

MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

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INTRODUCTION TO DIDACTICS

L3

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INTRODUCTION TO DIDACTICS

Objectives

By the end of the lesson, students should:

1. Be able to recognize the basic terminological distinctions in the field of didactics.
 2. Be able to recognize the terminological distinctions regarding English language teaching.
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Introduction

Over the years, applied linguists and educationists have developed, adapted, invented and adopted a bewildering variety of terms that describe the activities in which they engage and the beliefs which they hold. In this context, it would seem a worthwhile endeavor to try to limit the use of some of the more common terms when practitioners talk professionally about the concepts of language teaching. The three terms that the current lecture attempts to locate in the scheme of definitions, differences, and their relationship are approach, method, and technique. Although this paper does not aim to provide an exhaustive account of the existing definitions, relationship, and distinctions between the three levels or terms, it contributes to the discussion revolves around the three terms with a special focus on Edward M. Anthony (1963) model.

A Brief History of Language Teaching

Changes in language teaching methods throughout history have reflected recognition of changes in the kind of proficiency learners need, such as a move toward oral proficiency rather than reading comprehension as the goal of language study; they have also reflected changes in theories of the nature of language and of language learning. Kelly (1969) and Howatt (1984) have demonstrated that many current issues in language teaching are not particularly new. Today's controversies reflect contemporary responses to questions that have been asked often throughout the history of language teaching.

Throughout history, foreign language teaching and learning have always been an important practical concern. Today, English is the world's most studied foreign language, about five hundred years ago it was Latin, as it was the dominant language of education, commerce, religion, and government in the Western world. In the sixteenth century and as a result of political changes in Europe, national languages as French, Italian, and English gained much importance, and Latin became gradually displaced as a language of spoken and written communication. As the status of Latin diminished from that of a living language to an occasional subject in the school curriculum, the study of the classical Latin and the analysis of its grammar and rhetoric became the model for foreign language study from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. As modern languages began to enter the curriculum of European schools in the eighteenth century, they were taught using the same basic procedures that were used for teaching Latin. Textbooks consisted of statements of abstract grammar rules, lists of vocabulary, and sentences for translation. By the nineteenth century, this approach based on the study of Latin had become the standard way for studying foreign languages in schools. This approach to foreign language teaching became known as the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM).

I. Didactics

The word **didactics** comes from the Greek verb *didáskein* (διδασκειν), which means 'teaching, presenting, and clarifying'. The term *didaktiké téchne* (διδασκτικη τεχνη; *art of teaching*) refers to the praxis of teaching, and a **didactician**, διδασκαλος; διδασκαλος, used to teach young adults. It represents a central part of educational sciences with teaching as its main object. **Language didactics** or **language pedagogy** is a general term sometimes used to describe the teaching of a language as a **first language**, a **second language** or a **foreign language**.

II. Teaching, learning, acquisition

- The term **learning** is a psychological concept. The process by which changes occurring in behaviour, knowledge, skills, etc over a period of time, come about through practice, instruction or experience and the result of such a process.
- Learning goes far beyond learning from a teacher or learning through study or practice. It involves the learning of skills, the acquisition of knowledge, learning to learn, learning to think, modification of attitudes, the acquisition of interests, social values, social roles, and even changes in personality.
- **Teaching** refers to the activities intended to bring about learning.
- **Teaching does not equal to learning:**
Learning and teaching are totally different activities ($T \neq L$). If one is taking place, this is by no means to say that the other is happening too. Learning is connected to the learner himself as it requires attention and effort to get understanding. A teacher can exert much effort without achieving the outcome of learning, while much learning can happen without anything being done on the part of the teacher.

III. Language teaching

The activity of language teaching is meant to bring about the product of language learning. Language teaching is more generally interpreted than 'instructing a language class'. It includes the following elements:

- Formal instruction and methods of training
- Individualized instruction (teaching individuals)
- Self-study
- Computer assisted instruction
- The use of media (radio, television...)
- Supporting activities (preparation of teaching materials, teaching grammars (books), or dictionaries
- Training of teachers
- Making administrative provisions in the educational system.
- Informal methods of deschooling (out of class teaching in real contexts)

A. The subject matter of language teaching

Two essential elements constitute the core of language teaching: **language systems** and **language skills**. Specialists add other components, such as learning better ways of learning, exam techniques, working with people and learning about other people.

