1 | The changing world of English

A A language story

By the end of the twentieth century English was already well on its way to becoming a genuine *lingua franca*, that is a language used widely for communication between people who do not share the same first (or even second) language. Just as in the Middle Ages Latin became for a time a language of international communication (at least in the Roman Empire), so English is now commonly used in exchanges between, say, Japanese and Argentinian business people, or between Singaporeans and their Vietnamese counterparts. English is also, of course, a mother tongue for many people in the world, though, as we shall see, such 'native speakers' are increasingly out-numbered by people who have English as a second or third language and use it for international communication.

There is something awe-inspiring about the way English use has grown in the last few decades. In 1985, Braj Kachru estimated that there were between 320 and 380 million people speaking English as a first language and anywhere between 250 and 380 million speakers of English as a second language, but he had already predicted that the balance might change. 'One might hazard a linguistic guess here,' he had written two years earlier. 'If the spread of English continues at the current rate, by the year 2000 its non-native speakers will outnumber its native speakers' (1983: 3).

Kachru's guess was absolutely right, but on a much greater scale than he might have supposed. Estimates vary, but the ratio of native speakers to non-native speakers is anywhere between 1:2 (Rajagopalan 2004) and 1:3 (Crystal 2003a), and this gap is widening all the time. In terms of numbers, Crystal suggests that there are currently around 1.5 billion speakers of English worldwide, of whom only some 329 million are native speakers. 'Moreover,' he writes, 'the population growth in areas where English is a second language is about 2.5 times that in areas where it is a first language' (2003a: 69). A quarter of the world's population speaks English, in other words, and native speakers are in a proportionately ever-decreasing minority. However, it is worth acknowledging, as Crystal does, that these totals are to some extent only guesstimates, and avoid certain difficult questions, such as how good at the language someone has to be before we can say they are a real 'speaker of English'. Is a beginner an English speaker? Does being an English 'speaker' mean only having the ability to speak English, or do we wait until people are functionally literate before we count them?

Despite these uncertainties, it is clear that English is special, and for many people its inexorable rise has been something to celebrate, though for others it causes real unease (see A2 below). The future of English language 'superiority' is also called into question by some (see A4 below), and its growth may one day be halted. The status of English as one language is challenged by the many different 'Englishes' being used around the world (see A3 below), and the ownership of

English has shifted dramatically, as the numbers quoted above will have demonstrated. All of these issues have a bearing on how and why English is taught – and indeed what type of English is taught – and it is these issues which we will be exploring in this chapter.

A1 The triumph of English?

In his book *English Next*, the British applied linguist David Graddol discusses how English – originally the language of a small island people – triumphed, despite being infiltrated by other languages, especially Norman French in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Graddol 2006: 58). His use of the term *triumph* is deliberately ironic, of course, especially when we consider that the language itself grew from a number of roots and incorporated words and grammar from various languages and language groups (Crystal 2003b: Chapters 2–5). Nevertheless, some people have been tempted to see the history of English as it has spread through the world in terms of an onward march to victory (a view we will challenge below). How, then, did English get where it is today? How do languages become truly global? There are a number of factors which have ensured the widespread use of English.

- **A colonial history:** when the Pilgrim Fathers landed on the Massachusetts coast in 1620 after their eventful journey from Plymouth, England, they brought with them not just a set of religious beliefs, nor only a pioneering spirit and a desire for colonisation, but also their language, and though many years later the Americans broke away from their one-time colonial masters, the language of English remained and it is still the main language of the world's predominant economic and political power.

  It was the same in Australia, too. When Commander Philip planted the British flag in Sydney Cove on January 26th, 1788, it wasn't just a bunch of British convicts and their guardians who disembarked (to be rapidly followed by many 'free' settlers of that land), but also a language.

  In other parts of the British Empire, English rapidly became a unifying/dominating means of control. For example, it became something a little like a lingua franca in India, where a plethora of indigenous languages made the use of any one of them as a whole-country system problematic. The imposition of English as the one language of administration helped maintain the coloniser's power.

  English was not the only language to become widespread in this way, of course. Spanish was imposed on much of the 'new world' by the conquistadores from Castile. Brazil and parts of Africa took on the language of their Portuguese conquerors. The (short-lived) dominance of Russia in the Soviet Union meant that Russian was spoken – or at least learnt – throughout the Warsaw Pact countries (and we have not even mentioned the way Chinese or French, for example, became widespread as a result of political and colonial realities). English, therefore, is not unique in the way it travelled around many parts of the globe (though its predominance is partly the result of the extended reach of British colonial ambitions).

- **Economics:** military prowess may account for the initial establishment of a language, as we have seen, but it is economic power that ensures its survival and growth. A major factor in the growth of English has been the spread of global commerce, pushed on by the dominance of the United States as a world economic power. The English language travelled in the wake of this success, so that now, whatever countries are involved, it is one of the main mediating

languages of international businesses. This is the phenomenon of 'globalisation', described by the journalist John Pilger (at the end of the twentieth century) as '... a term which journalists and politicians have made fashionable and which is often used in a positive sense to denote a "global village" of "free trade", hi-tech marvels and all kinds of possibilities that transcend class, historical experience and ideology' (Pilger 1998: 61). Pilger, like many of his contemporaries, sees this globalisation as a threat to the identities of individual countries as a new colonialism stalks the world. But the situation may be somewhat more complex than this. As Suresh Canagarajah points out, 'postmodern globalisation' (his phrase) 'sees many companies outsourcing their economic activity so that now English – in varieties such as Indian or Sri-Lankan English – is a language being beamed back towards its originators from call centres offering technical assistance, marketing and customer service' (Canagarajah 2005: 17). In other words, as this one example shows, commercial activity has helped fan the flames of English, but it is no longer possible to see this only in terms of one-way traffic.

- **Information exchange:** a great deal of academic discourse around the world takes place in English. It is often a lingua franca of conferences, for example, and many journal articles in fields as diverse as astrophysics and zoology have English as a default language.

    The first years of the Internet as a major channel for information exchange also saw a marked predominance of English (though as we shall see in A4, such a situation may change). This probably has something to do with the Internet's roots in the USA and the predominance of its use there in the early days of the World Wide Web (see Chapter 11 for more on the Internet).

- **Travel:** much travel and tourism is carried on, around the world, in English. Of course this is not always the case, as the multilingualism of many tourism workers in different countries demonstrates, but a visit to most airports around the globe will reveal signs not only in the language of that country, but also in English, just as many airline announcements are glossed in English, too, whatever the language of the country the airport is situated in.

    So far, English is also the preferred language of air traffic control in many countries and is used widely in sea travel communication.

- **Popular culture:** in the 'western world', at least, English is a dominating language in popular culture. Pop music in English saturates the planet's airwaves. Thus many people who are not English speakers can sing words from their favourite English-medium songs. Many people who are regular cinemagoers (or TV viewers) frequently hear English on subtitled films coming out of the USA. There is a worldwide audience for the annual Oscars ceremony – though nowhere near the regularly quoted figure of a billion, Daniel Radosh suggests (Radosh 2005). However, we need to remind ourselves that Bollywood (in India) produces more films than Hollywood (in the USA) and that many countries, such as France and South Korea, for example, do their best to fight against the cultural domination of the American movie. Nevertheless, the advent of film and recording technology greatly enhanced the worldwide penetration of English. In addition, countries such as the USA, Britain, Canada and Australia do their best to promote their culture overseas and to attract people to choose them as a study destination.

A2 The effect of English

Not everyone sees the growth of English as a benign or even desirable phenomenon. Many people worry about what it means for the cultures and languages it comes into contact with, seeing its teaching as a form of cultural or linguistic 'imperialism' (e.g. Phillipson 1992, Pennycook 1994, 1998). They argue that, as we have seen, English has been regarded by some as a way of promoting military, cultural or economic hegemony. Nor is it necessarily welcome to those who have been obliged to study it, some of whom see learning English as an unpleasant but sadly necessary occupation (Pennycook 1998: 206–212).

