English-speaking country. The chapters of the course cover every major aspect of teaching English, ranging from the essential theoretical principles to practical teaching ideas which are designed to be effective and acceptable in the working contexts of most future 'green' teachers.

The material included in this coursebook stems from the genuine desire of making the teaching of English as a foreign language thoroughly efficient, manageable and easy to follow for young teachers. It attempts to link teaching to the classroom needs by giving you, our trainees, opportunities both to think about foreign language teaching and, at the same time, to strengthen your knowledge about language teaching and learning. Knowing about and understanding your own teaching is likely to heighten your professional awareness of how to achieve the goals you may have set. It will also point to why you should choose certain teaching techniques and methods according to the given circumstances of real classrooms.

However, the material presented is intended to be a suggestion for further practice, an incentive for reflection and an invitation to informed teaching creativity. It is meant to encourage you to investigate your own beliefs and expectations about teaching and learning and about how you are going to put them into real practice.

The overall aims of this course are:

- to provide information on the most important issues of foreign language teaching;
- to help you develop your personalized teaching style by getting inspiration from the information presented and discussed;
- to develop in you a gradually increasing professional freedom that will enable you to progress from simple to more and more complex teaching;
- to foster in you an awareness of the many challenging aspects of teaching practice and to help you make the best of it.

There will be Assessment Questions (**AQs**) in most parts of this course: these are intended to help you activate the knowledge you already have about what is being discussed, check your understanding of what you have read and prepare you for learning more by applying what you have learned. This will give you an opportunity to see and think about the extent to which the material presented has influenced your understanding of each issue and more importantly, about how all this information could be of use to you in your practical teaching. Also, you will be asked to provide personal, subjective responses to issues which are germane to the topic under investigation. These will be signaled by the symbol .

Last but not least, you are often asked to work with the other trainees, which is an extremely useful resource for ideas, information and feedback.

There are also some pieces of advice or mere suggestions which have stemmed from the author's teaching experience. They will be marked as *Tip(s)* next to the symbol .

1. ENGLISH AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE

Motto:

“Nowadays we face a rapid development of science and technology and a continuous growth of cultural, economic and political relations between nations and humanity has difficulties in the assimilation of useful and necessary information. No way has yet been found to solve the problems in overcoming language barriers and of accelerated assimilation of scientific and technological achievements by either the traditional or modern methods of teaching. A new approach to the process of teaching and learning is, therefore, required if the world is to meet the needs of today and tomorrow”¹.

In the 1960's any notion of English as a world language was a shadowy, theoretical possibility. Today the English language has acquired the status of a *lingua franca* that is the language which has been internationally adopted for communication between people whose native languages are different from each other.

Why a language becomes a world language, although this is influenced by the number of speakers and users, has little to do with the number of people who speak it. It has to do with *who* those speakers are. Without a strong power-base, whether political, military, economic or cultural, no language can make progress as an international medium of communication. The need for a world language is particularly appreciated by the international academic and business communities, and it is in these contexts that the adoption of a single *lingua franca* is most in evidence. For example, a conversation over the Internet between physicist in Norway, France and India is practicable only if a common language is available. English has emerged as the medium of the world's knowledge, especially in such areas as science and technology. And access to knowledge is the business of education.

Nowadays in the whole world more and more young people and adults are involved in the study of English. The interest in the learning of English has increased so much that English is now considered by many researchers to be an international language. In many instances it is a language of wider communication both among individuals from different countries and between individuals from one country. In this way, English is an international language in both a global and a local sense.

¹ Georgi, Lozanov, 1971. *Suggestology and Outlines of Suggestopedya*, Philadelphia: Gordon & Breach.

1.1. Defining an international language

For the first time English was defined as an international language by Smith L. who stated that an “*international language is one which is used by people of different nations to communicate with one another*”².

As an international language, English is used both in a global sense for international communication between countries and in a local sense as a language of wider communication within multilingual societies.

As English is an international language in a global sense, one of its primary functions is to enable speakers to share with others their ideas and culture.

An international language is by definition a language that belongs to all those who speak it and not to the few who acquire and use it from childhood.

One may wonder who is learning English. English is a required subject in many countries and school children have some exposure to it. Those who want to attain a high level of proficiency in English, often for exam and professional purposes, seek other means of learning, often in private institutes. Access to higher education in many countries is dependent on knowledge of English. Although it may not be the medium of instruction, accessing key information in a great variety of fields is often dependent on having reading ability in English.

One of the primary reasons for the spread of English today is because it has such a variety of specific purposes. Knowledge of English is necessary for accessing many discourses at global level from international relations to popular culture to academia.

1.2. Considerations on teaching and learning a foreign language

Knowing another language means a chance to become educated, study abroad, get a job, emigrate, access technology or simply expand one’s cultural horizons. Nowadays, in a globalized world, language learning and, respectively, teaching has become vital to the everyday lives of millions of people.

Teacher-training programmes usually show trainees how to teach while too little attention is given to the need of thinking – before, during and after – about the process of teaching and implicitly, learning. Why is this kind of thinking so important for teachers? We will try to answer this question in our discussion throughout the material presented.

