Teaching ESL/EFL Listening and Speaking

I. S. P. Nation
Jonathan Newton

ESL & Applied Linguistics Professional Series

Teaching ESL/EFL Listening and Speaking

Using a framework based on principles of teaching and learning, this guide for teachers and teacher trainees provides a wealth of suggestions for helping learners at all levels of proficiency develop their listening and speaking skills and fluency. By following these suggestions, which are organized around four strands—meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development—teachers will be able to design and present a balanced programme for their students.

Teaching ESL/EFL Listening and Speaking, and its companion text, *Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing*, are similar in format and the kinds of topics covered, but do not need to be used together. Drawing on research and theory in applied linguistics, their focus is strongly hands-on, featuring

- easily applied principles,
- a large number of useful teaching techniques, and
- guidelines for testing and monitoring.

All Certificate, Diploma, Masters and Doctoral courses for teachers of English as a second or foreign language include a teaching methods component. The texts are designed for and have been field tested in such programs.

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Preface

This book is intended for teachers of English as a second or foreign language. It can be used both for experienced teachers and for teachers in training. In its earlier forms this book has been used on graduate diploma and Masters level courses, and with teachers in training.

The book has two major features. First, it has a strong practical emphasis—around one hundred teaching techniques are described in the book. Second, it tries to provide a balanced programme for developing the skills of listening and speaking. It does this by using a framework called the four strands. These are called strands because they run through the whole course. They are the strands of meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. In a well-balanced language programme covering the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, each of the four strands should have roughly equal amounts of time. The organisation of the book largely reflects these four strands.

We have attempted to write the book using clear and simple language. Wherever possible, technical terms have been avoided. However, in a few cases, with terms such as *negotiation, pushed output*, and *extensive reading*, technical terms have been used and explained in the text. This book thus does not require any previous knowledge of second language acquisition theory or language teaching methodology.

Chapter 1 gives an overview of the four strands. This overview is also very relevant for the companion book to this one, called *Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing*. Chapters 2 and 3 deal largely with listening (a form of meaning-focused input). Chapters 4, 5 and 8 deal with

language-focused learning, paying particular attention to dictation and its related activities, and to pronunciation. Chapters 6 and 7 focus on speaking (meaning-focused output). These chapters look at how speaking activities can be designed to encourage language learning. Chapter 9 deals with fluency development, which is the fourth of the strands. Where English is taught as a foreign language, fluency development is often neglected. Fluency development is important at all levels of proficiency, and even beginners need to become fluent with the few items of language that they know. Chapter 10 deals with monitoring and testing.

As a result of working through this book, teachers should be able to design a well-balanced listening and speaking course which provides a good range of opportunities for learning. The teacher's most important job is to plan so that the learners are learning useful things, so that the best conditions for learning occur, and so that they are getting a balance of learning opportunities. This book should help teachers do this.

Wherever possible, the ideas in this book are research based. This is reflected in the principles which are described at the end of Chapter 1 and which are referred to throughout the book. The idea which lies behind these principles is that it is not a wise idea to follow closely a particular method of language teaching, such as communicative language teaching or the direct method. It is much more sensible to draw, where possible, on research-based principles which can be adapted or discarded as new research evidence becomes available.

There are many people who could be thanked for their help in the production of this book. Eli Hinkel gave us a great deal of very supportive encouragement to get us to offer the book for publication. Mary Hillemeier and Naomi Silverman of Taylor & Francis were similarly enthusiastic and took away a lot of the burden of publication. The reviewers of the book before it was published provided many helpful and frank comments which led us to see the book through others' eyes. We are very grateful for this.

Both this book and its companion volume, *Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing*, were largely written and used in our own teacher training courses before they were offered for publication. There was thus a lot of input from the teachers who were studying on these courses.

We would feel that the book's purpose has been achieved, if as a result of reading it, teachers learn some new techniques and activities, understand why these activities are used, and see how they fit into the larger programme.

Teaching English and training teachers of English are challenging but very rewarding professions. We have both been involved in them for a very

long time and they have given us a great deal of enjoyment. We hope that this enjoyment is apparent in the book and that it will help readers gain similar enjoyment.

Acknowledgements

Most of Chapter 1 is from an article entitled *The four strands* in the journal *Innovation in Language Teaching and Learning* (2007) 1: 1–12. Parts of Chapter 4 are from an article, *Dictation, dicto-comp and related techniques*, in the journal *English Teaching Forum* (1991) 29, 4: 12–14.

CHAPTER 1

Parts and Goals of a Listening and Speaking Course

This book uses research and theory on second language acquisition in classrooms as the basis for planning a listening and speaking programme for learners of English as a second or foreign language. As we shall see, the principles underlying the listening and speaking parts of a course are not essentially different from those underlying the reading and writing parts.

The Four Strands

The basic argument of the book is that a well-balanced language course should consist of four roughly equal strands:

1. Learning through meaning-focused input; that is, learning through listening and reading where the learner's attention is on the ideas and messages conveyed by the language.
2. Learning through meaning-focused output; that is, learning through speaking and writing where the learner's attention is on conveying ideas and messages to another person.
3. Learning through deliberate attention to language items and language features; that is, learning through direct vocabulary study, through grammar exercises and explanation, through attention to the sounds and spelling of the language, through attention to discourse features, and through the deliberate learning and practice of language learning and language use strategies.
4. Developing fluent use of known language items and features over the

four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing; that is, becoming fluent with what is already known.

These four strands are called meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. A well-planned language course has an appropriate balance of these four strands. It is through these four strands that learners achieve the learning goals of a language course, namely fluent control of the sounds, spelling, vocabulary, grammar and discourse features of the language, so that they can be used to communicate effectively. The opportunities for learning language are called strands because they can be seen as long continuous sets of learning conditions that run through the whole language course. Every activity in a language course fits into one of these strands.