1. Language systems

Language systems are the various levels of analysis and description of language. These include:

- + Sounds (phonology)
- + Word meaning (lexis or vocabulary),
- + How words form phrases and sentences (grammar),
- + How to use words and structures in particular situation,
- + How the sentences relate to each other coherently in larger chunks such as conversation (discourse),

Language systems are various ways of looking at the same thing. A teacher has to decide on which system(s) to give learners information about. One lesson may be devoted to one system or may contain parts about combined systems (e.g.: grammar + pronunciation + lexis).

Activities:

- Pick up a short text from a newspaper or a recorded conversation (maximum 50 words). Think of possible lessons that you can develop out of this text.
- Attend a language class (any level) and try to find the systems that the teacher was focusing on during one lesson.

2. Language skills

Language skills

As well as working with the language systems (which we can think of as what we know, i.e. ‘up-in-the-head’ knowledge), we also need to pay attention to what we **do** with language. These are the language skills. Teachers normally think of there being four important macro language skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing. Listening and reading are called ‘receptive skills’ (the reader or listener receives information but does not produce it); speaking and writing, on the other hand, are the ‘productive skills’. Skills are commonly used interactively and in combination rather than in isolation, especially speaking and listening. It’s arguable that other things (e.g. ‘thinking’, ‘using memory’ and ‘mediating’) are also language skills.

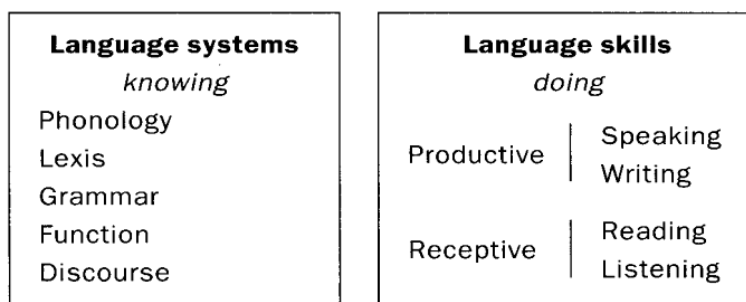


Figure 2.2 Language systems and skills

The main four skills are referred to as ‘macro’ because any one of them could be analysed down to smaller micro skills by defining more precisely what exactly is being done, how it is being done, the genre of material, etc.

Example

Macro skill Listening

- Some micro skills**
- Understanding the gist of what is heard, e.g. Who is talking? Where are they? What are they doing? What is their relationship? How do they feel?
 - Understanding precise information re. quantity, reference numbers, prices, etc. when listening to a business telephone call where a client wants to place an order.
 - Compensating for words and phrases not heard clearly in an informal pub conversation by hypothesising what they are, based on understanding of the content of the rest of a conversation and predictions of likely content.

B. Other areas that are part of language learning

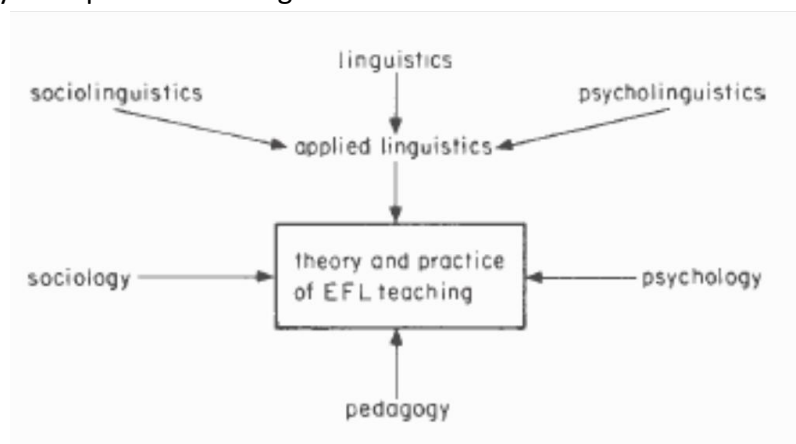
- Students may be learning new ways of learning: for example, specific study skills and techniques.
- They will also be learning about the other people in their class, and exploring ways of interacting and working with them.
- They may be learning about themselves and how they work, learn, get on with other people, cope with stress, etc.
- They may be learning a lot about the culture of the countries whose language they are studying.
- They may be learning how to achieve some specific goal, for example passing an exam, making a business presentation at an upcoming conference, etc.
- They may also be learning about almost anything else. The subject matter of ELT can encompass all topics and purposes that we use language to deal with.