The view that learners and non-native speakers of English are victims of linguistic and cultural imperialism is not shared by everyone. Joseph Bisong points out that Nigerians, for example, may want to operate with two or more languages in a multilingual setting, choosing which one to use depending upon the situation they are in and the people they wish to communicate with. He suggests that great writers like Achebe, Soyinka and Ngugi do not write in English as victims, but out of choice – whatever the reasons for this choice might be (Bisong 1995). But this isn't a free choice, Phillipson (1996) argues. It is determined by their audience, not them. Kanavillil Rajagopalan, on the other hand, suggests that the teaching of English should not be seen as a form of cultural imperialism, '... in a world marked by cultural intermixing and growing multilingualism at a hitherto unprecedented level' (Rajagopalan 1999: 200).

An issue that concerns everyone who follows the rise of English is the impact it has on the other languages it comes into contact with. This concern is articulated in the knowledge that of the approximately 6,000 extant languages in the world, at least half may be lost within the next hundred years – although some commentators are far more apocalyptic and suggest that the figure may be more like 90 per cent. Language death is a frightening and ongoing problem in much the same way that species loss is a threat to the biodiversity on our planet; for once lost, a language cannot be resurrected and its loss takes with it culture and customs and ways of seeing the world through its use of metaphor, idiom and grammatical structuring. In this context, a powerful argument is that as more and more people speak English, languages will gradually be lost. As David Crystal warns (in a widely-quoted phrase), if, in 500 years, English is the only language left to be learnt, 'it will have been the greatest intellectual disaster that the planet has ever known' (Crystal 2003a: 191).

Although there can be no doubt that the spread of English has some impact on other languages, creating a causal link between this and language death seems somewhat simplistic. In the first place, languages are under threat from a wide variety of sources, not just English. Spanish threatens some Andean languages, French battles it out with Euskara and Flemish, and the number of Mandarin and Arabic speakers is growing all the time – not to mention the growing influence that speakers of these languages exert in the international community.

But in a sense, the presence of a new multi-use language such as English is only one side of the picture. A much more important predictor of language survival will be whether there is still a viable community with its own social and cultural identity to keep a language alive. In other words, survival is as much social as linguistic. And here, too, the world is changing. Instead of only seeing language as a one-way street where English is exported, we need to remember that there is massive movement of people and languages around the globe. In London alone, according to a recent survey, more than 300 languages are spoken by schoolchildren, making London one of the most linguistically diverse cities in the world. This means that for at least

a third of all London schoolchildren, English is not the language spoken at home.

It is possible, of course, that many of these languages may be lost from one generation to the next (or the one after that). But language is bound up with identity, and there are many examples of successful identity-grounded fightbacks. Since the Balkan wars of the 1990s, for example, Serbians, Bosnians and Croatians have all taken the original 'Yugoslavian' Serbo-Croatian and started to mould it into three new varieties (Serbian, Bosnian and Croatian), emphasising as many differences between these varieties as possible. Catalan and Euskara have mounted a fierce and successful renaissance in Spain. The Welsh language went through something of a resurrection in the second half of the twentieth century, the Singaporean government embeds the preservation of home languages into its national curriculum, and there are many more examples of this kind. Members of the European Parliament who are competent speakers of English nevertheless use their own languages (e.g. Finnish) in plenary sessions as a highly charged statement of political and cultural identity.

We should not be starry-eyed about all this, of course. But rather than fearing English as a destroyer, we should, perhaps, concentrate on how to maintain communities with a strong enough identity to preserve the language they represent. It is even possible that the presence of English as a lingua franca actually provokes speakers of minority languages to protect and promote their own languages (House 2001).

The other charge against English – that of cultural and linguistic imperialism – is also proving more and more difficult to sustain. As we shall see below, neither colonial Britain nor the American giant actually own the language any more, in any real sense. Linguistic imperialism may have once been a function of geopolitical conquest (and it is certainly the case that economic globalisation has had some extremely baleful – as well as benign – consequences), but the world of English has morphed into something very different from what it was in the days of colonisation.

A3 English as a global language

We have already seen how the proportion of native and non-native speakers has altered in the last few decades, but the way this has happened, and its implications, need to be explored further.

In 1985 Kachru described the world of English in terms of three circles. In the inner circle he put countries such as Britain, the USA, Australia, etc. where English is the primary language.

The outer circle contained countries where English had become an official or widely-used second language. These included India, Nigeria, Singapore, etc. Finally, the expanding circle represented those countries where English was learnt as a foreign language (though we will be debating the use of that term in Section B below) – countries such as Poland, Japan, Mexico, Hungary, etc.

FIGURE 1: Kachru's 1985 circles

EXPANDING
OUTER
INNER
320–380
150–300
100–1000

We have already seen how Kachru's numbers have been dramatically surpassed. But something else has happened, too. It was once assumed that there was some kind of inbuilt superiority for inner circle speakers. They spoke 'better' English, and there were more of them. Among other things, this situation 'bred an extremely enervating inferiority complex among many a non-native speaker learner/teacher' (Rajagopalan 2004: 114). But since English is now used
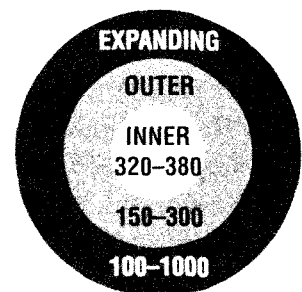
more often as a lingua franca than as a native language – and since the majority of competent English speakers are not native speakers, but second-language users – the inner circle has lost much of its linguistic power, real or imagined (though there are still many people who advocate using a native-speaker model to teach international English as we shall see in B2 below). As a result, a consensus has emerged that instead of talking about inner, outer and expanding circle Englishes, we need to recognise 'World Englishes' (Jenkins 2006a: 159) or 'Global English' (Graddol 2006: 106). World English (in Rajagopalan's words) '... belongs to everyone who speaks it, but it is nobody's mother tongue' (2004: 111). Nobody owns English any more, in other words – or perhaps we could say that we all, 'native' and 'non-native' speakers alike, own it together in a kind of international shareholders' democracy since whatever English we speak – Indian English, British English or Malaysian English – we have, or should have, equal rights as English users. This does not mean, of course, that there are not 'haves' and 'have-nots' in World Englishes (as there are in any language where 'conflicting interests and ideologies are constantly at play' (Rajagopalan 2004: 113)). But it does mean, suddenly, that native speakers may actually be at a disadvantage, especially if we compare less educated native speakers with highly competent and literate second-language English users. The speaker of World English is, perhaps, capable of dealing with a wider range of English varieties than someone stuck with native-speaker attitudes and competence; indeed, as Rajagopalan suggests, anyone who can't deal with a Punjabi or Greek accent (or, as Canagarajah suggests, with an outsourced call centre operative in Delhi or Kuala Lumpur speaking their own special English variety) is 'communicatively deficient' (Rajagopalan 2004: 115).

The emergence of global English has caused Kachru to propose a new circle diagram where language affiliation (and ethnicity) is less important than a speaker's proficiency (Kachru 2004). He still wishes to make a distinction between the inner core and everyone else, but outside that inner core, the main difference is between high and low proficiency users.
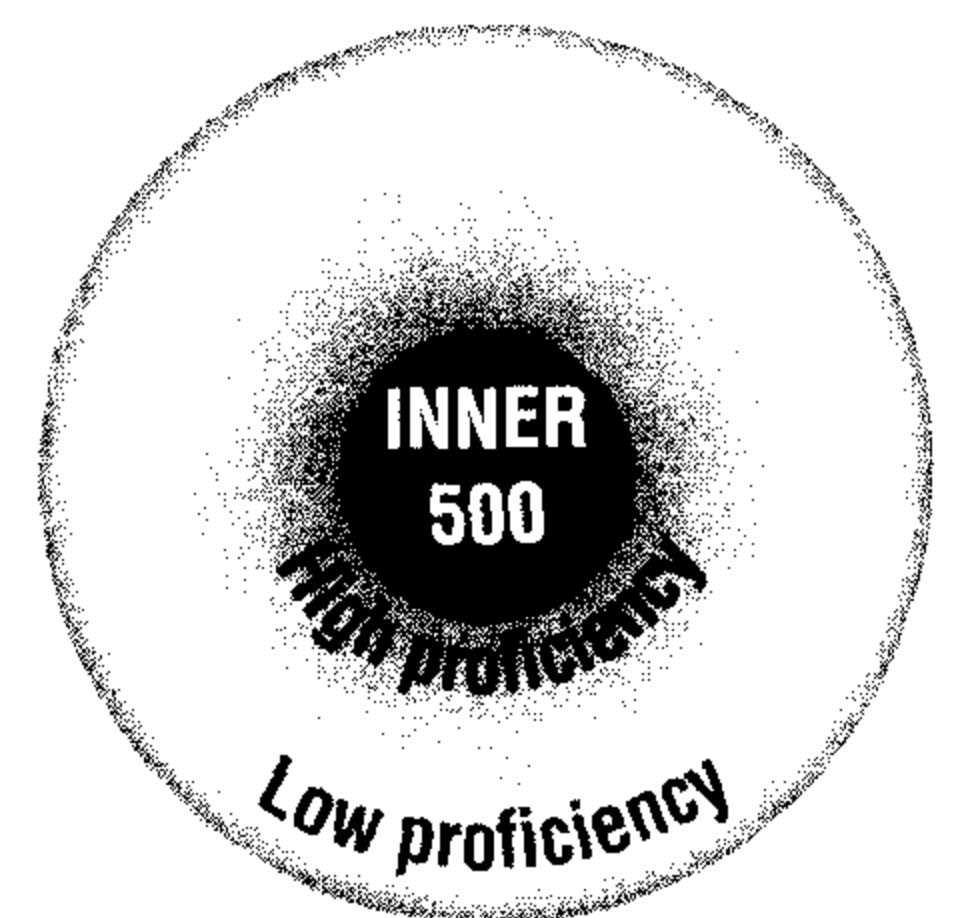

