

BOOK REVIEW

Review of Richards & Rodgers' (2014)
Approaches & Methods in Language
Teaching (3rd ed.)

Apisak Pupipat

Thammasat University, Thailand

- Description of the book
 - Title: 'Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching' (3rd ed.)
 - Authors: Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers
 - Date of publication: 2014
 - Components: 4 main parts/22 chapters/410 pages, as well as a 12–page tabular appendix and two indices
 - Publisher: Cambridge University Press
 - ISBN: 978–1–107–67596–4 (paperback)

Jack C. Richards' and Theodore S. Rodgers' *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (3rd ed.) (henceforth, *AMLT*) is a wonderful treatise for graduate students, teachers, ESL/EFL practitioners and the general public. It is comprehensive, well organized, easy to read and digest (most of the time) and authoritative since it is written by two world renowned scholars in English language teaching (ELT).

I am familiar with the second edition (2001) more since I used to use it for a methodology class for MA in Teaching English as a Foreign Language students. The third edition came into existence two years ago and I am very happy with it because it has expanded (from a total of 270 pages to 410 pages) and updated to cover interesting approaches/methods in ELT, as the authors have rightly said:

‘Despite the advances that have been made in our understanding of language teaching and learning in the last few decades, the language teaching profession continues to explore new instructional designs and pedagogies. Language teaching today reflects the changed status of English as an international language, which has accelerated the demand for more effective approaches to language teaching. Innovations in technology, the growing trend to begin teaching English at primary level as well as the use of English as a medium of instruction in many university programs prompt an ongoing review of past and present practices as teachers and teacher educators search for effective activities and resources for their classrooms.’ (p. ix)

Taking a closer look at the new version, a lot of merits can be detected. To begin with, the new *AMLT* book is divided into four main parts (instead of three):

1. Major Trends in Twentieth-century Language Teaching,
2. Current Approaches and Methods,
3. Alternative Twentieth-century Approaches and Methods, and
4. The Teaching and Learning Environment.

These main parts are better sequenced and more salient now as it has Part 1 as the general background, Parts 2 and 3 as the core, discussing approaches and methods, and Part 4 as a nice finale. Part 1 contains four chapters, as in the second edition: (1) A brief history of early developments in language teaching, (2) The nature of approaches and methods in language teaching, (3) The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching, and (4) The Audio-lingual Method. Chapter 1 mainly talks about how ELT has developed, along with the Latin influence, The Grammar-Translation and Direct Methods. I still feel that the two methods here are important and deserve more attention, especially the Grammar-Translation, which is still the default way of teaching English in several countries, including Thailand. Chapter 2, an important section, explores the two key terms of the whole book ‘approach’ and ‘method’ (the first one being conceptual while the second being more concrete), based on Anthony’s (1963) three-tier system Approach, Method and Technique although Richards and Rodgers prefer Approach, Design and Procedure. In Approach, I am glad to see the additional detailed information of the seven theories of language (i.e. Cognitive Model, Structure Model, Functional Model, Interactional Model, Sociocultural Model, Genre Model and Lexical Model) and seven theories of learning (Behaviorism, Cognitive-code Learning, Creative-construction Hypothesis, Skill Learning, Interactional Theory, Constructivism, Sociocultural Learning Theory or Social Constructivism) and Individual factors. In Design, the authors describe objectives, the syllabus, learning and teaching activity types, learning roles, teacher roles and role of instructional materials. Not much is changed here from the second edition, and, considering the importance of these aspects, I would welcome more information on each. In Procedure, the authors explain the teaching steps of three different methods: Situational Language Teaching, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Text-based lessons.

They judiciously replace the Silent Way and Finicchiaro and Brumfit (1983), found in the previous edition, with three more interesting and current approaches. Another useful thing here is the Checklist for the adoption of an approach or method (pp. 39–40). The remaining two chapters in Part 1 ‘The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching’ and ‘The Audiolingual Method’ (ALM) are generally good writings with interesting information, especially for Chapter 4. In this chapter on ALM, which seems to be almost as important as CLT, judging from the same number of pages devoted to the topic, I am glad to read about its detailed history, its emphasis on Aural–Oral Approach, the University of Michigan’s *Language Learning* journal (sadly, not as prominent as it once was), the *Lado English Series* (1977), also used in Thai high schools, a surprising quote from Chiang Mai AUA (p. 61), a useful list of types of drills used (p. 67), and some convincing reasons why ALM is still around despite CLT. In Chapter 3, I am always interested in the debates of the value of a word list; therefore, talking about West’s famous pioneering work *A General Service List of English Words* (1953) in the Vocabulary Section is refreshing. Regarding grammar content, some mentions of the holy names of Harold Palmer and A.S. Hornby, along with their books, is also encouraging. Happily, the format of the main aspects found in these two chapters will be consistently used for all the approaches and methods in Parts 2 and 3.