This chapter does not limit itself to listening and speaking, but because it aims at describing what a well-balanced course is like, it also includes the skills of reading and writing. There is a companion text, *Teaching ESL/EFL Reading and Writing*, to this text on listening and speaking.

There is a tendency for language courses not to balance the four strands and indeed to give almost no attention to some of them. Courses which have a very strong communicative focus often actively discourage formal language-focused learning. There is no justification for this as second language acquisition research shows that appropriately focused attention to language items can make a very positive contribution to learning (Doughty, 2003; Doughty and Williams, 1998; Ellis, 2005 and 2006). At the other extreme, there are courses that seem to do little else but focus on formal features of the language with little or no opportunity to use what has been learned to receive and produce real messages. Perhaps even more commonly, there are courses that provide opportunities to receive and produce messages, that give useful attention to language features, but that do not provide opportunities for the learners to become truly fluent in using what they know.

A common-sense justification of the four strands is the time-on-task principle. How can you learn to do something if you don't do that during learning? How can you learn to read if you don't do reading? How can you learn to write without writing? The time-on-task principle simply says that the more time you spend doing something, the better you are likely to be at doing it. This is a very robust principle and there is no shortage of evidence, for example, that those who read a lot are better readers (Cunningham and Stanovich, 1991) and that those who write a lot usually become better writers. However, it is a simplistic principle and it can be rightfully criticised for ignoring the quality of the activity in favour of the quantity of the activity, and for not taking account of the ways in which

language learning differs from other kinds of learning. Nevertheless, as one of a set of principles which do take account of these factors, the time-on-task principle is an important and essential one. Another idea underlying a common-sense approach is that there is something about each of the language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing that makes it different from the others. It is thus necessary to give attention to each skill to make sure that these unique features are learned (DeKeyser, 2007). It is also not difficult to argue that each of these four skills can be broken down even further, for example, that speaking monologue in a formal situation has features that differ from those involved in friendly conversation, and so on (Biber, 1989). It is also possible to distinguish accuracy from fluency and thus see the necessity for providing fluency practice for each of the skills. There are thus common-sense justifications for including the four strands in a language course.

The evidence for the strands draws on a large and growing body of research into the roles of input, output, and form-focused instruction on second language learning, and on the development of speaking and reading fluency. In this chapter we will look at each of the four strands, the research evidence for them, their justification, and how they can be put into practice. The chapter concludes with a set of pedagogical principles based on the strands that can be used to guide the teaching of a language course.

Meaning-focused Input: Learning through Listening and Reading

The meaning-focused input strand involves learning through listening and reading—using language receptively. It is called "meaning-focused" because in all the work done in this strand, the learners' main focus and interest should be on understanding, and gaining knowledge or enjoyment or both from what they listen to and read. Typical activities in this strand include extensive reading, shared reading, listening to stories, watching TV or films, and being a listener in a conversation (see Hinkel, 2006 for a survey of the four skills).

This strand only exists if certain conditions are present:

1. Most of what the learners are listening to or reading is already familiar to them.
2. The learners are interested in the input and want to understand it.
3. Only a small proportion of the language features are unknown to the learners. In terms of vocabulary, 95 percent to 98 percent of the running words should be within the learners' previous knowledge, and so only five or preferably only one or two words per hundred should be unknown to them (Hu and Nation, 2000).

4. The learners can gain some knowledge of the unknown language items through context clues and background knowledge.
5. There are large quantities of input.

If these conditions are not present, then the meaning-focused input strand does not exist in that course. Learning from meaning-focused input is fragile because there are usually only small gains from each meeting with a word, and because learning is dependent on the quality of reading and listening skills, and is affected by background knowledge. Because of this, large quantities of input are needed for this strand to work well. An extensive reading programme is one way of providing this quantity.

Although many researchers criticise Krashen's (1985) input theory, none would disagree with the idea that meaningful comprehensible input is an important source of language learning. Dupuy (1999) investigated "narrow listening", an approach based on Krashen's ideas. This involved learners in listening as many times as they wish to a range of 1–2-minute aural texts on a range of familiar and interesting topics of their choice. The learners in the study reported improvements in their listening comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary, as well as increased confidence in French (the target language). Among the best-controlled studies of second language extensive reading is Waring and Takaki's (2003) study of vocabulary learning from a graded reader. This study showed that small amounts of vocabulary learning of various strengths occurred incidentally as a result of meaning-focused reading. Elley and Mangubhai's (1981) classic study of the book flood (a programme that encouraged wide reading for pleasure) showed a range of language learning benefits compared with a programme that was largely dominated by language-focused learning (or perhaps more accurately, language-focused teaching).

Compared with well-planned deliberate learning, incidental learning through input is fragile and is dependent on large quantities of input to gain sufficient repetition. Nation and Wang (1999) calculated that second language learners needed to read at least one graded reader every two weeks in order to get enough repetitions to establish substantial vocabulary growth through incidental learning. The gains from meaning-focused input, however, become substantial gains if there are large quantities of input.

Meaning-focused Output: Learning through Speaking and Writing

The meaning-focused output strand involves learning through speaking and writing—using language productively. Typical activities in this strand include talking in conversations, giving a speech or lecture, writing a letter,

writing a note to someone, keeping a diary, telling a story, and telling someone how to do something.

The same kinds of conditions apply to meaning-focused output as apply to meaning-focused input:

1. The learners write and talk about things that are largely familiar to them.
2. The learners' main goal is to convey their message to someone else.
3. Only a small proportion of the language they need to use is not familiar to them.
4. The learners can use communication strategies, dictionaries, or previous input to make up for gaps in their productive knowledge.
5. There are plenty of opportunities to produce.

Many spoken activities will include a mixture of meaning-focused input and meaning-focused output. One person's output can be another person's input.