FIGURE 2: World English and English proficiency

A4 The future of English

We have noted that English is spoken by at least a quarter of the world's population. It is important, too, to realise that this means it is *not* spoken by three quarters of that same population. However, it is clear from the way its use has grown in the last decade that this situation is about to change. But by how much?

In 1997 David Graddol considered a number of future possibilities, all of which questioned the certainty of English as the number one world language. He pointed out, for example, that the fastest-growing language community in the USA was (and is) Hispanic. Taken together with the trade agreements which are springing up in both the North and South American continents, it is highly possible that in the foreseeable future the entire American continent will be an English-Spanish bilingual zone. He also suggested that other languages such as Mandarin, Hindu and Arabic would gain in status and importance as their geopolitical and economic power increased – something that is increasingly visible, especially in the case of China. It is still too early to say whether those predictions were right, but he now suggests that there will be about 3 billion English speakers by the year 2040. He thinks it doubtful 'that more than 40% of the global population would ever become functional users of English' (Graddol 2006: 107).

And what of the Internet, the means of e-commerce transmission? In 1999 the company Computer Economics (www.computereconomics.com) said that the proportion of first-language English-speaker users to speakers of other languages was 54%:46%, but that by 2005 that balance would change to 43%:57% – in other words, the number of other-language users would rise sharply. At the time of writing, Global Reach (http://global-reach.biz/globstats/index.php3) estimates that this figure has shifted to 35.8%:64.2%. This does not mean that there is a corresponding breakdown of languages actually used on the Internet – and indeed one of the biggest search engines, Google, only currently lists 35 different language options. However, things are changing and whereas it used to be the case that almost all websites seemed to be in English, nowadays there is an increasing amount of information offered in other languages, too.

What we think we know, then, is that English will grow, but is unlikely to have the catastrophic effect Crystal worried about (see page 16). It faces challengers from other big language groups, and the exponential growth of the IT community may not necessarily favour English in the same way that English dominated the virtual world in its early days.

However, what we do know is that because native speakers are becoming less and less 'powerful' in the daily use of the language, we will have to adjust the way in which both native and non-native speaker experts have traditionally thought about learning and teaching English around the world.

B EFL, ESL, ESOL & ELF

English teaching, like many other professions and disciplines, is almost overwhelmed by acronyms and initials. For example, we talk about *ESP* (English for Specific Purposes – English for specialities such as nursing or paper technology or banking) to differentiate it from general English (English taught in most schools and private language institutes). We use *EAP* (English for Academic Purposes) to describe courses and materials designed specifically to help people who want to use their English in academic contexts.

For many years, scholars and teachers have made a distinction between *EFL* (English as a Foreign Language) and *ESL* (English as a Second Language). EFL described situations where students were learning English in order to use it with any other English speakers in the world – when the students might be tourists or business people. Students often studied EFL in their own country, or sometimes on short courses in Britain, the USA, Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, etc. ESL students, on the other hand, were described as usually living in a target-language community (e.g. Britain, the USA, etc.) and needed the target language (English) in order to survive and prosper in that community, doing such things as renting apartments, accessing the local health service, etc. It follows from this separation that the language studied in EFL lessons will be different from the language which ESL students concentrate on.

The distinction has become difficult to sustain, however, for two reasons. Firstly, many communities – whether in English- or non-English-speaking countries – are now multilingual, and English is a language of communication. Does that make it a foreign or a second language? Secondly, however, many students of EFL use English in a global context, as we have seen. Using English for international communication, especially on the Internet, means that our students are in fact part of a global target-language community (the target language being

not British or American English, but, as we have seen, some form of World English). With the picture shifting like this, it makes sense to blur the distinction and say, instead, that whatever situation we are in, we are teaching *ESOL* (English to Speakers of Other Languages). This does not mean we should ignore the context in which language-learning takes place, but it does reflect a more multilingual global reality.

Recently a new term, *ELF* (English as a Lingua Franca), has become a focus for much discussion and it is to ELF that we will now turn.

B1 English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

The reality of Global or World English(es) has caused some people to become very interested in what actually happens when it is used as a lingua franca – that is between two people who do not share the same language and for whom English is not their mother tongue. A number of researchers have studied such conversations. In particular, Barbara Seidlhofer at the University of Vienna has noted a number of somewhat surprising characteristics, including:

- Non-use of third person present simple tense -s (*She look very sad*)

- Interchangeable use of the relative pronouns *who* and *which* (*a book who, a person which*)

- Omission of definite and indefinite articles where they are obligatory in native-speaker English, and insertion where they do not occur in native English

- Use of an all-purpose tag question such as *isn't it?* Or *no?* instead of *shouldn't they?* (*They should arrive soon, isn't it?*)

- Increasing of redundancy by adding prepositions (*We have to study about ...* and *Can we discuss about ...?*), or by increasing explicitness (*black colour* versus *black* and *How long time?* versus *How long?*)

- Heavy reliance on certain verbs of high semantic generality, such as *do, have, make, put, take*

- Pluralisation of nouns which are considered uncountable in native-speaker English (*informations, staffs, advices*)

- Use of *that* clauses instead of infinitive constructions (*I want that we discuss about my dissertation*)

Seidlhofer (2004: 220)

Something interesting is happening here. Whereas, as Jennifer Jenkins points out, '... the belief in native-speaker ownership persists among both native and non-native speakers' (Jenkins 2006a: 171), the evidence suggests that non-native speakers are not conforming to a native English standard. Indeed they seem to get along perfectly well despite the fact that they miss things out and put things in which they 'should not do'. Not only this, but they are actually better at 'accommodating' – that is negotiating shared meaning through helping each other in a more cooperative way – than, it is suggested, native speakers are when talking to second language speakers (Jenkins 2004). In other words – and as if to back up Rajagopalan's comments – non-native speakers seem to be better at ELF communication than native speakers are.

We said above that ELF speakers were doing things which they 'should not do'. But, argues Jennifer Jenkins, the evidence suggests that on the contrary, these 'expert' speakers (because

they are successful communicators) have just as much right to say what is correct as native speakers do. Jenkins discusses 'the need to abandon the native speaker as the yardstick and to establish empirically some other means of defining an expert (and less expert) speaker of English, regardless of whether they happen to be a native or non-native speaker' (2006a: 175). The traditional 'gatekeepers' of English (inner circle teachers, publishers and testing organisations) may have to think again, in other words, and it is only a short step from this realisation to the suggestion that – knowing what we now know about ELF – we should start to think again about what kind of English to teach.

