

DEFINING OUR FIELD: 50 YEARS OF TITLES

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The following reflection is offered as a tribute not so much to my bookcase as to all who have helped me build it up over the years. In particular I think of the New Zealand Embassy officials in Saigon who managed to get books to me in difficult circumstances in Phnom Penh in the 1970s and more recently to the many publishers who have allowed me to review their books for journals. Thank you. To readers of this article, I recommend writing reviews as a way of becoming familiar with our always expanding field.

Introduction

Descriptions of a profession exist in dictionary definitions, and, more implicitly, in the contents of its journals. One further way of understanding a profession could be to look at the books its members read. This article examines the titles of 52 books published over almost half a century for teachers of English to speakers of other languages and asks what these titles suggest about the development of our profession.

Naming and describing a field

Historical developments in language teaching have sometimes been expressed figuratively. For example, the twentieth century is seen by Mitchell and Vidal (2001) in terms of a flowing river in which the mainstream of grammar-translation and the Direct Method led to the sidestreams of the Oral Approach and later individualised and programmed instruction. Mitchell and Vidal also point to other moves over the decades, such as the separation or integration of language skills, and the distinction between focussing on the teacher and focussing on the learner.

Dictionaries provide more literal descriptions of the field which is referred to as 'language teaching' or 'applied linguistics'. The latter term arose in the 1940s, according to Johnson and Johnson (1998), or in the 1950s, according to Stevens (1992) "to refer to the new academic discipline of the study of the teaching and learning of second or foreign languages" (Allwright, 1998, p.9). Similarly Richards, Platt and Weber (1992) call applied linguistics "the study of second and foreign language learning and teaching" and "the study of language and linguistics in relation to practical problems..." (p.19). For Meara (2000), applied linguistics is "an academically respectable way of talking about language teaching theory" (p.33).

Apart from reading definitions, how might new members of our profession develop a sense of its focus? Davies (1999) believes that definitions of a professional field develop by demonstration, which, according to Kaplan and Grabe (2000), could include the contents of "the various journals that have promoted the work of applied linguistics" (p.3). Published analyses of two journals have followed this method of definition: *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* (Kaplan and Grabe, 2000) and *New Zealand Studies in Applied Linguistics* (Lewis, 2002).

Demonstration could also include the stated goals of professional associations. The broad aims of IATEFL (International Association of English as a Foreign Language), founded in 1967 (Byram, 2000), include supporting "ENGLISH Language Teaching professionals" (p.288) while members of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) are described as "teaching ENGLISH to speakers of other languages" (ibid, p.621). The 'foreign' v. 'second' language distinction is examined by Howatt and Tomalin (1997), who describe TEFL as "rootless in that it isn't socially based" (p.263) whereas TESL "is very much part of the social history of this country [Great Britain] and of the United States" (ibid.).

One further source of information about a profession's development is the memory of its longstanding members. Larsen-Freeman (1998) offers what she describes as a "selective and personal" summary "of how language, language learning, the language learner, and language teaching have been characterized" (p.207-208) between the 1950s and the 1990s. As one example, she identifies the following trends in relation to language learners over the five decades:

- 1950s mimic
- 1960s cognitive being
- 1970s affective being, social being
- 1980s doer, strategist
- 1990s political being.

The present article adopts the historical approach of Larsen-Freeman by examining the titles of one person's professional library collected over several decades. The analysis aims to answer the question: How has the profession of teaching English as a second or foreign language been described in the titles of books for teachers?

Background to the study

The list is an examination of a library for teachers of English as a second or foreign language collected between 1961 and 2003. The books were bought because of their perceived usefulness at the time to a language teacher trainee, then a teacher and later a language teacher educator.

From a much larger library, the study was limited to titles with a professional development purpose. The study excludes collections of classroom activities, specialised titles on topics such as English for Specific Purposes, course design, materials development, self-access and theories of tasks. It was also decided to exclude books dealing with separate skills (reading, listening etc). Books about theories of second language acquisition (SLA) were not part of the study unless they applied theories to the classroom. Thus *Teaching and learning languages* (Stevick, 1982) and *Affect in language learning* (Arnold, 1999) were included because they address practising teachers. A few early titles were included despite being more broadly addressed to all language teachers because at the time when they were bought they were recommended reading for teachers of English as a foreign language. Also, pre-60s titles were included if they were still recommended reading in the 1960s.

Table 1 classifies the titles from each period which fitted the criteria, based on their first date of publication.

Table 1: Number of books examined by decade

Period	Number of titles examined
1950s	3
1960s	7
1970s	5
1980s	16
1990s	17
2000-	4
TOTAL	52

It is worth noting that two of the 80s books have continued to be revised over many years while retaining their original titles. Douglas Brown's *Principles of language learning and teaching* (1980) went into a fourth edition in the year 2000 and Jeremy Harmer's *The practice of English language teaching* (1983) also continues to be re-edited.

Analysis of the titles

In the first two decades, titles were very matter of fact; they told what was being taught and in two cases to whom, using remarkably similar wording.

Teaching English as a foreign language (1955)

The teaching of modern languages (1956)

Teaching English to beginners (1958)

Teaching English to immigrants (1963)

Teaching English as a second language (1966)

Teaching foreign-language skills (1968)

The emphasis in all cases was on the teaching role, although Finocchiaro was ahead of her time in also mentioning theory.

English as a second language: From theory to practice (1964)

Towards the end of the 1960s and through the 1970s the word "teaching" continued but often with extra descriptors as the following titles show.