Swain's (1985) output hypothesis has been influential in clarifying the role of speaking and writing in second language learning. As its name suggests, the output hypothesis was initially formulated as a reaction to Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis and the inadequacy of the input hypothesis in explaining the effects of immersion education. "Put most simply, the output hypothesis claims that the act of producing language (speaking and writing) constitutes, under certain circumstances, part of the process of second language learning" (Swain, 2005: 471). The opportunities that output provides for learning, however, are not exactly the same as those provided by input. Swain (1995) suggests three functions for output: (1) the noticing/triggering function, (2) the hypothesis testing function, and (3) the metalinguistic (reflective) function.

The noticing/triggering function occurs when learners are attempting to produce the second language and they consciously notice gaps in their knowledge. That is, they do not know how to say what they want to say. Izumi's (2002) research indicates that the effect on acquisition of noticing a gap through output was significantly greater than the effect of noticing through input. This effect can be explained in two ways. First, productive learning involves having to search for and produce a word form, whereas receptive learning involves having to find a meaning for a word form. Productive learning typically results in more and stronger knowledge than receptive learning (Griffin and Harley, 1996). Second, generative use involves meeting or using previously met language items in ways that they have not been used or met before and produces deeper learning than the simple retrieval of previously met items (Joe, 1998). Izumi (2002) suggests that the grammatical encoding that is required by output forces learners to

integrate the new items into a more cohesive structure. Decoding items from input does not require this same kind of integration. That is, output sets up learning conditions that are qualitatively different from those of input. This is not to say that input is inferior, simply that it is different and thus an important part of a balanced set of opportunities for learning. The full effect of the noticing/triggering function is not complete until learners have had the chance to make up for the lack that they have noticed. This can occur in several ways. First, having noticed a gap during output, the learners then notice items in input that they did not notice before. If learners notice that there is something they do not know when writing, they later "read like a writer" giving attention to how others say what they wanted to say. This is often referred to as moving from semantic to syntactic processing. This is similar to an amateur guitar player not just enjoying a performance by a top-class guitarist, but also analysing the techniques and chord voicings he or she uses in the hope of copying these later. Second, having noticed a gap during output, learners may successfully fill that gap through a lucky guess, trial and error, the use of analogy, first language transfer, or problem solving. Webb (2002) found that learners were able to demonstrate aspects of vocabulary knowledge of previously unknown words even though they had not had the opportunity to learn those aspects of knowledge, but which they were able to work out through analogy and first language parallels. Third, having noticed a gap during output, learners may deliberately seek to find the item by reference to outside sources like teachers, peers, or dictionaries.

Swain's second function of output is the hypothesis-testing function. This involves the learner trying out something and then confirming or modifying it on the basis of perceived success and feedback. This hypothesis-testing function is particularly important in interaction when learners negotiate with each other or a teacher to clarify meaning. The feedback provided in negotiation can improve not only the comprehensibility of input, but can also be a way for learners to improve their output (Mackey, 2007). Similarly, a large body of research shows that feedback from the teacher during communicative classroom interaction has significant effects on learning (Leeman, 2007). However, there are many ways of giving feedback and not all are equally effective, a point we discuss in a later chapter. Feedback need not be immediate, as in the case of feedback on writing.

The third function of output is the metalinguistic (reflective) function. This involves largely spoken output being used to solve language problems in collaboration with others. Common classroom applications of this idea include the use of activities like the strip story (Gibson, 1975) and dictogloss (Wajnryb, 1988, 1989) where learners work together to construct or

reconstruct a text. Similarly, communication tasks called explicit structure-based tasks involve learners in solving grammar problems through meaning-focused output with grammar structures being the topic of communication (Fotos, 2002). All these activities involve a lot of talk about language and this talk can contribute to language learning (Swain and Lapkin, 1998; Swain, 2000). The requirements of such activities are a deliberate reflective focus on language, typically within the context of language in use. Although this is made more likely by interaction, it is not limited to interaction. Other activities encouraging metalinguistic reflection include whiteboard or group composition where learners cooperate to produce one piece of written work and "Ask and Answer" (Simcock, 1993) where learners retell a text in an interview format. These activities combine meaning-focused output and language-focused learning because output becomes the means for deliberately focusing on language features.

It is possible to add a number of additional functions of output. A fourth function involves strengthening knowledge of language items through the way they are used. The most effective use is called "generative use" (Joe, 1998) where the learners use the language items in ways that they have not met or used before. The more generatively something is used, the better it is retained. Additional functions involve developing discourse skills such as turn-taking and skills for dealing with communication problems, developing a personal voice or manner of speaking (Skehan, 1998). These are skills that can only be acquired through active participation in meaning-focused speaking.

Language-focused Learning

Language-focused learning has many names—focus on form, form-focused instruction, deliberate study and deliberate teaching, learning as opposed to acquisition, intentional learning, and so on. It involves the deliberate learning of language features such as pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse. The term language-focused learning is preferred because terms like focus on form and form-focused instruction are misleading in that they can involve a deliberate focus on meaning as well as form, and need not involve instruction but can be the focus of individual autonomous learning. The ultimate aim of language-focused learning is to deal with messages, but its short-term aim is to learn language items. Typical activities in this strand are pronunciation practice, using substitution tables and drills, learning vocabulary from word cards, intensive reading, translation, memorising dialogues, and getting feedback about writing. The deliberate learning of strategies such as guessing from context or dictionary use are also included in this strand. Most of these

language-focused learning activities can have a positive effect on learning and language use, but it is important that they are only a small part of the course and do not become the whole course. In total, the language-focused learning strand should not make up more than one-quarter of the time spent on the whole course.

Just as there are conditions for meaning-focused input and output, there are conditions for language-focused learning:

1. The learners give deliberate attention to language features.
2. The learners should process the language features in deep and thoughtful ways.
3. There should be opportunities to give spaced, repeated attention to the same features.
4. The features which are focused on should be simple and not dependent on developmental knowledge that the learners do not have.
5. Features which are studied in the language-focused learning strand should also occur often in the other three strands of the course.