B2 Teaching English in the age of ELF

For Jennifer Jenkins, the evidence of ELF suggests that we should change what we teach. Instead of conforming to a native standard such as British English, learners 'need to learn not (a variety of) English, but about Englishes, their similarities and differences, issues involved in intelligibility, the strong links between language and identity, and so on' (2006a: 173). Elsewhere (Jenkins 2004: 40) she has wondered whether or not we should cease to correct developing language in the classroom and concentrate instead on helping students to accommodate more. Because in her research she has noticed that some allophonic variation is not evident in ELF conversations (e.g. ELF speakers do not differentiate between strong and weak forms; they substitute voiced and voiceless 'th' with /t/, /s/ and /d/ – *think* becomes *sink* or *tink*), she suggests only concentrating on core phonology. And finally, she suggests that in lexis teaching we should 'avoid idiomatic usage' – because ELF speakers don't use idioms.

Not everyone would be happy with these suggestions. In particular, Ivor Timmis worries that students, for whatever reason, often want to conform to native-speaker norms while teachers, on the contrary, seem to be moving away from such a position. He is clear that we should not foist native-speaker norms on students who neither want nor need them, but 'it is scarcely more appropriate to offer students a target which manifestly does not meet their aspirations' (Timmis 2002: 249).

Vicky Kuo (2006) argues strongly against the view that native speakers are irrelevant or that native-speaker varieties have little prestige. She thinks that ELF applied linguists are erroneously suggesting that 'what is needed for comprehension is all that is needed to be produced.' (2006: 216). She points out that there is more to language use than 'mere international intelligibility'. She says that the phenomenon that people are making use of their imperfect L2 repertoire to communicate more or less effectively 'is interesting and revealing', but doesn't necessarily have any implications for teaching. Based on responses from students in her doctoral research, she suggests that while a degree of inaccuracy may be tolerated in communication, it does not constitute an appropriate model for learning purposes, especially in a highly competitive world where accuracy and linguistic creativity not only in speech, but also in reading and writing (especially in the domain of e-commerce) may contribute towards success. All this leads her to defend a native-speaker variety as an 'appropriate pedagogical model' (2006: 219).

B3 Native speaker varieties and other Englishes

When Vicky Kuo defends the appropriacy of a native-speaker variety, we might want to ask her if she has any preference for which one – or indeed if it matters which variety she or her students would choose. This is not an idle question, since different varieties exhibit different

grammar, lexis and pronunciation. This is borne out if we look at the two most analysed varieties of inner circle English: British and American English. In Oscar Wilde's 1887 play *The Canterville Ghost,* one of the British characters says, 'We have really everything in common with America nowadays except, of course, language.'

The differences between British and American English are well documented. For example, British English speakers regularly use the phrase *have got* in utterances such as *I've got a book about it* or *Have you got the time?* when American English speakers are more likely to say *I have a book* and *Do you have the time?* While British speakers in conversation make use of the present perfect in questions such as *Have you read her latest article yet?* an American English speaker might well say *Did you read her latest article yet?* and there are many differences in vocabulary use (*lift/elevator, flat/apartment, trousers/pants*), pronunciation (/lɔː/ – *law* (British English) versus /lɔ/ (American English), ad*ver*tisement (British English) versus adver*tise*ment (American English)) and even spelling (*analyse/analyze, colour/color*).

But there is a danger in calling a variety by the name of a country, since in so doing we fail to take account of regional variety. If we consider 'British English', for example, it only takes a moment's thought to realise that there are many varieties of English within the British Isles, each with its own vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. While a Londoner might get a *take-away* meal to eat at home, a Scottish person will order a *carry-out.* While an East-end Londoner might talk about having a '*barf* (/baːf/), a Yorkshireman talks about a *bath* (/bæθ/).

In addition to geography, factors such as social class, ethnic grouping and sex affect the language being used and influence the way in which listeners judge speakers. Until comparatively recently in Britain, it was customary for people to talk about 'BBC English' to describe an accent which derived from the 'received pronunciation' (RP) recorded by the phonetician Daniel Jones in the first half of the twentieth century, and which was considered a sign of status. In Britain, while some accents are admired (such as 'BBC English' and some Scottish varieties), others (such as the 'Birmingham' accent) are still seen by many as less attractive. Though it is true that such attitudes diminished towards the end of the twentieth century – and some accents, such as 'Cockney' and 'Geordie' became widely admired, particularly in broadcast media – it is still the case that many British people ascribe status, educational background and social position to a person largely on the basis of accent.

However, concentrating on British and American varieties of English ignores the many other inner circle varieties on offer, such as Canadian, Australian or Irish, all of which have their own special lexical, grammatical and phonological identities, and all of which have variations of their own. And, as we have made clear in this chapter, even these might seem irrelevant in a world where a number of World Englishes (such as Singaporean English, for example) are on offer as equal status varieties, and where ELF might be considered as a variety in its own right, too. We seem, therefore, to be in something of a fix. What is English for, after all, and what model should we choose to teach it with? Does the fact that something is observable (e.g. ELF behaviour) make it desirable? How important is correctness, and who is going to decide when something is or is not acceptable? Perhaps the answers to these questions will depend on where English is being taught, who the students are, and what they want it for.

B4 World English education

Around the world English is taught in a bewildering variety of situations. In many countries it first appears in the primary curriculum, but many universities in those and other countries

continue to find that their entrants are insufficiently competent in English use, even if, as David Graddol points out, good English is an entry requirement for much tertiary education in a global market where English gives the user a 'competitive advantage' (2006: 122). English is taught in private language schools and institutes all over the world, and even in specialised 'English villages' in countries such as Korea and Japan, where pupils live in English-only environments in specially constructed theme-park-like environments. A growing trend has been for Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), where, in secondary schools, a subject is taught through the medium of English. In other words, the students learn the language for mathematics at the same time as they learn the mathematics they are talking about in English. Rather than just teaching maths *in* English (a situation which is common in some bilingual schools), the language and the subject are taught side-by-side. In such situations students might well study another foreign language, too, since there will be no lessons which deal with English only as a foreign language.

We have already seen other situations where English is studied not just for some unspecified general purpose, but, for example, for academic purposes (EAP) or as English for business. Business English learning and teaching has grown enormously over the last 20 years, whether it takes place before students enter commercial life or during their life in the business world.

It is clear from this short summary that the old world of English language teaching is in transition, especially in terms of the language schools which have traditionally taught general English, and for whom many of the teacher exams, such as the CELTA and DELTA schemes run by the local examinations syndicate of Cambridge University, were developed. If CLIL becomes a standard model in secondary schools, for example, the demand for private 'top-up' learning may diminish. If students emerge from primary education with a good working command of English, they may be competent English speakers by the time they get to university level. In such situations language schools and institutes whether in inner circle countries or in other parts of the world (e.g. the Culturas and bi-national centres of Latin America or the worldwide federation of International House schools) may have to think more carefully about what they teach and what 'added value' (in Graddol's words) they can offer. But these are big 'ifs'; we will have to wait to see how things develop. In the meantime we will offer our students the kind of English (general, business, CLIL, etc.) which is most appropriate for their needs at the time.

But whatever kind of English it is, we cannot escape the need to decide on the variety or varieties which students are exposed to and learn. As we have seen, the choice seems to be between adopting one (perhaps native-speaker) variety, or, on the other hand, raising students' awareness or 'pluricentricity' so that they can adjust their speech 'in order to be intelligible to interlocutors from a wide range of L1 backgrounds, most of whom are not inner circle native speakers' (Jenkins 2006a: 174).

Inner circle varieties become noticeably inappropriate when, for example, students in the Far East or South America are taught particularly British idioms such as *I may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb* or learn the language for renting a flat in the south of England. But they are more convincing when students learn how they are constructed grammatically and lexically while, at the same time, avoiding their more obviously culture-specific manifestations. Australian, British and American English are still prestige varieties of the language, in other words. What this chapter has shown, however, is that they are not the only prestige varieties which all must aspire to. On the contrary, other World Englishes have equal

prestige and can serve as equally appropriate models for teaching. Indeed there may be good psychological reasons why a student actually wants to speak Singaporean English, with its distinctive pronunciation aspects and special lexical and grammatical patterning. Language, as we have said, is bound up with identity. Speaking English with a Singaporean, Argentinian or Turkish accent, for example, may make a clear statement about who the speaker is. On the other hand, as we have seen, some students want to gravitate towards a native-speaker model.