Part 2 Current Approaches and Methods, to me, the most important section of the whole book, in this third edition, contains even more interesting details about nine approaches and methods:

1. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)
2. Content-based Instruction (CBI), and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)

3. Whole Language
4. Competency-based Language Teaching (CBLT), standards, and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR)
5. Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT)
6. Text-based Instruction
7. Lexical Approach
8. Multiple Intelligences (MI)
9. Cooperative Language Learning (CLL).

Virtually every chapter here is well written with a lot of useful information. However, I am much attracted to Chapters 5, 6, 8, 9 and 12, especially Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) since, as the authors correctly state, it ‘marks the beginning of a major paradigm shift within language teaching in the twentieth century, one whose ramifications continue to be felt today’ (p. 81). In the CLT chapter, there is a good historical account, talking about the external (i.e. English becoming the world language) and internal factors (i.e. the paradigm shift due to Chomsky and advocates like Candlin and Widdowson, whose ideas came, in turn, from Firth, Halliday, Hymes, Gumperz, Austin and Searle). The authors also mention its various interpretations (or *characteristics?*): Language use, anti-structural view, fluency/appropriateness vs. accuracy, learning by doing, learner centeredness, communicative competence/proficiency, information gap, individual learner as having unique interests and needs and the sad fact that CLT has no real ‘authority.’ I like this edition’s improvements on the Theory of Learning (pp. 90–91), an example of the Objectives taken from Richards’ own ESL/EFL textbook *Four Corners 2* (p. 91), Van Ek and Alexander’s (1980) the learner’s communicative competence (p. 93), English for Specific Purposes (p. 95, although not exhaustive), Types of Learning and Teaching Activities (pp. 95–97, short but very informative), citing Richards’ own extremely popular ESL/EFL textbook *Interchange* (4th edition) as an instance for text-based materials

(p. 100), and Technology-supported Materials (p. 101). I also enjoy reading the critiques of CLT (pp. 103–105), e.g. the problem of native-speakerism but, unfortunately, there is nothing about World Englishes or English as a Lingua Franca. I agree with the challenge of CLT's not keen on a teacher-fronted or teacher-led class, i.e. students think that teachers are not teaching! Also, by giving students opportunities to make choices, it may be a waste of time since some may not be ready for this freedom of thoughts yet (Saksit Saengboon, personal communication). My own reservations of this CLT chapter are two: the fact that the whole table comparing ALM and CLT by Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) is taken away in this edition, and whether the communicative lesson about movie making in the Appendix is really useful or not.

Chapter 6, Content-based Instruction (CBI) and Content, and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (with the CLIL sub-section being newly written for this edition), tries to differentiate the two approaches (with some success) but perhaps, to me, doing so would make no big difference since both stress content and language. From the book, interestingly, it seems that CLIL, but not CBI, allows discipline teachers to help out in the teaching. Depending on the individual's interpretation, both approaches can emphasize content or language. Another interesting feature of this chapter is that some sub-sections discuss the two approaches together while others do so separately. To me, it seems that perhaps there is no point in doing this since they both emphasize the content and language, as mentioned earlier. However, I find several things in this chapter that are more worthwhile: the link of the two approaches to ESL programs for immigrants to the USA (e.g. immersion education) (p. 117), the emphasis on learners' needs and interests (i.e. the content itself) (p. 118), positive attitudes (p. 117), intercultural awareness (p. 120), language as text or discourse (p. 120), integration of skills (p. 121),

corrective feedback (p. 121), teacher roles (p. 128), and contemporary models of CBI and CLIL (pp. 129–132).

In Chapter 8, there is a concise section on The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), talking about the history, categorizing learners into six groups according to their proficiency level (A1 to C2), Can-do statements (p. 166), and some negative comments which I agree, e.g. ‘the CEFR is not research based and has been developed largely from the intuitions of experts’ (p. 167) and so it would need to be adjusted according to the group of learners.