Language-focused learning can have any of these effects:

- it can add directly to implicit knowledge
- it can raise consciousness to help later learning
- it can focus on systematic aspects of the language
- it can be used to develop strategies.

Some activities in the language-focused learning strand, such as dictation, go in and out of fashion, but there is plenty of evidence, certainly in vocabulary learning, that deliberate learning can make a very useful contribution to a learner's language proficiency.

There has long been substantial evidence that deliberately learning vocabulary can result in large amounts of well-retained usable knowledge (Nation, 2001: 296–316). Evidence also shows that very large amounts of learning can occur in limited amounts of learning time, particularly if learning sessions are increasingly spaced. There is evidence that deliberate learning is effective for the learning of multi-word units (Boers, Eyckmans, Kappel, Stengers, and Demecheleer, 2006). Williams (2005) provides a very clear and useful analysis of what might be required for effective deliberate learning of grammatical features (focus on form). There is plenty of evidence that such a focus has positive effects for language learning, but there is debate over whether this has to be within the context of an overall focus on meaning and communication or whether it can be fully decontextualised (Ellis, 2006; Williams, 2005).

Becoming Fluent in Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing

The fluency development strand should involve all the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. In this strand, the learners are helped to make the best use of what they already know. Like meaning-focused input and output, the fluency development strand is also meaning-focused. That is, the learners' aim is to receive and convey messages. Typical activities include speed reading, skimming and scanning, repeated reading, 4/3/2, repeated retelling, ten-minute writing, and listening to easy stories.

The fluency strand only exists if certain conditions are present.

1. All of what the learners are listening to, reading, speaking or writing is largely familiar to them. That is, there are no unfamiliar language features, or largely unfamiliar content or discourse features.
2. The learners' focus is on receiving or conveying meaning.
3. There is some pressure or encouragement to perform at a faster than usual speed.
4. There is a large amount of input or output.

If the activity involves unknown vocabulary, it is not a fluency activity. If the focus is on language features, it is not a fluency activity. If there is no push to go faster or more smoothly, it is not a fluency activity. The fluency strand should make up about one-quarter of the course time. It is time out from learning new items and is a time for getting good at using what is already known.

Studies of fluency development in first language readers have found that fluency practice increases fluency and that assisted fluency activities seem to work better than unassisted activities (Kuhn and Stahl, 2003). Studies of second language readers have also found an increase in fluency as a result of timed practice (Chung and Nation, 2006), and have found transfer between the first and second languages when language difficulty is controlled for (Bismoko and Nation, 1974; Cramer, 1975; West, 1941). Studies of the 4/3/2 technique, where the same talk is repeated to different listeners in a decreasing time frame (four minutes, then three minutes, then two), have shown increases in fluency during the task, but surprisingly also increases in grammatical accuracy and grammatical complexity (Arevart and Nation, 1991; Nation, 1989a). Schmidt (1992) describes a range of theories to explain fluency development. What is common to many of these is that fluency development involves more formulaic use of larger language chunks or sequences (Wood, 2006). Fluency, accuracy and complexity are most likely interdependent.

There are two major types of second language fluency activities, those that involve repetitive reception or production of the same material as in

4/3/2 and repeated reading, and those that do not as in easy extensive reading or listening. For first language learners, Kuhn and Stahl (2003) found no advantage for one type of fluency practice over the other.

In the early stages of language learning especially, there is value in becoming fluent with a repertoire of useful sentences and phrases such as those listed in Crabbe and Nation's (1991) survival vocabulary. This fits with Palmer's (1925) fundamental guiding principle for the student of conversation—*Memorise perfectly the largest number of common and useful word groups!* Palmer explains that "perfectly" means to a high level of fluency. In most language courses not enough attention is given to fluency development, possibly because it does not involve the learning of new language items and thus is not seen as moving the learners forward in their knowledge of the language.

Balancing the Four Strands

Each strand should have roughly the same amount of time in a well-balanced course which aims to cover both receptive and productive skills. The balancing of time needs to take account of what occurs inside the classroom as well as opportunities for language learning and use outside the classroom.

A teacher can check whether there is a good balance of the strands by noting the language activities that learners are involved in over two weeks or a month, classifying each of these into one or more of the four strands and noting how much time each one took. Ideally each strand should occupy about 25 percent of the course time.

What justification is there for trying to have an equal amount of time for each strand? Ellis (2005) includes the following principles in his list of principles of instructed language learning:

- Instruction needs to ensure that learners focus predominantly on meaning.
- Instruction needs to ensure that learners also focus on form.

The three strands of meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, and fluency development are meaning-focused strands. They all involve activities where the learners' focus is on communicating and receiving messages. In the meaning-focused input and meaning-focused output strands, this meaning-focused communication pushes the boundaries of learners' knowledge and skill and results in the largely incidental learning of language features. In the fluency development strand, the messages are very easy and familiar ones but they are still the main focus of the activities. Thus three of the four strands, and thus three-quarters of the time,

focus predominately on meaning, and one strand, the language-focused learning strand, focuses on form. There is another justification for this three-to-one balance. Given the same amount of time, deliberate language-focused learning activities result in more learning than the incidental learning from meaning-focused activities. For example, the Waring and Takaki (2003) study showed that in approximately 56 minutes of meaning-focused reading of a graded reader, four words were learned reasonably well, and another 12 were partially learned. Studies of deliberate vocabulary learning when learners study word pairs (2L–1L) result in learning rates of around 35 words per hour which are four or more times higher than the incidental rate (Nation, 2001: 298; Thorndike, 1908; Webb, 1962). This kind of comparison is not entirely fair, however, because meaning-focused activities have a range of benefits for language learning, gaining content matter knowledge, skill improvement and enjoyment. Nonetheless, a major justification for language-focused learning is its focused efficiency. This focused efficiency needs to be balanced against the three less efficient but more widely beneficial meaning-focused strands.