What seems to be the case, therefore, is that, especially for beginner students, a prestige variety of the language (whether from the inner circle or from anywhere else) will be an appropriate pedagogical model. The actual variety may depend on the wishes of the student, the variety the teacher herself uses, the learning materials that are on offer, or the school or education authority policy. Within that variety, it seems entirely appropriate to say what is and is not correct or acceptable so that students have something to aim at and some standard to judge their performance by. As they become more advanced, the variety's richness – including metaphor and idiom – should be offered for the students to absorb, provided that it is not too culture-specific. But at the same time, as Jennifer Jenkins has suggested, we need to expose our students to the reality of World English. As they become more advanced, our students should be made more and more aware of the different Englishes on offer. However, we will have to ensure that they are not swamped by diversity, but rather guided gently into an appreciation of the global phenomenon that is English.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Native speakers**
  On the dubiousness of the term *native speaker*, see M Rampton (1990).

- **Worldwide economy**
  On the use of English in a worldwide commercial setting, see D Graddol (2006: Section 2).

- **Language death**
  On language death, see D Crystal (2000). See also R Phillipson (2003) on his view of fighting an English-only policy in Europe.

- **Languages in London**
  On the diversity of languages in London, see a report from *The Independent* at www.phon. ucl.ac.uk/home/estuary/multiling.htm. On the top 40 languages, see the CILT website at www.cilt.org.uk/faqs/langspoken.htm. See also P Baker and J Everseley (eds) (2000) and R Salverda (2002) on multilingualism in London.

- **CLIL**
  For an account of the debate on CLIL, and articles by D Marsh, G Lang and D Graddol, see www.guardian.co.uk/guardianweekly/clildebate/0,,1469879,00.html.
  A good book on teaching for CLIL is S Deller and C Price (2007).

2 Describing the English language

A Language in use

The language we speak or write is governed by a number of rules, styles and constraints as the four examples on this page make clear. Quite apart from the meaning we wish to convey (in this case *Thank you for the invitation. I will come at eight o'clock*), we have to think about whether we are writing or speaking, texting or emailing. Whereas SMS or text messaging has developed into a sophisticated way of conveying messages in the shortest possible space (hence *thx 4 = thanks for*), more formal letters are written out in full (*Thank you very much for inviting me*). Whereas in letters we write *I will arrive ...*, in emails we will often use contracted forms (*i'll be at your place at 8*). Different email writers have their own conventions, too, such as *wbw* (= *with best wishes*), and, as our example shows, there is a greater tolerance in emails for mis-spellings and deviant punctuation (e.g. not using a capital *I* for *i'll*).

> Hey, thanks for the invite. I'll be round at 8, OK?

New message

Thx 4 invite. CU at 8. Jx

Reply Save Delete

msn.co.uk
msn Hotmail   Today   Mail
jeremypeter@hotmail.co.uk
Send | Save Draft | Attach | ! | Tools | Cancel

To: dfielding45@OKlineout.net
Cc:
Bcc:
Subject: Next Monday

Hi Dave,

Thanks for inviting me. i'll be at your place at 8.

Wbw

J

14 Ainworth Terrace, Camberton CB3 5PG
tel: 01223 222556   mobile: 07897 333465

April 10, 2007

Dear Mr Fielding,

Thank you very much for inviting me to dinner next Wednesday. I have great pleasure in accepting your invitation.

I will arrive at around eight o'clock.

Yours sincerely,

Jack Griffiths

Jack C Grittiths

In many ways, informal emails (and Internet chatting – see Chapter 11, I2) look quite a lot like speaking in the way messages are put together. We might well send an email saying *I'll be round at 8, OK?*, but though this would approximate speech, it would be without the sounds, stress and intonation which accompany the message (and tell the listener things such as how enthusiastic the speaker is). We will look at the sounds of speech in Section F below. And informal speech is both similar to and very different from more formal written language (as we shall see in Section H).

But whether language users are texting, emailing, speaking or letter-writing, they are making choices about the language they use based on what they want to say, what medium they are operating in, how texts are typically constructed in such situations, what grammar they can use and what words and expressions they can find to express their meanings. We will examine all these in turn.

B What we want to say

The linguist Peter Grundy reports the following conversation between himself ('me' in the extract) and a student at the University of Durham where he worked some years ago:

ME: *You're in a no-smoking zone.*
FEMALE STUDENT: *Am I?*
ME: *The whole building's a no-smoking zone.*
FEMALE STUDENT: (extinguishing cigarette) *Thanks very much.*
(Grundy 1995: 96)

We know what the words mean, of course, but why exactly did Peter Grundy give the student the information about the no-smoking zone? He clearly wasn't just offering information or passing the time. On the contrary, his purpose was to stop the student smoking. And what are we to make of the student's second utterance? Is she really thanking her lecturer for giving her information that she didn't have before? Or does her *Thanks very much* really mean *sorry*? Perhaps its purpose is to indicate to her lecturer that yes, she knows she was smoking in a no-smoking zone and since she's been 'caught', she has no option but to put out her cigarette?

Peter Grundy might have chosen different words for the purpose, especially if, instead of a student, he had found the dean, his boss, smoking in the corridor. Instead of stating, baldly, *You're in a no-smoking zone*, he might have said something like, *Umm, not sure if I should point this out or not, but this building is a no-smoking area* or maybe he would have employed a different formula of words altogether to get his point across.

The issue that faces us here is that the words we use and what they actually mean in the context we use them, are not the same thing at all. There is no one-to-one correspondence, in other words, between form and meaning.

B1 Form and meaning

Peter Grundy could have chosen a wide range of language forms to ask the student to stop smoking, e.g. *Could you put that cigarette out, please?*, *Stop smoking*, *Please extinguish your cigarette* or *If you want to smoke, you'd better go outside*. There are many different ways of saying the same thing.

This point is well exemplified by the different ways we have of expressing the future in English. Among the many alternatives on offer, we might say *I will arrive at eight o'clock* (a simple statement of fact), *I'm arriving at eight o'clock* (= that's the arrangement I have made), *I'm going to arrive at eight o'clock* (= that's my plan) or *I arrive at eight o'clock* (= that's the itinerary). Each of these constructions indicates futurity, but each means something slightly different, as we have shown.

If we take one of the grammatical constructions used to construct a future sentence, the

present continuous (*I'm arriving at eight o'clock*), another startling phenomenon becomes apparent. In our example, the statement refers to the future, but if we say *Look at John! He's laughing his head off at something*, the present continuous (sometimes called progressive) is referring not to the future, but to a temporary transient present reality. A third possible meaning of the present continuous is exemplified by a sentence such as *The problem with John is that he's always laughing when he should be serious*, which describes a habitual, not a temporary action. And we can even use the present continuous to make a story about the past more dramatic, e.g. *So I'm sitting there minding my own business when suddenly this guy comes up to me ... .*

As we shall see in E2, this same-form-different-meanings situation is surprisingly unproblematic for language users since the *context* (situation) and *co-text* (lexis and grammar which surround the form, such as *eight o'clock, Look at John*, etc.) usually resolve any ambiguity. Nevertheless, it makes decisions about what forms to teach, and what meanings to teach them with, a major factor in syllabus planning.

The choice of which future form to use from the examples above will depend not only on meaning, but what purpose we wish to achieve.

B2 Purpose

Many years ago, the philosopher J L Austin identified a series of verbs which he called 'performatives', that is verbs which do what those same words mean. Thus, if a speaker says *I promise*, the word *promise* itself performs the function of promising. If a celebrity says *I name this ship 'Ocean 3'*, the use of the verb *name* performs the function of naming.

The idea that language performs certain functions is not restricted to the kind of verbs Austin mentioned, however. We saw above how *This is a no-smoking zone* had the purpose of having the student put out her cigarette, just as a sentence like *It's cold in here* might, in certain circumstances, perform the function of a request to the other person in the room to close the window.

One major result of this interest in purpose was to lead linguists to propose a category of language functions such as inviting, apologising, offering and suggesting. Thus *Would you like to come for a coffee?* performs the function of inviting, whereas *I just can't accept that* performs the function of disagreeing, with the purpose of making your own opinion quite clear. *Why don't you try yoga?* performs the function of strongly suggesting, where the purpose is to provoke action, and *I'll do it if you want*, is clearly offering help, with the purpose of being helpful.

The study of functions and how they are realised in language, has had a profound effect upon the design of language teaching materials, making language purpose a major factor in the choice of syllabus items and teaching techniques.

