

**Revisiting the Concepts ‘Approach’,
‘Design’ and ‘Procedure’ according to the
Richards and Rodgers (2001) framework**

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Abstract

The three concepts Approach, Design and Procedure as proposed in Rodger's Framework are considered particularly effective as a framework in second language teaching with the specific aim of developing communication as well as for better understanding methodology in the use of communicative language use.

This paper will identify and examine the three elements proposed by Richards and Rodger's Framework (hereafter referred to as R&R): 'Approach', 'Design' and 'Procedure', also viewed as "interrelated elements of organisation upon which language-teaching practices are founded" (Richards, 1985, p. 17, Richards and Rogers, 1982, p. 154, Long & Richards, 1987, p. 146). The correlation and interconnectedness that exists between these elements and the teaching of a Second Language (L2) will also be critically examined, with a specific example focussing on the teaching methodology of communicative language teaching. Furthermore, methods (of which come different goals, role of L1, focuses and selection of material) in addition to their use in L2 teaching will be looked at, and by drawing on various research, this essay will analyse the effectiveness and value of the above framework proposed by R&R in understanding L2 methodology. Finally, examples of communicative language use in the 'procedure' component will be provided as will the methodology of communicative language teaching based on the specific aim of communication, in connection with the role the framework plays.

To begin with, 'approach' encompasses both language learning and language, and the theories that inherently define them. This relationship between approach, design and procedure is one of clarity because of the provision of psycholinguistic and linguistic rationale relevant when choosing L2 teaching related techniques and tasks. Underlying approaches are principles that relate theoretically to methods, and in looking at theory, Richards's goal was to examine linguistic competence and fundamental characteristics of linguistic organisation (Richards, 1985).

As a definition, Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 19) state approach as "the level at which assumptions and beliefs about language and language learning are specified". Additionally, Richards (1985, p. 17) proposed an additional element to approach as "theories about the nature of language and the nature of language learning that operate as axiomatic constructs or reference points and provide a theoretical foundation for what language teachers ultimately do with learners in the classroom." Thus, in this sense, approach is how theories of language acquisition and teaching tie in with sources of principles of language teaching (Richards and Rodger, 2001), showing the importance that approach plays in the role of elucidating the need for teachers to incorporate beliefs into their teaching.

Before delving further into approach, it is important to make a distinction between the often overlapping terms of methodology, methods and approaches, to avoid confusion. It is within methodology in fact that a distinction should be made in that methods are often seen as teaching systems with fixed practices or techniques while approaches are more recognised as philosophies in the classroom applied in different ways (Nunan, 1991). Another reason cited behind the deliberate non-use of the term 'method' in R&R's framework, was their preference it seems "to use it as an umbrella term to refer to the broader relationship between theory and practice in language teaching" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 86). This is in fact seen as a shortcoming of the framework by some in the confusing use of terminology applied.

Richards (1985, p. 16) too in his own words similarly states R&R's preference to use the term method "for the specification and interrelation of theory and practice." Finally, on this topic, to add an enriched interpretation of the term 'method', Richards (1985, p. 32) summarises his use of it as referring to "a language-teaching philosophy that contains a standardised set of procedures or principles for teaching a language that are based upon a given set of theoretical premises about the nature of language and language learning", with essentially two routes that lead to the development of such methods, i.e. either syllabus-based or alternatively based on procedures and processes of learning and instruction. Rodgers (2001) too offers a slightly different take by distinguishing between methods and approaches in that approaches are more philosophies in language teaching which can be applied in various ways whilst methods are more teaching systems that are essentially fixed with techniques that are generally prescribed.

In looking at different language teaching methods and second language teaching practices, there are naturally a number to choose from, and in a similar vein to what Nunan proposed, these can be categorised into different styles. On this point, Cook (2001, p. 199) defines style as reflecting "the element of fashion and changeability in teaching" and something which is not used "as an academic term with a precise definition but as a loose overall label that we can use freely to talk about teaching." Ultimately though, it is the aim to develop communication which is pivotal to this argument and although numerous such styles exist including academic teaching, audio-lingual, mainstream EFT as well as others that are more than just language

orientated (Cook, 2001), the focus here is on the communicative style with the specific aim of developing interaction both in and out of the classroom.