In spite of these arguments, giving equal time to each strand is an arbitrary decision. It has been suggested that the time given to the strands could change as learners' proficiency develops (Ellis, 2002). At the beginning stages there could be more language-focused learning and less fluency development. At the higher proficiency levels, fluency development could take a greater proportion of the time. We are not in favour of this as there are good arguments for developing fluency with items like numbers and useful multi-word phrases right from the beginning of language learning. Similarly, learning more about the nature of language such as its history, etymology and pragmatic effects can be a useful support for learning at advanced levels.

Integrating the Four Strands

The four strands are opportunities for certain types of learning. They differ from each other according to the conditions which are needed for the different types of learning. They can fit together in many different ways. For example, in an intensive English programme with many different teachers, there may be different classes for spoken language (listening and speaking), reading, writing and language study. It would then be important to make sure that the spoken language classes, for example, not only had meaning-focused input and output activities, but also included fluency development activities and only a very small amount of language-focused learning.

In a content-based course which did not have a skill-based division of

classes, the four strands could all occur within a unit of work. Language-focused learning could lead into meaning-focused input or output, and this could lead into a fluency activity on the same theme. Alternatively, language-focused learning could occur as it was needed in the context of meaning-focused work. Once again, a good teacher would be quickly checking to see if over a week or two there was a roughly equal amount of time given to each strand.

There are many ways of giving time to the four strands and these will depend on many factors like the skills and preferences of the teachers, the expectations of learners and the school, the time-tabling constraints, and current beliefs about language teaching and learning. What is important is that over a period of time, each strand gets about the same amount of time.

Principles and the Four Strands

The following pedagogical principles are aimed at providing guidelines for teachers. They draw on an earlier larger list (Nation, 1993) and can usefully be compared with other lists of principles (Brown, 1993; Ellis, 2005; Krahnke and Christison, 1983). The list is organised around the four strands with the final two principles focusing on what should be covered in a course. Each principle is followed by a brief list of suggestions about how the principle could be put into practice.

1. *Provide and organise large amounts of comprehensible input through both listening and reading.* This could involve providing an extensive reading programme, reading to the learners, getting learners to give talks for their classmates to listen to, arranging spoken communication activities, and interaction via the internet.
2. *Boost learning through comprehensible input by adding a deliberate element.* Note words on the board as they occur in listening, do consciousness-raising activities before communicative tasks, get learners to reflect on new items they meet while reading, explain problem items that come up in the context of communication activities.
3. *Support and push learners to produce spoken and written output in a variety of appropriate genres.* Use communication activities in a range of situations, use role plays, match writing and speaking tasks to learner needs.
4. *Provide opportunities for cooperative interaction.* Do group work involving opinion gap and information gap tasks, get learners to work together on writing and reading.
5. *Help learners deliberately learn language items and patterns, including*

sounds, spelling, vocabulary, multi-word units, grammar, and discourse. Do teacher-led intensive reading, give feedback on writing, deliberately teach language items, arrange individual study of language items.

6. *Train learners in strategies that will contribute to language learning.* Work on guessing from context, dictionary use, word part analysis, and learning using word cards.
7. *Provide fluency development activities in each of the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.* Run a speed reading course, include repeated reading, provide an extensive reading programme, do 4/3/2 activities, organise a regular ten-minute writing programme, do listening to stories.
8. *Provide a roughly equal balance of the four strands of meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development.* Keep a record of the activities done in the course, the strand they fit into, and the amount of time spent on them.
9. *Plan for the repeated coverage of the most useful language items.* Focus on high frequency items, use controlled and simplified material, provide plenty of input at the same level.
10. *Use analysis, monitoring and assessment to help address learners' language and communication needs.*

The main aim of this book is to show the wide range of activities that can be used in each of the four strands of a course, to show the research evidence that justifies the existence of the strands, and to show how teachers can monitor and assess the learning that occurs in each of the strands.

A basic assumption that lies behind the book is that it is not wise for a teacher or course designer to ally themselves with a particular method of language teaching. It is much more productive to become aware of the important principles of teaching and learning and to apply these in ways that suit the learners, the teaching conditions and the skills of the teacher. This may result in courses that use different kinds of teaching and learning activities but which fundamentally draw on the same principles.

Another related assumption behind this book is that teaching and learning activities that have become unfashionable for a variety of reasons may still make a positive contribution to learning if they apply useful principles and if they are focused on worthwhile goals. Thus, in this book there is considerable discussion of pronunciation practice, structure drills, learning words out of context, dictation activities and repetition activities. This is because each of these activities, performed in an appropriate way, can

contribute to one of the strands of a course. The trick lies in giving them a useful focus and a suitable amount of time.

This book is written for teachers of English as a second or foreign language and, as a result of working their way through it, they should be able to do the following things:

1. Recognise and describe the range of goals of a language course.
2. Look critically at a language course to see its strengths, weaknesses and gaps.
3. Develop and adapt courses to provide a balance of the four strands in a course.
4. Choose, apply and monitor a range of activities that will reach useful learning goals.
5. Be able to describe and justify the parts of their language course drawing on principles derived from research in second language learning and second language teaching.

In each section of this book there will be discussion of how much time in a course should be given to each of the four strands and the sub-strands within them. Teachers will need to look at opportunities for learning outside class and consider these when planning a course.

Learning Goals

A language learning course is used to reach learning goals. These goals can include the learning of: (1) language items such as sounds, vocabulary and grammatical constructions, (2) the content or ideas of the subject being studied such as geography, English literature, mathematics, or cross-cultural understanding, (3) language skills such as listening, writing, fluency in using known items, and strategies for coping with language difficulties, and (4) the organisation of discourse such as rhetorical features and communication strategies. Table 1.1 elaborates these areas. The mnemonic **LIST**, which contains the first letter of each of the goals, is a useful way to remember the goals.