B3 Appropriacy and register

A feature of language functions is that they do not just have one linguistic realisation; the following phrases, for example, show only some of the possible ways of inviting someone to the cinema:

> *Would you like to come to the cinema?*
> *How about coming to the cinema?*
> *D'you fancy the cinema?*
> *I was wondering if you might like to come to the cinema tonight?*

What about the cinema?
Are you on for the cinema?
Cinema?
There's a good film on at the cinema.
etc.

Thus, when we attempt to achieve a communicative purpose (such as getting someone to agree to an invitation), we have to choose which of these language forms to use. Which form, given our situation, is the most appropriate? The same is true, of course, in our choice of language in letters, emails and text messages.

Six of the variables which govern our choice are listed below:

- **Setting:** we speak differently in libraries from the way we do in night clubs. We often use informal and spontaneous language at home, whereas we may use more formal pre-planned speech in an office or work environment.

- **Participants:** the people involved in an exchange – whether in speech or writing – clearly affect the language being chosen. However egalitarian we may want to be, we often choose words and phrases in communication with superiors which are different from the words and phrases we use when talking to, writing to or texting our friends, members of our families or colleagues of equal status to us.

- **Gender:** research clearly shows that men and women typically use language differently when addressing either members of the same or the opposite sex. This is especially true of conversation. Women frequently use more concessive language than men, for example, and crucially, often talk less than men in mixed-sex conversations.

- **Channel:** there are marked differences between spoken and written language. But spoken language is not all the same: it is affected by the situation we are in. Are we speaking face to face or on the telephone? Are we speaking through a microphone to an unseen audience or standing up in a lecture hall in front of a crowd? The examples at the beginning of this chapter have shown how the writing channel (Internet, snailmail or SMS text) will also affect how we write.

- **Topic:** the topic we are addressing affects our lexical and grammatical choices. The words and phrases that we use when talking or writing about a wedding will be different from those we employ when the conversation turns to particle physics. The vocabulary of childbirth is different from the lexical phrases associated with football. The topic-based vocabulary we use is one of the features of *register* – the choices we make about what language to employ.

- **Tone:** another feature of the register in which something is said or written is its tone. This includes variables such as formality and informality, politeness and impoliteness. For example, sophisticated women's magazines may talk of *make-up*, but teenage magazines sometimes call it *slap*. Using high pitch and exaggerated pitch movement (intonation – see F2 below) is often more polite than a flat monotone when saying things such as *Can you repeat that?*

These, then, are some of the factors that influence our choice of language. When we have our students study the way language is used in speaking or writing, we will want to draw their attention

to such issues. We may ask why a speaker uses particular words or expressions in a specific situation. We may have our students prepare for a speaking activity by assembling the necessary topic words and phrases. We may discuss what sort of language is appropriate in an office situation when talking to a superior – and whether the sex of the superior makes any difference.

Language is a social construct as much as it is a mental ability. It is important for students to be just as aware of this in a foreign or second language as they are in their own.

C Language as text and discourse

We started this chapter with four examples of texts – that is collections of words, sentences and utterances (an utterance is a sentence, question, phrase, etc. in speech). Although, as we shall see, grammar and vocabulary are vital components of language (as are the sounds of English in spoken discourse), we also need to look at language at the level of text or discourse (that is texts which are longer than phrases or sentences).

C1 Discourse organisation

In order for collections of sentences or utterances to succeed effectively, the discourse needs to be organised or conducted in such a way that it will be successful. In written English this calls for both *coherence* and *cohesion*.

For a text to be coherent, it needs to be in the right order – or at least make sense. For example, if we take a paragraph from the book *Teacher Man* by Frank McCourt and put the sentences in the wrong order, the paragraph becomes incoherent:

> At the end I wondered how I lasted that long[1]. On the second day I was almost fired for mentioning the possibility of friendship with a sheep[2]. I often doubted if I should be there at all[3]. On the first day of my teaching career, I was almost fired for eating the sandwich of a high school boy[4]. Otherwise there was nothing remarkable about my thirty years in the high school classrooms of New York City[5].

But if we read the sentences in the order McCourt originally wrote them (4, 2, 5, 3, 1) the paragraph makes sense, and its internal logic – the coherent way the author sets out his thoughts – becomes clear.

However coherent a text is, however, it will not work unless it has internal cohesion. The elements in that text must cohere or stick to each other successfully to help us navigate our way around the stretch of discourse. One way of achieving this is through *lexical cohesion*, and a way of ensuring lexical cohesion is through the repetition of words and phrases (in the paragraph from *Teacher Man* above, *first day, second day/fired, fired/high school, high school*, etc.). We can also use interrelated words and meanings (or lexical set *chains*) to bind a text together (*teaching, boy, high school, classrooms* in the paragraph above).

Grammatical cohesion is achieved in a number of ways. One of the most common is the concept of *anaphoric reference*, where we use pronouns, for example, to refer back to things that have already been mentioned, as in the following example (where *his* refers back to Frank McCourt, and *it* refers back to his book *Angela's Ashes*):

> Frank McCourt first emerged on the literary scene with his book *Angela's Ashes*, a memoir of a childhood lived in poverty. It became an instant classic.

Another similar cohesive technique is that of *substitution*, using a phrase to refer to something we have already written. The last two sentences in the paragraph from *Teacher Man* above (when in the correct sequence) are *I often doubted if I should be there at all. At the end I wondered how I lasted that long.* In the first sentence, the word *there* refers back to (and substitutes for) *the high school classrooms of New York City*, mentioned in an earlier sentence, whereas *that long* refers back to *thirty years* which occurred earlier on.

Grammatical cohesion is also achieved by tense agreement since if the writer is constantly changing tense, it will make the text difficult to follow. Writers also use linkers, such as *and, also, moreover* (for addition), *however, on the other hand, but* (for contrast) or *first, then, later* (for time).

These features are also present in spoken language, which also shows many examples of *ellipsis* (where words from a written-grammar version of an utterance are missed out without compromising the meaning of what is being said). The following two lines, for example, were spoken in a British pub:

A: *Another round?*
B: *Might as well.*

Another round? is probably an elliptical version of the question *Shall we have another round?* (a *round* is an order of drinks for everyone in the group), and *Might as well* is an elliptical version of the sentence *We might as well have another round.*

For conversational discourse to be successful, participants have to know how to organise the events in it. They need to know, for example, how and when to take turns – that is when to interrupt, when to show they want to continue speaking, or when they are happy to 'give the floor' to someone else. In order to do this successfully, they need to be able to use discourse markers effectively. These are the spoken equivalent of the linkers we discussed previously. Thus phrases such as *anyway, moving on* and *right* are ways of beginning a new thread of the discussion (or sometimes of closing one down); *d'you know what I mean? OK?* and *Right?* are ways of encouraging a listener's agreement and *yeah, but* and *OK* (said with doubtful intonation) are ways of indicating doubt or disagreement.

Finally, in order for conversations to proceed successfully, we need to be sure that participants are 'playing the game according to the same rules' (Thornbury 2005a: 17). Thus, for example, if speaker A asks a question, he or she expects speaker B to give an answer. This example of cooperation is at the heart of the *cooperative principle* (Grice 1975) which states that speakers should (1) make their contribution as informative as required, (2) make their contribution true, (3) make their contribution relevant, and (4) avoid obscurity and ambiguity – and be brief and orderly. Of course, these characteristics are not always present, and, as Scott Thornbury points out, we frequently excuse ourselves for disobeying these maxims with phrases such as *At the risk of simplifying things,* or *I may be wrong, but I think* ... (Thornbury 2005a: 18).

One other factor in successful spoken discourse is the way speakers use intonation. We will discuss this in F2 below.

C2 Genre

One of the reasons we can communicate successfully, especially in writing, is because we have some understanding of *genre*. One way of describing this – and one much favoured by

people who teach ESP (see Chapter 1B) – is to say that a genre is a type of written organisation and layout (such as an advertisement, a letter, a poem, a magazine article, etc.) which will be instantly recognised for what it is by members of a *discourse community* – that is any group of people who share the same language customs and norms.

Within the genre of advertising, however, there are many variations. The following extracts are all advertisements, but they all represent different sub-genres of advertisements.

> **Academic Director**
> **ILA VIETNAM**
> **ilavietnam** Asia & Australasia
> Responsible for day to day academic management
> of a new training centre.

