

# Reviews

## *Comptes rendus*

### **MAKING THE GRADE: EVALUATING STUDENT PROGRESS**

**R.J. Cornfield, Kathleen Coyle, Beverley Durrant, Karl McCutcheon,  
John Pollard and William Stratton,  
Board of Education for the City of Etobicoke Writing Committee  
Prentice-Hall Canada Inc.**

This comprehensive resource document provides a basis for the development of more effective evaluation policies and procedures to keep pace with recent progress in program development and teaching techniques. The early chapters present in detail the theoretical issues relating to the purpose, use and effectiveness of the evaluation program. The role of evaluation in the teaching-learning process is assumed to be “both active and fundamental”. To achieve this intended evaluation, the program design must be closely related to the teaching objectives. Of special interest to the ESL teacher is the section on “Intended Evaluation and Students of Other Cultures, Languages and Dialects”, which warns of the pitfalls encountered by both teacher and student during evaluation.

The later chapters dealing with specific evaluation procedures present a wide variety of approaches according to the subject, the grade level and the purpose of the evaluation. Accompanying the proposed procedures are examples of practical assessment techniques designed for use in the classroom to evaluate progress in various aspects of the learning process at different levels of ability and stages of development. Also included are sample charts and check lists for recording performance and progress by both teacher and student. Modifications of the evaluation procedures for exceptional students are addressed in detail.

Despite the absence of attention to the ESL program in particular, other than through references listed in the bibliography, the sound principles of student evaluation as outlined here apply equally in formulating appropriate policies and procedures for this program.

The scope of information presented in this resource manual, with consideration for both the underlying theory and practical application of evaluation procedures, make it useful to the individual teacher as well as

to those responsible for the development of the evaluation policies and procedure for a district, school or department.

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## **APPROACHES AND METHODS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING: A DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS**

**Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers**  
Cambridge University Press, 1986, 171 pages.

Jack Richards and Theodore Rodgers have provided, in a remarkably clear, concise, and compact little volume, a superb overview of major approaches and methods used in second language teaching. The word "overview" is used advisedly, for no book of 171 pages can provide an in-depth analysis of eight or more teaching approaches; but the word is not used pejoratively. Indeed, instructors of methodology at the university level should all insist that their students study this text before doing further readings from the extensive bibliographies at the end of each of the eleven chapters, and all ESL teachers will derive a wealth of information from these chapters.

The beauty of the Richards and Rodgers book is that the authors do not consider any approach or method in a dogmatic manner; rather, they provide readers with a model by which they can themselves analyze and evaluate, by which they can examine the similarities and differences of the various methods.

This model of analysis is presented in the second chapter of the book. It follows a rather cursory examination in Chapter I of the history of language teaching from Grammar Translation to the Direct Method of the 1920's. The model is based on that of Edward Anthony (1963), whose three levels of organization included *approach, method, and technique*. Anthony's model, however, made no reference to the roles played by teachers and learners, to materials employed, or to teaching techniques; and thus Richards and Rodgers have devised a superior model to include these latter elements. The following, then, is a summary of their model:

- I. *Approach*
  - A. Theory of language (structural, functional, interactional)
  - B. Theory of learning (cognitive processes involved, conditions that activate learning)

## II. *Design*

- A. Objectives (skills, structures, learning behaviour)
- B. Syllabus (content choice, organization)
- C. Types of learning and teaching activities
- D. Learner roles (active, receptive)
- E. Teacher role (authoritative, consultant, etc.)
- F. Instructional Materials

## III. *Procedure*

Techniques, practices, and behaviours

Using this Model, the authors next examine eight different approaches or methods, devoting a chapter to each. These include the following:

- (1) The Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching (used in Britain in the 1950's but based on the work of Harold Palmer and A.S. Hornby in the 1930's and approaching language teaching through a structural approach with emphasis on avoidance of errors and on pattern practice)
- (2) The Audiolingual Method (similar to Situational Language Teaching but relying more on Contrastive Analysis)
- (3) Communicative Language Teaching (advocated in the 1970's by Christopher Candlin, Henry Widdowson, and others, who stressed a functional and communicative view of language learning based on learners' needs and using authentic materials)
- (4) Total Physical Response (based on the "trace theory" of memory in psychology and the concept that speech and action must be coordinated)
- (5) The Silent Way (linking physical objects to language learning)
- (6) Community Language Learning (considering the teacher as counsellor and the student as client, and advocating a holistic approach to learning in a secure, uncritical environment)
- (7) The Natural Approach (advocated by Krashen and Terrell in the 1980's, and with more emphasis on *input* than on *practice*)
- (8) Suggestopedia (linked to unconscious processes that optimize learning).

A final chapter gives readers further guidelines for comparing and evaluating methods. We are urged to look for elements of commonality, to compare approaches and methods, to consider learners' needs relative to the eight approaches (and to any approaches which may be advocated in the future), to consider varying objectives, to examine opposing teaching and learning activities, and to attempt to locate documented proof of the effectiveness of the various methods.

In their "Preface" Richards and Rodgers state that their goal "is to enable teachers to become better informed about the nature, strengths, and weaknesses of methods and approaches so they can better arrive at their own judgements and decisions". The authors have most admirably achieved their goal.

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## TAKE PART: SPEAKING CANADIAN ENGLISH

**Lucia Pietrusiak Engkent and Karen P. Bardy.**  
Prentice-Hall Canada Inc., 1986, pp. ix + 108

*Take Part: Speaking Canadian English* is an ESL textbook aimed at intermediate-level learners who have difficulty expressing themselves in everyday spoken English. Learners are expected to have a good background in English structure, vocabulary and, presumably, listening skills. The authors conceived the text for a forty-hour conversation course and they suggest that two or more hours be allowed to complete each of the sixteen units.