A more detailed elaboration of some of these areas can be found in Munby's (1978: 176–184) taxonomy of language skills.

The use of particular language teaching techniques is justified to the extent that they achieve learning goals. This even applies to techniques that are used for fun to give the learners a break, because there are many language teaching techniques that are great fun and achieve very useful learning goals.

The separate listing of specific goals like pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency does not mean that there must be a discrete point approach to

Table 1.1 Learning Goals

General goals	Specific goals
Language items	pronunciation
	vocabulary
	grammatical constructions
Ideas (content)	
Skills	listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills or subskills
	accuracy
	fluency
	strategies
Text (discourse)	conversational discourse patterns and rules
	text schemata or topic type scales

teaching. The purpose of such a listing is to make teachers more analytical about their use of techniques and the design of programmes. As we shall see, one technique can achieve several goals and at times it may not be obvious to the learners what the goal is as their interest may be on the message involved in the activity.

Some books describe the skill components and the nature of listening and speaking (Rost, 2002; Thornbury, 2005). Such descriptions give a teacher more realistic expectations of what may be achieved in a course and what to look for to see if the range of knowledge and skills is being covered. Such descriptions also play a role in sequencing the sub-goals of a course.

The text or discourse goals are clearly related to language goals. Biber's research (1989) has shown that various grammatical aspects of the language tend to form different clusters according to the type of discourse. Biber set up a typology of texts based on the co-occurrence of language features. He found that he was able to group texts according to the language features that frequently occurred or which were typically absent or infrequent. For example, face-to-face interaction is typified by the use of time and place adverbials, first- and second-person pronouns, the present tense, private verbs like *know* and *think*, and *be* as a main verb. Imaginative narrative is typified by past tense verbs, third-person pronouns, public verbs like *said*, and present participial clauses.

Biber's findings are important for designing courses, because we can draw the following implications from them.

1. In order to meet the full range of language features, learners need to be exposed to a range of discourse types.
2. Being able to operate well in one kind of discourse, for example informal conversation, does not mean that a learner has the knowledge to operate well in another kind of discourse, for example formal speech, because each discourse type makes use of a different cluster of language features.
3. Having to operate in an unfamiliar discourse area is a demanding task for learners and may make them aware of gaps in their command of the language. As Ellis (1990) points out, this awareness is a prerequisite to language acquisition.

We have looked at the broad features that should make up a well-balanced language course. In the following chapters we will look in detail at what should make up a well-balanced listening and speaking course. The following chapters are based on the idea of the four strands and look at what can make up each strand.

CHAPTER 2

Beginning to Listen and Speak in Another Language

The aims of a beginners course in listening and speaking are: (1) to help the learners to be able to cope with meaning-focused input and meaning-focused output as soon as possible; (2) to motivate them in their language study by getting them to engage in successful listening and speaking; and (3) to make the early learning as relevant as possible to their language use needs.

What Should They Learn?

The content of an English course for beginners will vary greatly according to the age of the learners, their purpose for learning, their educational background and previous experience with English, and whether they are learning in a foreign or second language context. Below is a set of learning priorities for one type of beginners, namely new migrant adult absolute beginners who may have had limited education and who need general everyday English for living in an English-speaking context.

1. *Using a New Alphabet*
   - Recognise and write the letters of the alphabet (including upper and lower case letters). This could involve lots of copying tasks
   - Develop phonological awareness, that letters in words stand for specific sounds, including vowel consonant patterns, three letter words (consonant—vowel—consonant), consonant blends, etc.

2. *Phrases for Talking about Yourself*
   - My name is _____. I live in _____. I come from _____.
   - I am _____ years old. I am married. I have _____ children.
   - I worked as a _____.
   - I like _____. I don't like _____.

3. *Phrases and Vocabulary for Everyday Life*
   - Shopping—food, clothing names, household objects
   - Visiting the doctor
   - Housing
   - Using the telephone
   - Banking
   - Finding a job
   - Contacting government agencies

4. *Sight Vocabulary*
   - Reading street signs, tickets, labels, etc.

5. *Classroom Expressions*
   - Excuse me . . .
   - Say that again please?
   - How do I say this?
   - Can you help me?
   - How do you spell _____?
   - I don't know. I don't understand.
   - Please speak more slowly.
   - May I go to the toilet?

6. *High Frequency Words*
   - Numbers
   - Classroom objects
   - Colours
   - Time and date words
   - Family members
   - Parts of the body
   - Objects in the home
   - Simple question forms

If the learners are adults who wish to use the language while travelling, then learning the survival vocabulary (Appendix 1) is a sensible early goal. This collection of around 120 sentences and phrases has been designed to be immediately useful and to fill the needs of getting to

places, finding food and accommodation, being polite, shopping, and getting help.

If the learners are children, then they should learn the high frequency words of the language which allow them to listen to simple stories, begin to read graded readers, and do interesting activities.

Where possible the course should try to address the learners' language needs and should do this so that the learners can see that this is being done. In small classes this can involve the use of a negotiated syllabus (Clarke, 1991) where the teacher and learners work together to decide what will be dealt with in class.

How Should the Teaching and Learning be Done?

Five Principles for Teaching Beginners

One way to answer this question is through a set of principles. Here are five principles that are particularly relevant to the teaching of beginners:

1	**M**eaning	Focus on meaningful and relevant language
2	**I**nterest	Maintain interest through a variety of activities
3	**N**ew language	Avoid overloading learners with too much new language
4	**U**nderstanding	Provide plenty of comprehensible input
5	**S**tress-free	Create a friendly, safe, cooperative classroom environment

Notice that the first letter for each of the key words spells out the acronym "MINUS". This provides a useful aid for remembering the principles. We now discuss the principles in relation to the teaching of absolute beginners in an ESL context. This is, of course, only one of many contexts for teaching beginners, and so readers will need to consider its relevance to their particular teaching context, and how the examples can be adapted to suit this context.