ADVERTISEMENT 1: online job advertisement

> **The Life of Galileo**
> New version, by David Hare, of Bertold Brecht's powerful drama that looks at the conflict between faith and reason. Directed by Howard Davies.
>
> *National Theatre: Olivier, South Bank, SE1 (020-7452-3000) Sat & Mon–Wed 7.30pm, mats Sat & Wed 2pm to Oct 31, £10, £27.50. concs available*

ADVERTISEMENT 2: theatre listing

> **Attractive and humorous**, affectionate black F, 47, WLTM charming warm-hearted, open-minded M. GSOH, 42–57, any ethnic background. Ldn. Call 01730 8829741

ADVERTISEMENT 3: soulmates

However, despite their obvious differences, the advertisements all share the same basic characteristic, which is that they are written in such a way that the discourse community will know instantly exactly what they are and what they mean. Jobseekers in TEFL (the intended readership for advertisement 1) instantly recognise the meaning (and position within the advertisement) of *academic director*, and have no trouble deciphering *responsible for day to day academic management*. The British theatre-going public (a discourse community in its own right) knows that *The Life of Galileo* advertisement is a theatre listing saying when the play is on, where and how much it costs. They know that because they have seen many such listings before. This genre familiarity helps them to understand *mats* (= *matinees*) and *concs* (= *concessions*, i.e. cheaper tickets for students, the elderly, etc.). Finally, the readers of 'lonely hearts' advertisements will all understand the soulmates advertisement because that discourse community (people looking for love) know the norms and discourse patterns of such written advertisements (adjective(s) + noun → WLTM/seeks/is looking for → adjective(s) + noun + post-modification (→ for fun/companionship/long-term relationship)). And once again, it is familiarity which helps them to understand *WLTM* (*would like to meet*) and *GSOH* (*good sense of humour*), both typical abbreviations in this sub-genre.

Other experts prefer to see genre as a staged, goal-oriented social process rather than a description of text forms. A 'new rhetoric' view, on the other hand (Hyland 2002: 17), seeks to establish the connections between genre and repeated situations and to identify the way in which genres are seen as recurrent rhetorical actions. But however genre is described, the fact remains that textual success often depends on the familiarity of text forms for writers and

readers of the discourse community, however small or large that community might be. And so, when we teach students how to write letters, send emails or make oral presentations, for example, we will want them to be aware of the genre norms and constraints which are involved in these events. However, we need to make sure that we are not promoting straightforward imitation, but rather making students aware of possibilities and opportunities. One way of doing this is to show them a variety of texts within a genre rather than asking for slavish imitation of just one type. We will return to this issue in Chapter 19.

Whatever text we are constructing or co-constructing (as in a conversation, for example, where speakers together make the conversation work), the sentences and utterances we use are a combination of grammar, morphology, lexis and, in the case of speaking, sounds, and it is to these elements of language that we will now turn.

D Grammar

The sentence *I will arrive at around eight o'clock* that we saw on page 25 depended for its success on the fact that the words were in the right order. We could not say, for example **I arrive will at eight o'clock around* (* denotes an incorrect utterance) because auxiliary verbs (e.g. *will*) always come before main verbs (e.g. *arrive*) in affirmative sentences. Nor can the modifying adverb *around* come after the time adverbial since its correct position is before it. There is a system of rules, in other words, which says what can come before what and which order different elements can go in. We call this system *syntax*.

Grammar is not just concerned with syntax, however. The way words are formed – and can change their form in order to express different meanings – is also at the heart of grammatical knowledge. Thus, for example, we can modify the form *arrive* by adding *-d* to make *arrived*, so that the verb now refers to the past. If we replace *e* with *-ing* to make the form *arriving*, the verb now indicates continuity. We call the study of this kind of word formation *morphology*. Speakers of a language have a good knowledge of morphology, for if they did not, they would not be able to say *I arrive*, but then change this to *he arrives*. They would not be able to use the different forms of the verb *take* (*take, took, taken*) without such knowledge, or be able to manipulate a word such as *happy* (adjective) so that it becomes an adverb (*happily*), a noun (*happiness*), or has an opposite meaning (*unhappy*).

Grammar can thus be partly seen as a knowledge of what words can go where and what form these words should take. Studying grammar means knowing how different grammatical elements can be strung together to make chains of words. The following diagram shows how the same order of elements can be followed even if we change the actual words used and alter their morphology.

I	will		at	around	eight o'clock.
They	didn't	arrive	until		last Tuesday.
She	is	arriving	in	exactly	two hours.

D1 Choosing words

In order to fill the cells in the table above (i.e. string the grammatical elements together

appropriately), we need to know which words (or forms of words) can be put in those cells. For example, in the last line we couldn't put a noun in cell number 2 (*She nothing arriving*) and we couldn't put an adjective in the last cell (*in exactly happy*). They just don't fit. As a result, we choose words that are allowable. And this will often depend on the words themselves. For example, we class some nouns as *countable* (that is they can have a plural form – *chair, chairs*), but others as *uncountable* (that is they cannot be pluralised; we cannot say *furnitures*). This means that in the grammar chain *The _____ are very modern*, we can fill the blank with *chairs* but not with *furniture*. Put another way, this means that if we use the word *furniture*, we know it will be followed by a singular verb, but if we use the words *chairs*, we have to choose a plural verb form.

A similar situation occurs with verbs which are either *transitive* (they take an object), *intransitive* (they don't take an object) or both. The verb *herd* (e.g. *to herd sheep*) is a transitive verb. It always takes an object. The verb *open*, on the other hand, can be either transitive or intransitive. The dentist says *Open your mouth* (transitive), but we can also say *The dentist's surgery opens at eight o'clock* (intransitive).

Verbs are good examples, too, of the way in which words can trigger the grammatical behaviour of words around them. The verb *like* triggers the use of either the *-ing* form in verbs which follow it (*I like listening to music*) or the use of *to* + the infinitive (*I like to listen to music*), but in British English *like* cannot be followed by *that* + a sentence (we can't say *She likes that she sails*). The verb *tell* triggers the use of a direct object and, if there is a following verb, the construction *to* + infinitive (*She told me to arrive on time*), whereas *say* triggers *that* + a clause construction (*She said that I should arrive on time*).

When we construct sentences, therefore, we are constantly making choices about, for example, singular or plural, countable or uncountable, present or past, transitive or intransitive, and about exactly what words we want to use (e.g. *like, enjoy, say* or *tell*). Grammar 'is concerned with the implication of such choices' (Carter and McCarthy 2006: 4).

As far as possible, students need to understand at some level (consciously or unconsciously) what these implications are. They need to be aware of rules. The problems arise, however, when rules are complex and difficult to perceive. The fact that third person singular verbs in the present simple take an *s* in most varieties (e.g. *he plays the guitar; she sails ocean-going yachts*) is a straightforward concept which is easy to explain and easy to understand, but other rules are far less clear. Perhaps our greatest responsibility, therefore, is to help students develop their language awareness, that is their ability to spot grammatical patterns and behaviour for themselves (see Chapter 3C).

E Lexis

In this section we will look at what is known about lexis (the technical name for the vocabulary of a language) thanks, in part, to the computerised analysis of language data. Armed with that knowledge, we will discuss word meaning, how words extend through metaphor and idiom, and how they combine to form collocations and the longer lexical phrases which are a major feature of any language.

E1 Language corpora

One of the reasons we are now able to make statements about vocabulary with considerably

more confidence than before is because lexicographers and other researchers are able to analyse large banks of language data stored on computers. From a *corpus* of millions of words (made up of novels, scientific articles, plays, newspapers, brochures, speeches, recorded conversations, etc. stored on computers) quick accurate information can be accessed about how often words are used and in what linguistic contexts. We can find out what other words are commonly used with the word we are interested in, and we can also state, with some confidence, how frequently words are used in the language. This is a huge advance on, say, the pioneering work of Michael West (see West 1953) who tried to get the same kind of information through manual sweat and toil and a card index. It was impossible for him and his researchers to achieve even a fraction of what computers can now tell us.