An instructor's manual and a cassette audio tape to complement the student's edition are mentioned in the preface but were not available for review.

The textbook is divided into sixteen thematically organized units, each introducing a new set of characters and focusing on one of a number of themes common in ESL textbooks, e.g. introductions, weather, work, leisure time, food, family, travel, etc. Individual units are not graded according to linguistic or pedagogical criteria, and subsequent units do not include reinforcement of vocabulary items presented in previous units. With the exception of unit one (Introduction), units can be used in any sequence that suits the interests or needs of individual groups.

Each unit follows approximately the same internal organization: a theme is introduced through a short dialogue or, in two units, through a prose passage. Selected vocabulary items in these passages are highlighted in bold print and listed in the margin, where a brief definition is given. A discussion section consisting of two or more tasks follows the dialogue or prose passage. The tasks are graded in that they tend to lead from a controlled to a free format, i.e. the first type of task usually verifies overall comprehension, requiring students, for example, to summarize the con-

versation or explain the relationship between the different speakers and so on. The next type of task tends to encourage practice based on the model provided, (e.g. what would you do/say in this situation?), and the last type of task requires generalization in the form of class activities. One or two additional dialogues follow, each introducing new contexts and more vocabulary items on the same theme. A set of discussion tasks completes each dialogue. The last dialogue in each unit is followed by a section called "Language Notes." They take the place of formal grammar explanations and exercises and are usually linguistically based summaries of specific features of informal English presented in the unit's dialogues; i.e. some may refer to aspects of pronunciation while others give short explanations of points of grammar or vocabulary. The next section, "Culture Notes," offers learners insight into Canadian culture and an appreciation of different aspects of Canadian lifestyles. "Culture Notes" deal with topics as diverse as an explanation of the popularity of "weather" as a topic for small talk, educational opportunities in Canada and the commercial orientation of North American culture. An additional vocabulary section, related to the theme of the unit, and more discussion topics and suggestions for activities and assignments conclude each unit. A convenient and comprehensive index of both "Language Notes" and "Vocabulary" complete the textbook.

*Take Part: Speaking Canadian English* sounds like the answer to many ESL teacher's requests for teaching material reflecting Canadian lifestyles and culture. On this level, the textbook is disappointing as it does not explore any typically Canadian themes, and most settings are neutral with regard to cultural and geographic content. Less than ten percent of the dialogues make specific reference to things Canadian. Canadian content is, however, provided in the often interesting and amusing "Culture Notes." These range from guidelines for social conversation (Unit 1) to customs and traditions based on superstitions (Unit 7) to guidelines reflecting "telephone etiquette as understood by Canadians" (p. 102, Unit 16).

The dialogues in *Take Part: Speaking Canadian English* are intended to serve as models of typical informal conversations and as springboards to further discussions. The scripts of the dialogues, however, seem artificial despite the frequent use of contractions and idiomatic/colloquial phrases. The dialogues simply provide a context for the selected idiomatic and colloquial expressions. Few hesitations, interjections and interruptions and no false starts are present in the dialogues, although they are characteristic of most native speakers' spontaneous speech. Even the typically Canadian expressions "eh?" is only mentioned briefly on page 3 and does not surface again throughout the textbook. The last Culture Note (Unit 16) tells learners to use uh-huh and uh-uh on the telephone to indicate to

their interlocutor that they are still following the speaker. Students in an intermediate level conversation class need more such techniques and strategies to initiate, maintain and terminate informal conversations. They need to learn how to hesitate, interrupt, disagree, hold the floor, etc. in an appropriate way. The dialogues in *Take Part: Speaking Canadian English* should be used to illustrate the use of such conversational tools, which could then be practiced in subsequent tasks.

*Take Part: Speaking Canadian English* succeeds well in illustrating different levels of formality in conversational English. Examples include some slang expressions, many colloquialisms and idioms, and range from the very informal exchanges which take place between friends, to advertising jingles and the register appropriate in job and radio interviews. The glosses for the vocabulary items clearly indicate which expressions are slang and colloquialisms. They are kept very brief; only the meaning relevant to the expression's use in the context of the text is given. Occasionally, explanations of a word are more difficult to understand than the word being explained, e.g.

- (p. 34) "easy on the salt" is defined as "use the salt sparingly"
- (p. 80) "hit-or-miss" is defined as "haphazard, careless"

Learners at the level envisaged by the authors are not likely to find "sparingly" and "haphazard" in the above explanations helpful, whereas

- (p. 91) "M.L.A.", defined as "Member of Legislative Assembly (provincial government)" and
- (p. 91) "M.P.P.", defined as "Member of Provincial Parliament" will likely leave many teachers wishing for a more complete explanation.

The topics and range of activities in this book allow considerable flexibility in the classroom. For higher level learners, the material can easily be supplemented by authentic listening passages, films, in-depth discussions etc. Lower level learners will not only need more time to work through each unit, but they will likely need more explanations and exercises than are given in each unit.

In conclusion, *Take Part: Speaking Canadian English* offers a welcome, albeit not entirely satisfactory, addition to available textbooks for a conversation class at the intermediate level. It is a pity Prentice-Hall did not use a more attractive packaging for the text: the paper quality is drab and the black and white cartoon-style drawings soon become monotonous.

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