Principle 1. Focus on Meaningful and Relevant Content

The main focus should be on language that the learners can use quickly for their purposes rather than on too much grammar explanation or on words that are not directly useful. Here are some simple sentences that can be learnt very early in a course so that the learners can use them straight away:

My name is _____.
I come from _____.
I live in _____.
My address is _____.

The teacher could present these sentences orally, one by one, with gestures and lots of repetition and learner involvement. The sentences could then be written on a whiteboard so that the learners can write them down. The written versions then become the basis for pair work. The first aim of this learning is for learners to be able to say these things about themselves without looking at the written version, and to understand other learners when they use them. The second aim is for learners to begin to link the written and spoken forms of the words. For learners who are not very familiar with the written form of English, recognising the written form of their name and address is an important early step in building literacy.

One way of checking the usefulness of a phrase or word is to use a computer concordancer to see how many examples of the item can be found in a collection of spoken texts. A useful starting point is http://www.lextutor.ca/concordancers/.

One of the most useful techniques in a listening and speaking programme is the teacher engaging in meaning-focused dialogue with the learners. This dialogue can have many different focuses.

1. *Classroom management.* Perhaps the most realistic kind of dialogue involves the day-to-day running of the classroom. This includes: (1) organising classroom work such as forming groups, using the course book, and calling on learners to perform tasks; (2) keeping control of noise and behaviour; (3) checking attendance; and (4) thanking and praising.
2. *Informal conversation.* The teacher and learners talk about things that happened outside school. Where appropriate this can be about the learner's family, their hobbies, how they travel to school, favourite food, and so on.
3. *Recalling previous lessons.* The teacher and learners talk about previous class work. This draws on what is hopefully known and familiar and also provides opportunities for revision.
4. *Finding out learners' opinions and ideas.* During an activity the teacher can ask the learners if they like the particular activity and if they want to do more of it. This dialogue can be the early beginnings of a partly negotiated syllabus.

Principle 2. Maintain Interest Through a Variety of Activities

To maintain learners' interest, activities need to be short and varied, and to involve the learners in responding to or using the language. Here are some simple ways to keep learners interested in learning:

- do activities that involve movement
- use real objects and pictures

- plan trips outside the classroom, for example, a trip to a local supermarket linked to a simple food search game
- use songs and simple chants in between other more demanding activities
- introduce and practise new content though games such as bingo.

Principle 3. Avoid Overloading Learners with Too Much New Language

There is usually little need to focus on grammar in the early parts of a course for beginners. Instead lessons should focus on learning set phrases and words. Teachers often make the mistake of introducing too much new language without giving learners enough opportunities to gain control over this language. A simple rule to keep in mind is "*learn a little, use a lot*". For example, if the goal is to learn the names for parts of the body, it is better to focus on the most useful words such as *head, neck, arms, hands, legs, feet*, and so on, and to avoid less common words such as *elbow* and *ankle*. Note that introducing *elbow* and *ankle* at the same time creates another problem; the similarities between these words (i.e., they sound a bit the same and their meanings are related) is likely to lead to learners confusing each word for the other.

To apply the principle of "*learn a little, use a lot*", the body words need to be practised in a variety of ways. These could include picture games, information transfer activities, action games ("Simon says . . ."), and bingo. The words can then be used in simple sentence patterns and dialogues such as "*How are you? Not so good. My* _____ *hurts*". These activities are described later in this chapter.

Principle 4. Provide Plenty of Comprehensible Input

Note that most of these activities mentioned above first involve learners in learning the words through listening and doing before they deepen their learning through using the words in guided speaking. If speaking is pushed too early, learners may be more likely to transfer L1 phonology and to concentrate on mechanical difficulties. Activities like listen and do, picture ordering, bingo and information transfer show how listening can be practised in very active ways without requiring much speaking.

To ensure that input can be understood requires the use of visual aids and contextual support for new language including pictures, gestures, mime, objects, and experiences out of class. Teachers also need to think carefully about the language they use in class with the aim of keeping their talk simple but not simplistic or ungrammatical. One way to do this is to always use one form for one meaning. Thus, for example, the teacher needs to decide whether to use "My name is _____" or "I am

_____", but not both; "Where are you from?" or "Where do you come from?", but not both.

Early in the course learners can also learn simple phrases for controlling input such as, "*Sorry, I don't understand*", "*Please say it again*". Displaying these phrases on a large poster makes them readily available throughout a course.

Most of these ideas assume a context in which learners speak a variety of first languages, or the teacher does not speak the learners' first language. Of course, teaching beginners is easier if the learners all speak the same first language and the teacher speaks the first language of the learners. Using translation to convey the meanings of words and phrases is very efficient and is well supported by research as an effective way of communicating meaning. The main disadvantage is that the teacher and learners are tempted to use a lot of classroom time using the first language instead of the second language. However, as long as the teacher is aware of this danger, then using the first language is a good thing to do and saves a lot of time.

If the learners do not all speak the same first language, and if the teacher does not speak the first languages of the learners, then pictures, gestures and the use of context need to be used to get meaning across. This is not as difficult as it sounds, and if the learners also have a well-illustrated course book, the job is easier.

Older learners may make use of bilingual dictionaries which give the meanings of second language words in the learners' first language. These dictionaries differ a lot in quality, but they are extremely useful learning aids. Learners need to have a second language vocabulary of at least 2000 words before they can use monolingual dictionaries where meanings are given in the second language. This is because a vocabulary of around 2000 words is needed to write and understand definitions.