According to Cook (2001), the communicative teaching style (CTS) is a method that gained considerable popularity in the 1970's and 80's and has since been incorporated in teaching practices to replace in a sense a previous focus on linguistic competence. This style can also be further categorised into three separate areas of i) social communicative, ii) information communicative and iii) task-based learning, each emphasising slightly different functions (Cook, 2001).

Actually, in spite of the fact much effort in language teaching has focussed on different approaches and methods in pursuit of the best way, there has been a "shift away from a focus on methods" as a result of the realisation that "there never was and probably never will be a method for all" (Nunan, 1991, p. 228). Nunan (ibid.) also sees approaches able to be categorised into three different traditions: i) psychological covering audio-lingualism and cognitive code learning, ii) humanistic that include community language learning, the silent way and suggestopedia and finally iii) second language ones that comprise of the natural approach and the total physical response.

This communicative teaching style advocates a number of principles and overshadowed Situational Language Teaching which encompassed methods such as Community Language Learning, Total Physical Response, Suggestopedia and the Silent Way. Principles incorporated in CTS include learners' objective to ultimately be able to communicate, with communication that is authentic and meaningful highly important in the goal of fluency, something that needs to incorporate different language skills (Rodgers, 2001). Rodgers (2001) believes in fact CTS is better seen as an approach more so than a method as a result of the prescription of practices to be used not generally employed, with examples of such approaches known in the language teaching field as the Natural Approach, Cooperative Language Learning, Content-Based Teaching and Task-Based Teaching, synoptically explained in the following chart in terms of the method and respective roles of such methods by both teacher and learner (Rodgers, 2001).

TEACHING METHODS AND TEACHER & LEARNER ROLES		
Method	Teacher Roles	Learner Roles
Situational Language Teaching	Context Setter Error Corrector	Imitator Memorizer
Audio-lingualism	Language Modeller Drill Leader	Pattern Practiser Accuracy Enthusiast
Communicative Language Teaching	Needs Analyst Task Designer	Improviser Negotiator
Total Physical Response	Commander Action Monitor	Order Taker Performer
Community Language Learning	Counsellor Paraphraser	Collaborator Whole Person
The Natural Approach	Actor Props User	Guesser Immerser
Suggestopedia	Auto-hypnotist Authority Figure	Relaxer True-Believer

In looking at the second level of the framework, i.e. ‘design’, Richards (1985, p. 17) states its characteristics as the “relationship of theories of language and learning to both the form and function of instructional materials and activities in instructional settings”. In other words, it is the connection of how learning and language come together in language teaching as instructional design features and how they are viewed. Richards (1985, p. 197) also gives another definition further adding to the scope of design, stating it “thus refers to the operationalization of information and theory into a form from which objectives can be formulated and learning experiences planned.” Whatever the case, design and components such as assessment of learner needs, isolation of micro-skills, diagnostic testing and formulation of objectives are all paramount prior to instructionally based activities commencing (Richards, 1985).

On a different note, depending on what theory design is built upon naturally determines the outcome of what linguistic matter is identified, highlighting the

importance of this second level. Richards (1985, p. 20 & 21) sees structurally based theory that is incorporated into design for instance as resulting in identifying “lexis and grammar”, whilst one “built on a functional theory of language” results in linguistic content thus being organised in a conceptual manner. However, another example shows designs being built on interactional theories using goals which are interactive as key principles in the choice of content. Ultimately though, it is within this second level of R&R’s framework that the objectives of a method are concerned with, as well as the method’s criteria, sequencing, and form the content that is used in a syllabus (Richards, 1985). In short, design encapsulates elements of objectives, the organisation of its content as well as the role of the teacher, students and materials.

As for the third level of the framework, ‘procedure’, it appears to be in a similar vein to technique, and according to Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 86), is “the actual moment-to-moment classroom activity” including “a specification of context of use and a description of precisely what is expected in terms of execution and outcome for each exercise type.” Hence, it essentially refers to techniques and teaching practices that correlate to both learning and teaching, the specific tasks and exercises undertaken in class and resources used in order to facilitate such tasks, or in other words the results of designs and approaches incorporated in the context of actual teaching. Procedural elements thus refer to specific tasks and exercises according to particular methods (Richards, 1985), e.g. tasks that are interactive, use drills, contextualised so that certain dialogues are included and so forth. Therefore, issues that relate to certain teaching and learning techniques, in addition to resources used in order to implement them, fall under the umbrella of this third level in the framework.

