

1. The development of language teaching. Current trends in the teaching of English as a foreign language. The communicative approaches.

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1. Introduction

The study and teaching of foreign languages have undergone profound changes over the centuries, reflecting the evolution of linguistic theories, educational paradigms and social needs. In the modern world, foreign language learning, and particularly the teaching of English, is no longer confined to elite or academic settings, but is essential for global communication, intercultural dialogue and professional development.

This evolution has led to the refinement of multiple pedagogical models, each of which has responded to specific historical contexts, theories of learning and views on the nature of language. Today, the communicative approach and its offshoots are dominant in most educational systems and are embedded in official curricula as the main framework for the teaching of English as a foreign language.

From an educational point of view, the development of language teaching methodology is not just a theoretical journey but a practical tool for improving teaching practice. Understanding past and present approaches allows educators to design meaningful learning experiences, select appropriate strategies and adapt to diverse learners' needs. This topic is supported by key references such as *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching* (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011), *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* (Richards and Rodgers, 2014), and *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (Harmer, 2015). For the didactic integration of these methodologies, *Literature and Language Teaching* (Lazar, 1993) and the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020) provide essential pedagogical grounding.

2. Historical Overview of Language Teaching Methodologies

The teaching of foreign languages has evolved significantly over time, shaped by prevailing linguistic theories, educational philosophies and sociopolitical contexts. In the 19th century, the dominant approach was the Grammar-Translation Method, which focused primarily on the written form of the language. It emphasised translation exercises, rote memorisation of vocabulary and explicit grammar instruction. Although it aimed to develop learners' reading and writing skills, it largely neglected oral communication and failed to foster functional language use.

At the turn of the 20th century, dissatisfaction with the limitations of Grammar-Translation led to the emergence of the Direct Method. This approach aimed to mirror first language acquisition, placing strong emphasis on speaking and listening through inductive grammar teaching and exclusive use of the target language. Vocabulary was taught through demonstration and association, and grammatical rules were discovered by

learners rather than explained. However, its effectiveness was highly dependent on the teacher's fluency, and it proved challenging to apply in public education systems with large and heterogeneous groups.

Mid-century developments in psychology and linguistics gave rise to the Audiolingual Method, particularly in the United States. Based on behaviourist learning theories and structuralist linguistics, it promoted habit formation through drills and pattern practice. Accuracy and repetition were prioritised, and language was reduced to a set of discrete structures. Although it introduced a more systematic focus on oral skills, it was later criticised for its artificial use of language and lack of emphasis on meaning and context.

In response, the 1960s and 1970s witnessed the rise of cognitive and humanistic approaches. The influence of Chomsky's theory of an innate language acquisition device shifted focus to mental processes rather than external behaviour. Methods such as Suggestopedia, the Silent Way and Total Physical Response highlighted affective factors in learning and placed greater emphasis on the learner's active role, motivation and emotional wellbeing. These approaches encouraged experimentation and innovation in the classroom but often lacked scalability in standard education contexts.

The methodological debate during these decades revealed the need for more flexible, learner-centred and communicative approaches. This paved the way for the emergence of the Communicative Language Teaching movement, which would redefine the objectives and practices of language teaching and continues to influence modern pedagogy.

3. Current Trends in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language

Contemporary language teaching is characterised by eclecticism, personalisation and the integration of real-world communication. Rather than adhering rigidly to a single method, teachers draw on a range of strategies to meet learners' diverse needs, preferences and learning contexts. Key trends include Task-Based Language Learning (TBLT), Project-Based Learning (PBL), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and the increasing use of digital technologies.

TBLT focuses on meaningful interaction and the completion of real-world tasks as the central unit of instruction. Learners use the target language to solve problems, share information or create a product, promoting fluency and spontaneous use of English. PBL extends this principle to longer and collaborative assignments, such as creating a class magazine or recording a podcast, where students must negotiate meaning, plan, draft, revise and present. CLIL, widely adopted across Europe, integrates subject content and language learning. In the Spanish curriculum, it is strongly promoted as a way to foster multilingual competence and content mastery simultaneously. Learners, for example, might study history or science in English, requiring the teacher to adapt input, scaffold language and promote cognitive engagement. This aligns well with the plurilingual and pluricultural vision of the CEFR.

Technology has become indispensable in the modern classroom. From interactive platforms and learning apps to AI-supported feedback and digital storytelling, it enables more autonomous, personalised and multimodal learning. However, the pedagogical

design of these tools remains essential, as technology alone cannot replace communicative and reflective teaching.

In addition, the current emphasis on inclusion, emotional intelligence and global citizenship calls for approaches that value diversity, learner agency and critical thinking. As such, modern trends point towards a holistic, integrated and competence-based view of language education.

4. The Communicative Approaches

The Communicative Approach, also known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), emerged in the 1970s as a response to the limitations of earlier methods that prioritised form over meaning. It is grounded in sociolinguistic theories, especially those of Hymes (1972), who coined the term “communicative competence” to describe the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts.

CLT sees language primarily as a tool for communication, and instruction is structured around functional use rather than isolated grammar rules. Its principles include an emphasis on fluency over accuracy, learner-centred activities and the use of authentic materials. Classroom interaction, through role plays, interviews, debates or simulations, replaces mechanical drills. Grammar is not excluded, but it is approached inductively and in context, often as a means to support communication rather than as an end in itself.

There are two main versions of CLT. The “strong” version immerses learners in communication with minimal focus on form, while the “weak” version integrates structural awareness and form-focused activities to support communicative goals. Most current practices adopt the latter, combining the best of earlier methods with communicative principles, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as the “post-method era” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

CLT is also the basis for the CEFR descriptors, which inform teaching and assessment in European education. These descriptors prioritise what learners *can do* with the language in real-life situations, in all four skills. Activities such as exchanging personal information, expressing opinions or dealing with everyday problems are more relevant than translating or completing grammar drills.

In classroom practice, communicative approaches enable the design of interactive and cooperative activities. Pair and group work, information gap tasks, task cycles and role-based scenarios are frequently used to foster negotiation of meaning. Learners are encouraged to express themselves freely, tolerate ambiguity and repair communication breakdowns.

Moreover, communicative approaches promote intercultural awareness. By incorporating cultural content, such as traditions, behaviours or current social issues, teachers can help students interpret and respond to cultural differences in communication. This is particularly relevant in the Aragonese and national curricula, which emphasise intercultural and global competence as part of the key competences.

5. Conclusion

The evolution of language teaching methodologies, from grammar-based instruction to meaning-focused communication, has been shaped by changing views of language, learning and the learner. While early methods prioritised form and accuracy, modern approaches emphasise communication, inclusion and learner autonomy. The communicative approach, in its various forms, remains central to current educational practice, and is supported by European frameworks and national curricula alike.

In the classroom, this evolution translates into a diverse toolkit of strategies, where real-world tasks, cultural content and learner interaction are key. Teachers today must act not only as instructors but also as facilitators, designers and cultural mediators, adapting to learners' profiles and educational challenges.

The use of communicative methodologies and current trends responds to the goals set out in the Spanish Organic Law 3/2020, known as LOMLOE, and the Order ECD/1172/2022, comprising the Aragonese Curriculum for Secondary Education, which promote competency-based, inclusive and meaningful learning. These legal frameworks advocate the development of linguistic, intercultural, civic and digital competences, all of which are enhanced through communicative language teaching.

In conclusion, the historical development of language teaching methodologies provides essential insight for teachers. Understanding and applying current communicative trends allows educators to promote not only effective language acquisition, but also personal growth, critical thinking and intercultural understanding, core aims of 21st-century education.