Principle 5. Create a Friendly, Safe, Cooperative Classroom Environment

There is strong evidence that anxiety influences learners' willingness to communicate in a second language (e.g., Yashima, 2002). Therefore, it is particularly important that, in the early stages of learning a second language, learners have successful, low stress learning experiences. By paying attention to the first four principles, there is a very good chance that these experiences will be plentiful, and that the teacher will already be meeting this fifth principle. Some of the factors that contribute to a positive beginners' classroom are variety, movement, physical comfort, frequent interaction, successful language experiences, and opportunities for learners to experiment and make mistakes without penalties.

Activities and Approaches for Teaching and Learning in a Beginners' Course

Memorising Useful Phrases and Sentences

A quick way of gaining early fluency in a language is to memorise useful phrases. There are several advantages in doing this. First, simple communication can occur at an early stage. For example, learners should be able to say who they are, where they come from, and what they do from the very first language lessons. They should also be able to greet people with phrases like *good morning*, and *good day* and to thank them. Second, memorising phrases and sentences allows learners to make accurate use of the language without having to know the grammar. Third, as we have seen, knowing sentences like *Please say that again, Please speak more slowly, What does X mean?* allows learners to take control of a conversation and use it for language learning purposes. Fourth, the words and patterns that make up such phrases can make the learning of later phrases and perhaps the learning of later patterns easier. Even at this very early stage of language learning, it is worth showing learners the value of making small cards with the second language word or phrase on one side and the first language translation on the other. These cards are used for recalling the meanings of the words and phrases, and later recalling the words and phrases. The learner carries a pack of these cards around and goes through them when they have a free moment. Research has shown that this spaced recall is a very effective way of learning (Nation, 2001: 296–316), and results in the kind of knowledge needed for normal language use.

There are several ways of deciding what sentences and phrases to learn. The following list is ranked in order of importance.

1. The learners think of things they want to be able to say and the teacher provides the second language phrase to say this.
2. The teacher thinks of the uses the learners need to make of the language and thinks of useful phrases to meet these needs. In some cases this may involve the teacher talking to the learners about their language needs and observing their daily use of the language.
3. The teacher consults lists of useful and frequent phrases that researchers have developed.
4. The teacher follows a course book.

Here is an example of what can happen if not much thought is given to what is taught. Gareth is in his fifth month of learning Japanese in the first year of secondary school. He is speaking to a researcher.

"Tell me something in Japanese, Gareth."
"OK. You ask me questions in English and I'll answer in Japanese."

"Were you born in New Zealand?"
"We haven't got up to 'yes' yet."
"All right. I'll try something else. How old are you?"
"Do you want me to say the whole sentence because I can only say the number?"
"That's fine. Just tell me the number."
"· · · · ·"
"That sounds good. Here's another question. What do you do at school?"
"No, not that kind of thing."
"Sorry. What sort of thing should I be asking you?"
"Well all the regular things like 'This is a pen' and 'The book is red'. That kind of thing."

Practising Sentence Patterns

The next step from memorising phrases and sentences is to learn some productive sentence patterns, that is, sentences where regular substitutions can be made to produce other sentences. These are called **substitution tables**. Here is an example.

1	2	3	4	5
I	'll	see	you	tomorrow.
		meet		on Friday.
		call		next week.
				at six o'clock.

The sentence has five parts, but in the example, substitutions are only made in two of them. When the pattern is first introduced, it is best to have substitution only in one part. The first step is to memorise one sentence, *I'll see you tomorrow*. Then the teacher gets the learners to take turns around the class making a systematic substitution in one part, for example *tomorrow, on Friday*, etc. The teacher should give the learner an oral cue before they make the substitution.

Teacher: I'll see you tomorrow. On Friday.
Learner 1: I'll see you on Friday.
Teacher: next week
Learner 2 I'll see you next week.
Teacher: at six o'clock
Learner 3: I'll see you at six o'clock.

When a new pattern or substitution table is introduced the teacher should start regularly. That is, the teacher should go through the table so that the learners can tell what the next sentence will be, and who will have to say it.

		eating ice-cream
		playing football
	hate	going to the cinema
I	like	studying geography
	love	walking in the evening
		reading comics

For example, when the teacher introduces this substitution table, it can start in a regular way with the teacher saying "I hate eating ice-cream" and then pointing to *playing football*. The first learner in the first row says "I hate playing football". Then the teacher points to *going to the cinema* and the second learner in the first row says the new sentence and so on.

T: I hate eating ice-cream. (points to *playing football*)
L1: I hate playing football.
T: (points to *going to the cinema*)
L2: I hate going to the cinema.

When this is easy for the learners the teacher can point to phrases in any order. When this is easy for the learners, the teacher points to a phrase and then points to any learner with the other hand. Thus, the learners do not know what phrase will be next and who will be the next person to speak. So the teacher keeps the exercise interesting by increasing the amount of irregularity in the use of the table (George, 1965).

Another way to keep the exercise interesting is for the teacher to increase the speed of pointing at the table or at the learners. The learners thus have less time to think. The teacher should be careful that the learners do not say the sentences too quickly because of this.

Another way to keep the exercise interesting is to make the learners use their memory. If the table is written on the board, the teacher can gradually rub out words and phrases. The teacher still points to the whiteboard but often points to an empty space and the learners must remember what was there in order to say the sentence. To make it easier, when the words are rubbed out, they can be replaced by drawings or words in the first language. Or, after the learners have used a substitution table for a short time, it is rubbed off the whiteboard or the learners close their books. Then the teacher says parts of phrases and the learners must say the whole sentence. So, using the above substitution table the teacher would say, "I hate eating ice-cream playing." The learners must remember that *playing* was followed by *football* in the table and so the learner says, "I hate playing football." Then the teacher says "comics" and so on.

There is a danger in the use of substitution tables. The items which are listed in one column, *on Friday, next week, at six o'clock*, tend to be related