Chapter 9 is about Task-based Language (Learning and) Teaching (TBLT). It nicely talks about the fact that TBLT is an offshoot of CLT, some history and link to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (p. 175), the characteristics of TBLT (pp. 176–177, to me, most of them are the features of successful teaching in general, e.g. a focus on process rather than product, greater motivation, promotion of learning how to learn, promotion of risk taking), definitely the various interpretations of the word ‘task,’ e.g. ‘there is some kind of purpose or goal set for the task, so that learners know what they are expected to achieve....’ (p. 177), language as a means of achieving real-world goals (p. 179), Willis’ and Pica’s task types (p. 186), the role of instructional materials (pp. 188–190), and Willis’ (1996) wonderful sequence of pre-task, while-task, and post-task procedures (pp. 190–192). To me, this is one of the best chapters of this *AMLT* book.

Chapter 12 discusses Multiple Intelligences, which is based on Gardner (1993). It briefly describes his eight native intelligences (p. 231), Lazaar’s (1991) proposed ‘syllabus’ design (awaken the Intelligence, amplify the Intelligence, teach with/forthe Intelligence and transfer of the Intelligence) (p. 234), types of learning and teaching activities (from MI projects and Curriculum-based projects to Resource-

based projects and Student-choice projects all of which look very interesting!) (pp. 234–235), and Berman’s (2002) and Christison’s (1997) even more interesting (and entertaining) MI activities (e.g. mind maps, relaxation exercises, jazz chants, background music creating the natural world; creating codes, painting or collage, field trips, mime, singing, interest centers and self-esteem journals) (pp. 235–236). For sure, I am interested in many of these MI activities for their ‘edutaining’ values for my students and myself.

Part 3 (pp. 259–327), *Alternative Twentieth-century Approaches and Methods*, also wonderfully presents five more ways of teaching: Krashen’s *The Natural Approach*, Asher’s *Total Physical Response (TPR)*, Gattegno’s *The Silent Way*, Curran’s *Community Language Learning*, and Lozanov’s *Suggestopedia*. My favorite approaches/methods are TPR (talking about brain lateralization; to me, TPR is usable at various levels and in many types of classroom, including English camps), *The Silent Way* (describing the importance of learning through discovery or creation, and learning via physical objects), and *Suggestopedia* (the benefits of the authority (i.e. the teacher), infantilization, double-planedness, and a relaxed classroom through music). The authors also try to associate these approaches and methods to SLA theories, especially for *The Natural Approach*.

Part 4 (pp. 239–387), *The Teaching and Learning Environment*, the final section, consists of four chapters: *Learners, Approaches, and Methods*; *Teachers, Approaches, and Methods*, *Approaches, Methods, and the Curriculum*, and *Postscript*. I like Chapter 19, *Learners, Approaches, and Methods*, a lot. It mainly talks about four crucial topics in ELT/SLA: Learner autonomy (including a description of a successful class that promotes autonomous learning, p. 332; and, some other features listed by Reinders, 2009, p. 333, e.g. needs analysis, self-monitoring, learning-counseling, self-access centers and self-study),

the most important learner strategies, especially Cognitive strategies, Metacognitive strategies, Social strategies and Affective strategies (pp. 335–336), learning styles, e.g. visual learners, kinesthetic learners and group learners (pp. 337–338), and Impact of Technology (pp. 339–341, not much but enough). Although the two interim chapters on Teachers' roles and Approaches, Methods, and the Curriculum are interesting, I prefer the last chapter, #22 Postscript, more. Here, the authors nicely summarize everything, with a good coda 'Looking forward' (pp. 384–385), briefly discussing the factors that bring about the changes in approaches and methods in ELT. I am interested to learn more about the last two issues: Crossover educational trends (Cooperative Language Learning, Whole Language and Multiple Intelligences from general education) and Crossovers from other disciplines (e.g. psychology, communication science and human engineering).

In summary, this *AMLT* book is a wonderful textbook with many good points: a good balance between the old and the new, as well as the theory and the practice; consistent format for each chapter; well documented chapters with lots of examples, illustrations and tables; a good conclusion for each chapter that links the current topic to other parts of the book; ample exercises in Discussion Questions at the end of each chapter (and the book would do even better with the least or no grammar slips, e.g. on p. 41, #4 'Which approaches and methods have been popular in your country in the past?' and #6 'How important to do you think practice is in language learning?'); a succinct appendix that summarizes everything; and, excellent References and Further Reading, that are comprehensive and updated.

A few points for making the book even much better: More SLA in Chapter 2; more about World Englishes/English as a Lingua Franca and Intercultural Communication; and, more reference to research, including PhD theses.

My last words: This book makes a big contribution to general ELT. My BIG thanks go to the two authors. *Korpkhunmaak-maak, krup!* (in the Thai language, 'Thank you so much')