From a pedagogical point of view and what procedure needs to focus on in terms of activities comes a number of interrelated factors that one needs to consider in the development of a syllabus or simply prior to the utilisation of such tasks. Examples are the validity of the content, the task’s purposefulness, the objective being either to teach or test, as well as its authenticity (Richards, 1985). Furthermore, from the pedagogical perspective of design, approach and procedure coming together as a framework, this model can be used as a tool for understanding L2 teaching methodology in its ability to compare and evaluate different teaching methods in a broad sense.

In looking at a specific methodology, the example to be examined is communicative language teaching (CLT). With the surge in popularity in the use of teaching which is more communicative and well as a more integrated approach, CLT has characteristics of placing emphasis on contextualised meaning. R&R's framework is particularly helpful in the sense of providing clarity to, for example, this methodology in categorising its theories, instructional features and teaching practices.

In examining approach for instance, CLT aims to, as a key goal, develop ability in communicative competence and distinguish meaning from language through authentic materials, i.e. using the knowledge of the target language appropriately to communicate from a sociolinguistic perspective as opposed to the development of perfect pronunciation or grammar. Richards (2006, p. 3) sees communicative competences as understanding “how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions”, understanding how to adjust language depending on the setting (sociolinguistics), “knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts” such as interviews and conversations for instance, as well as having the ability to continue communication in spite of one's limitations in the language through the use of different strategies.

From the perspective of the ‘design’ aspect of the framework where both general and specific objectives are also key elements, the use of all macro-skills are incorporated and encouraged, regardless of level, and translation into L1 not discouraged from the belief learners may in fact benefit from doing so. With teachers' roles to facilitate and guide, it is important to accentuate the connection which exists between language and the contexts it can be used, and in general terms, any instruction or guidance that ultimately results in increased competence in communication seems something which is accepted in this methodology. Activities may take the shape of role plays in either groups or pairs that encourages practice of certain functions or indeed grammar or pronunciation introduced by the teacher, or more specifically gap fills, games, sharing opinions and discussions, interviews and so on. The role here of the instructional materials and of course the correct selection of such materials is to provide ideas and a context in which activities based on communication can be performed.

As CLT aims to develop fluency as opposed to concentrating on accuracy, (i.e.

“meaningful interaction” and being able to maintain a “comprehensible and ongoing communication despite limitations” (Richards, 2006, p. 14)), activities to facilitate this include negotiating meaning and naturally focus on the most natural use of language in settings that are not always predictable, ideally adhering to the inextricable connection between language and an authentic context.

As for procedure, CLT does not employ one single practice or technique due predominately to the fact that it “draws upon a number of different educational paradigms and traditions” and instead, the principles used are more an effort to combine different methods that best suit and relate to the age, context, goals and level of the students in question (Richards, 2006, p. 22). To provide a number of specific interactive tasks undertaken in class to facilitate this methodology are, as mentioned, authentic contextual ones in the form of a role-play for instance with examples again given by Richards (2006) as making lists, sorting, problem solving, comparing and discussions on issues which may be either ethical or morally based.

To return to the framework itself, highlighting some criticism paints a more rounded view of some deficiencies apparent in explanations purported. Some confusion exists in the slight overlap between approach and design with respect to assumptions of pedagogical theory. Furthermore, Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 87) believes the “framework suffers from an element of artificiality in its conception and an element of subjectivity in its operation.” Moreover, another example is that of Pennycook (as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 87) who stated that the attempts of R&R in demonstrating “conceptual unity for methods do not seem justifiable.” Ultimately, it is a matter of individual interpretation of statements put forth, allowing for some material to be misinterpreted.

To conclude, this essay has examined three interrelated elements of R&R’s framework showing how they come together to comprise an interdependent system, and their effectiveness as a tool for understanding the methodology in second language teaching, by providing examples of communicative language use and teaching styles that are fundamentally based on this aim of communication, in particular CLT. It has been shown that their framework also can be used to critically evaluate and compare different methods of teaching and the function teachers play,

where differences can be seen at varying or a similar numbers of levels. Moreover, by conceptualising this framework, it has been shown how R&R have been able to compartmentalise different teaching proposals, also allowing a more objective differentiation of claims put forward by others (Richards, 1985). Ultimately, the framework encompasses both language learning and theories behind this, leading effectively to their goal of examining linguistic competence and characteristics fundamental to linguistic organisation and allowing teachers to duly consider the interaction between learners and teachers and the responsibility in the choice of suitable resources and styles.

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