C. Acronyms of language teaching

- **TEFL:** an acronym for Teaching English as a Foreign Language, used to describe the teaching of English in situations where it is a FOREIGN LANGUAGE.
- **TESL:** an acronym for Teaching English as a Second Language, used either to describe the teaching of English in situations where it is a SECOND LANGUAGE or to refer to any situation where English is taught to speakers of other languages.
- **TESOL:** an acronym for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages, used to describe the teaching of English in situations where it is either a SECOND LANGUAGE or a FOREIGN LANGUAGE. In British usage this is also referred to as **ELT**, i.e. *English Language Teaching*.

D. Contributing areas to language teaching

There are certain basic principles common to all good language teaching, principles derived from the interaction of aspects of those fields of study which contribute to the theory and practice of EFL teaching. The contributory areas of knowledge may be represented in Figure 3.



- **Linguistics**, the study of language as a system.

- **Sociology** establishes the place and role of language in the sociology of human behaviour, group interaction, the status of the teacher and the school in the local culture, the social role of education as a whole.
- **Psychology** investigates among other things how language is learned, facts about memory span, motivation, cognitive development.
- **Pedagogy** is concerned with the ways in which formal teaching and learning in institutional settings such as schools is planned and delivered (class management, questioning techniques, lesson planning and teaching strategies and the numerous daily tricks of the trade that separate the professional teacher from the amateur.

IV. First language, second language or foreign language.

A **first language** is (generally) a person's mother tongue or the language acquired first. In multilingual communities, however, where a child may gradually shift from the main use of one language to the main use of another (e.g. because of the influence of a school language), first language may refer to the language the child feels most comfortable using. Often this term is used synonymously with **native language**. First language is also known as **L1**.

Learning and acquisition

Several years ago it became customary to talk about language *acquisition* in preference to *learning*, especially with reference to a first language. The reason for this was that the process of language 'acquisition' in the child was viewed by some theorists as a biological process of growth and maturation rather than as one of social learning (through experience, environmental influence) or deliberate teaching. The theorists, advocating this viewpoint, did not wish to prejudge whether it was a *learning* process or not; hence the choice of the neutral term 'acquisition'. In our view, this terminological distinction is questionable. Psychologists are accustomed to using such terms as 'growth', 'development', and 'learning' in order to describe the interplay between genetic or biological factors and environmental or experiential influences. Thus, in studies of child development it is quite customary to talk about '*learning to walk*' or '*the development of walking*', realizing that the crux of the problem lies in defining the relationship between biophysical and neural growth and the role of social experience. This is in no way different from the problem that presents itself in '*learning to talk*', '*language development*' or '*language acquisition*'. Consequently, we regard the use of the term '*language acquisition*' as of no theoretical significance and treat it as a purely stylistic alternative to '*language learning*'. One weakness of the word 'acquisition' in combination with 'language' is that it is associated with the notion of permanent

possession. The language development of an individual, however, is subject to continuing modifications, and the notion of finality or permanency that might be evoked by the term 'acquisition' of language could be quite misleading.

From around 1975 the term 'language *acquisition*' has been given a special meaning and contrasted with language *learning* by the American applied linguist Krashen (1978, 1981). Krashen uses the term 'acquisition' to describe second language learning which is analogous to the way in which a child acquires his first language, that is 'naturally', without focus on linguistic form, and 'learning' as conscious language development particularly in formal school-like settings. Krashen's acquisition/learning distinction has become very popular in discussions on second language learning as a way of describing the intuitively known ways of language growth. A disadvantage of Krashen's terminology is that it runs counter to the terms used in psychology which, as we have noted, comprise Krashen's 'acquisition' and 'learning' as different ways of learning (more or less conscious). The distinction which Krashen has made is valuable, but the restriction it implies for the **use** of the term 'learning', namely as deliberate school-like learning, is a disadvantage. But we must be aware of the wider and the narrower use of the term 'learning' in current discussions on language 'learning' or 'acquisition'.⁶

To sum up our position on the concept of 'learning', we subsume under the concept of 'language learning' first or second language 'acquisition' or 'learning', the development of bilingualism, and the learning of linguistic variations within a language. Some learning is stimulated by teaching, but much of it may be independent of any teaching.