The visual element in language teaching (1966)

The new pattern of language teaching (1967)

Applied linguistics and the teaching of English (1969)

Language teaching in action (1973)

Teaching English as a second language: Techniques and procedures (1976)

Foundations for teaching English as a second language (1976)

A practical guide to the teaching of English (1978)

Some of the descriptors had a fresh and lively ring ("visual", "new", "in action"). Others emphasised the workability of their contents ("techniques and procedures", "practical"). However, as in the 1960s, one writer was ahead of her time. The Wilga Rivers title

Speaking in many tongues (1974)

looked ahead to the 80s' emphasis on the learner. With this exception, the emphasis on both the practical element and the teacher continued into the next decade.

Teaching English as an international language (1980)

Methods that work (1983)

The practice of English language teaching (1983)

However, as the 1980s developed, it was not enough to speak about methods and teachers alone. Teachers need to look "beyond" the study of methods at "the community", "the context" and at "issues". The broader word "approaches" appears in this decade.

Beyond methodology: Second language teaching and the community (1985)

The context of language teaching (1985)

Approaches and methods in language teaching (1986)

Current issues in teaching English as a second language to adults (1988)

Context continued to be important into the next decade.

Teaching language in context (1993)

In contrast with earlier titles that emphasised how practical their contents were, some 80s titles had reminders that methods need to be informed by "principles", "concepts" and "pedagogy".

Principles of language learning and teaching (1980)

Fundamental concepts of language teaching (1983)

Techniques and principles in language teaching (1986)

Second language pedagogy (1987)

At the same time, in the 1980s learners and the learning process started to be mentioned in books for teachers rather than in separate books for SLA specialists.

Teaching and learning languages (1982)

Communicating naturally in a second language (1983)

Interactive language teaching (1987)

Roles of teachers and learners (1987)

By the 1990s this focus on the learners was a major element in titles as increasingly specific aspects of language learning were mentioned:

Humanism in language teaching (1990)

Process and experience in the language classroom (1991)

Collaborative language learning and teaching (1992)

Interaction in the language curriculum: Awareness, autonomy and authenticity (1996)

Learner-centredness as language education (1996)

Affect in language learning (1999)

The dynamics of the language classroom (2001)

With the increasing flow of books to read during this decade, it is no wonder that one title warned readers that becoming a professional is not a fast process:

The first step on the longer path: becoming an ESL teacher (1992)

Another pattern emerges when we compare earlier and later titles. Starting in the late 1980s and continuing through the 1990s came two apparently opposing trends. One was a lack of certainty in the titles. No longer could teachers buy a book and find "foundations for teaching English" (Saville-Troike, 1976) or "methods that work" (Oller and Richard-Amato, 1983). Increasingly there was more than one way of doing things, so that teachers had to reflect and make choices.

Images and options in the language classroom (1986)

Currents of change in English language teaching (1990)

Issues and options in language teaching (1992)

Reflective teaching in second language classrooms (1994)

Challenge and change in language teaching (1996)

However, parallel with this wealth of choice, as the 90s moved along there was also a return to the certainty of the 50s and 60s. The "foundations" of 1976 are the "essentials" of 1993. Again there is mention of "essentials", a "guide" and even just "teaching".

The language teaching matrix (1990)

Aspects of language teaching (1990)

Teaching English overseas: An introduction (1992)

Essentials of English language teaching (1993)

Teaching English as a foreign or second language (1996)

In the present decade two of the three titles continue this trend. The word "guide" from 1978 is repeated in a 2001 title and the "methods that work" from 1983 have become the "methodology" of 2002.

The Cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages (2001)

Methodology in language teaching: an anthology of current practice (2002).

Only one title suggests something fresh.

Teaching English as an international language: Rethinking goals and approaches (2002)

Discussion

This article is, like the reflections of Larsen-Freeman (1998), one person's interpretation. Figure 1 summarises this interpretation, in which one overall trend is a growing awareness of what students bring to the process of language learning in contrast to the early, teacher-centred days.

1950s, 60s	70s	80s	90s, 2000s
factual	action	practical teaching	reflection
	workability	methods	learning
	certainty	principled teaching	learners
		learning	change +certainty

Figure 1: Overview of trends

The question is, do these titles reflect real changes in the profession or is it unwise to read too much into them? The fact that an emphasis does not appear in a title need not mean that it is absent in the text. Titles are chosen for many reasons, one being to avoid overlaps with other titles, including titles by the same author in the case of writers like Ashworth, Nunan, Richards, Rivers and Stevick. As the trickle of books in our field became a flow, originality of wording must have sometimes competed with the need for a clear description of a book's contents.

Does the wording of a title become a trend that others follow? For example, why did so many 1980s titles have "paired" phrases in their titles: teaching and learning, teaching and the community, images and options, approaches and methods, techniques and principles, teachers and learners, process and experience, issues and options, learning and teaching, challenge and change? The trend continued into the 1990s. There was even one triple run (awareness, autonomy and authenticity). Some of the pairs, like "teachers and learners", have a strong meaning distinction but could it be that others, such as "process and experience" and "challenge and change" were chosen for reasons of euphony? Whatever the reason, the pattern seemed to run its course, with a final appearance of "twin" words in 1996. Questions about what actually determines the choice of title could be answered by interviewing authors and publishers. Questions about the link between a title and the book's contents could be answered by examining their tables of contents or indices.

This report has been based on the premise that a profession can learn something about itself by looking backwards. In the very earliest book in this study Gurrey (1955) stated that "few people ... realize what an unceasing expenditure of thought and energy is essential for teaching this subject" (p.1). Nearly half a century later, some of the teachers' energy is going into reading the scores of books which have been written for them.

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