² Smith, L., 1976. *English as an International Auxiliary Language*, *RELC Journal*, 7/2: p. 38.

2. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES OF LANGUAGE TEACHING

Making decisions all the time is an essential part of the teaching profession. Sometimes, decisions are not crucial, e.g. how much homework should be assigned for the next class, but very often, the decisions are very important: what teaching method would be more effective for a particular group of learners or what means of evaluation should be chosen. There are no recipes and no universal answers to such questions. Teachers have to answer these questions for themselves and for particular classes. Therefore, the more informed and knowledgeable of existing choices teachers are, the more suitable decisions they are likely to make in their classrooms.

In this part we are going to examine the most popular three methods of foreign language teaching which are currently practiced today. We believe that, as you go through the material presented, you will get ideas of how to use or adapt them creatively to your particular teaching situation or style. As Larsen-Freeman points out: "*It is not so much the technique itself as the way a teacher works with it that makes the difference.*"³ She further concludes that teachers are limited only by their own imagination. So, read the material, process it and let your knowledge and creativity do a good job for you and for your prospective learners!

Teachers have always tried to find more effective ways of working, usually adopting some kind of approach or method. Approaches and methods in teaching English can be seen as a historical sequence of revolutions and evolutions. New ideas and information from linguistics, psychology, and pedagogy have meant that foreign language teaching has evolved since the nineteenth century. However new approaches and methods have never totally invalidated or replaced previous ones – neither method was totally wrong or totally effective. The trained and well-informed teachers take ideas from unfashionable methods because they seem appropriate for their own teaching-learning situation. This is known as eclecticism. Eclectic approaches, based on well-informed views of the nature of language, language learning, and language teaching, and a good analysis of the specific teaching-learning situation, are considered by many English teaching professionals to be the best. We present a historical sequence of the main methodological options used in teaching since the nineteenth century.

³ Larsen-Freeman, D., 1986. *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 2.

2.1. What teaching models have influenced current teaching practice?

The history of foreign language teaching witnessed the rise and fall of a series of language teaching approaches and methods, from which I have chosen to describe, compare and contrast the major examples. All of them share some common assumptions regarding the set of teaching procedures that define the best language teaching practice, the idea being that, if followed correctly, they will lead to better levels of language learning than alternative ways of learning and the assumption that language learning quality will improve if teachers use the best alternatives. Despite many different teaching approaches having appeared during the past six decades and their different characteristics (objectives, theories of learning and procedures), there is something they have in common – language learning can only be improved through bettering the teaching methodology. This idea has always been strengthened by academics or organizations that support or reject some methods or approaches, by publishing houses that provide coursebooks based on the latest or most efficient teaching approaches and methods and by teachers who are doing the same, always searching for the best.

“Foreign language teacher development . . . has a basic orientation to methods of teaching. Unfortunately, the latest bandwagon ‘methodologies’ come into prominence without much study or understanding, particularly those that appear easiest to immediately apply in the classroom or those that are supported by a particular ‘guru’. Although concern for method is certainly not a new issue, the current attraction to ‘method’ stems from the late 1950s, when foreign language teachers were falsely led to believe that there was a method to remedy the ‘language teaching and learning problems’.”⁴

We have to keep in mind that the evolution and the study of past and present teaching methods and approaches constitutes an important part of teacher development programs because teachers must have a clear view of how and why this evolution occurred; approaches and methods should be

⁴Lange quoted in Richards, J., and Rodgers. T., 2001. *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, Cambridge University Press, p. 15.

viewed as sources of good practice that can be adapted and implemented according to each teacher's and learner's needs rather than prescriptions of how to teach. Furthermore, it is the experience of using different teaching methods and approaches that can help teachers develop basic teaching skills to be improved or completed later on in their teaching career.

There have been some traditional language learning techniques that have been used for many years. The five teaching models which have had a strong influence on classroom practice are: Grammar-Translation, Audiolingualism, PPP, Task-Based Learning and Communicative Language Teaching.

2.1.1. The Grammar-Translation Method

The Grammar-Translation Method was the most used way of learning languages in the past and it is still practiced nowadays. This method arose out of the traditional teaching of classical Latin and Greek, when living languages began to be widely taught the nineteenth century. It was the dominant method until the end of the century and has continued to be used in one form or another until the present day. Languages were seen as systems of rules for the construction of correct sentences. Writing was considered to be superior form of a language.

In the eighteenth century, "modern" languages that made their way into the European schools were taught using the same grammar-based teaching methods developed for the study of Latin – books used in class were comprised of abstract grammar rules, bilingual vocabulary lists and translation exercises. The exercises consisted of sentences given for translation, which illustrated the grammatical system of the second language, but in no way encouraged the communicative aspect of the language. Students had to translate sentences which eventually led to the only oral practice they got – reading them aloud mainly because speaking the foreign language was not the goal.

The mid-nineteenth century thus brought us this first approach that became the conventional way of teaching foreign languages in schools, by using textbooks containing lessons organized around grammar points, where each was listed, its rules explained and sample sentences illustrating it were given.