Users of computer corpora can get a *concordance* for words they are looking for. A concordance is a selection of lines from the various texts in the corpus showing the search word in use. Here for example, is a 20-line concordance for the word *asleep* in written English:

```
1    box, would you? It would be just  like being  asleep in a box. Not that I'd like to sleep in a box
2    hus to evade the guards who are wont to fall   asleep at that  time!"   Alianor looked uneasy. "Ca
3    erations but those of perspective, are  fast  asleep on ground as bare and brown as an end of the
4    ssed up like a chicken  for roasting. I fell  asleep again till the time for the evening  feed. Ye
5    w miles further on, the eleven-year-old fell  asleep in his  saddle and Gloucester, unwilling to c
6     Porter's room. Inside, the Porter was half   asleep behind a newspaper.   There were a great man
7    "  His brother made no reply, seeming half    asleep in his saddle and  lagging behind. Edward dre
8     such a  late hour, with the two guards half  asleep in the guardchamber on  the ground floor.
9    I'd probably be quicker only I'm  still half  asleep! I wash my hair and leave it to dry naturally
10   upon her neck. He lies down. She, seeing him  asleep,  leaves him.)   GUIL: What is the dumbshow
11   en from the farm, they  found Bobbie and Jim  asleep.   The men carried Jim on a piece of flat wo
12   the cat was undisturbed by the gulls. It lay  asleep on a  piece of sacking the gardener had disca
13   thing  as small as a potato. I was probably   asleep when the robot  teacher told me the answer to
14   . I suddenly  felt very tired and I was soon  asleep.   I woke up feeling better. I wasn't hot in
15   e!" wailed the woman. "My  husband was sound  asleep with his mouth wide open when the cat  ran in
16   on the rush-strewn floor. Prince Richard was  asleep beside her, his head on his mother's lap, he
17   ter the wolf would be cut open while she was  asleep, filled up  with heavy stones once the little
18   alaxy!   An animal is destroyed    Buff was   asleep. I told the spaceship to take us to New Earth
19   o look for them at eight o'clock, they were   asleep in the sun.   "I've found another room," Mot
20   ervant, Miles, to watch it  whilst they were  asleep, under the instruction that they should  be w
```

FIGURE 1: Twenty-line concordance for *asleep* from the British National Corpus (written), generated by the Compleat Lexical tutor (www.lextutor.ca)

Twenty lines is just a small sample of the many occurrences of *asleep* found in the written corpus. But even with such a small sample, some things are instantly clear – partly because the computer was asked to provide the lines in alphabetical order of the words immediately to the left of *asleep*. Thus we can see that in writing it seems that *fall asleep, half asleep* and *was/were asleep* are very common word combinations.

The Compleat Lexical Tutor (a free concordance program) allows us to look, as well, at how *asleep* is used in speaking.

```
1    ere asleep when I went down.    She's always  asleep!   No. She don't sleep at night.   That's i
2    p at night.    That's it! I mean, she'd been  asleep   What?   Well it were two o'clock when I
3    is time of year really, quite he's not  even  asleep up there   not pigs   you gonna watch erm J
4    ou know he was that shattered he was falling  asleep  downstairs before I put him in his cot, so i
5    d till next morning when they were all fast   asleep you know and   mm    didn't go to bed about
6    re doing the cars and he  had blokes    fast  asleep  fast asleep in sleeping bags   yeah    in
7    rs and he  had blokes    fast asleep  fast    asleep in sleeping bags   yeah    in corners   yea
8    r  and me and Russell were still in bed fast  asleep. I mean we'd  been up    Did they knock you
9    When?   I drunk a bottle of wine and fell    asleep after the match.   Where was ?   He was sle
10   they were going up  for the cup and she fell  asleep, well you know with the wine in  you, here wa
11   before we  came out   Oh I   I'll be half    asleep all afternoon   What is it    Spanish?   Do
12   they tell their da.   Do they? That you're    asleep.   And then you know the way your he head go
13   ted the curtains out and   Mm.   once he's    asleep that's it   Yeah.   and I think it's just g
14   id eh can you turn this music down, my kid's  asleep, oh  right, oh and he went and turned it down
15   nk you're go you're tomorrow after ten ?      asleep by his side Erm how's he affording to go too?
16   u find someone else who  wants it.    I was   asleep in bed. I had to get up a    I said that's t
17   gather as soon as Paul gets in I think I was  asleep.   He's like that aren't you? He's    Yeah
18   ey we came into  the house when everyone was  asleep. That would freak me out so  much, you just w
19   that from?   Tracy. Cos she thinks she was   asleep. What, when I went down for  , so I called ba
20   her then.   Who, Kia?   Yeah.   She were    asleep when I went down.   She's always asleep!
```

FIGURE 2: Twenty-line concordance for *asleep* from the British National Corpus (spoken), generated by the Compleat Lexical tutor (www.lextutor.ca)

It becomes clear immediately that *fast asleep* is a more common word combination in speaking than in writing, but that the other combinations we noticed in writing also occur in speech.

Lexicographers work with considerably more complex concordance information than this, of course, but the principle is the same, and it allows them to provide dictionary entries which not only give definitions, but also list frequently occurring combinations (*collocations*), and say how common words are. In the dictionary entry for *asleep* (Figure 3) we see that it is one of the 2,000 most common words in speech [S2], but that it falls outside the 3,000 most common words in written English (because no frequency information is given for writing [W]).
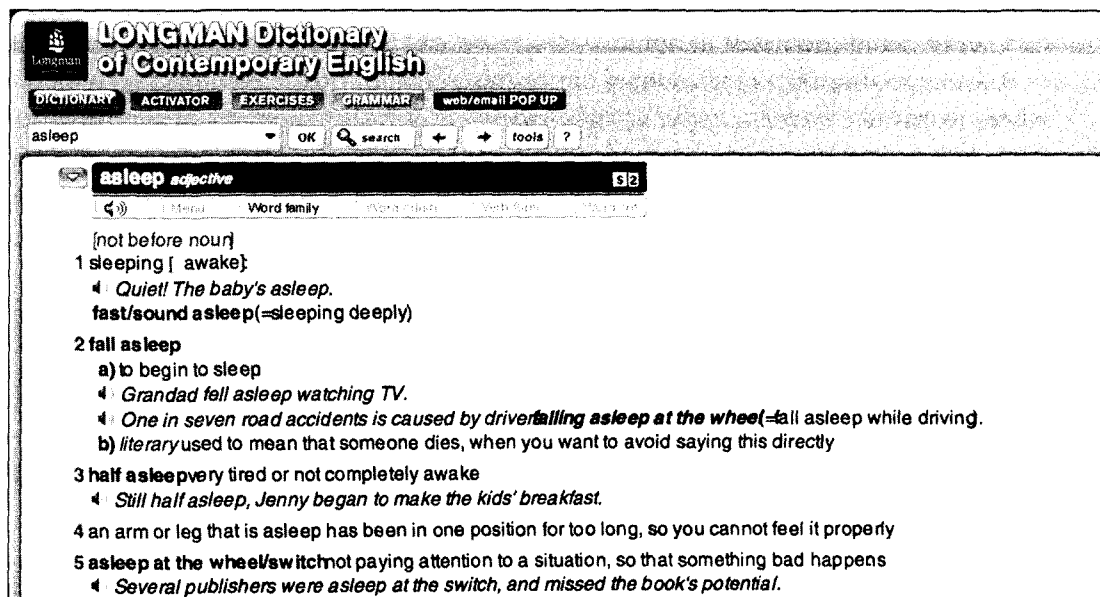

FIGURE 3: Entry for *asleep* from the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (CD-ROM version)

E2 Word meaning

The least problematic issue of vocabulary, it would seem, is meaning. We know that *table* means a thing with three or four legs which we can write on and eat off and that *book* is a collection of words between covers. But of course the situation is more complicated than this. Both words have many different meanings, quite apart from those already mentioned. We can eat off a *table*, or we can *table* a motion at a conference. We can summarise information in a *table*, too. Then again, when we have read our *book*, we can ring up a restaurant and *book* a table, but if we drive too fast on the way, we might be *booked* for speeding. Some people have been keeping a *book* on whether we will keep our job because everyone knows we've been cooking the *books* for years. The point is that the same collection of sounds and letters can have many different meanings. As with multi-meaning grammatical forms (see B1), this *polysemy* is only resolved when we see the word in context. It is understanding the meaning in context that allows us to say which meaning of the word is being used in this particular instance.

What a word means is often defined by its relationship to other words. For example, we explain the meaning of *full* by saying that it is the opposite of *empty*; we understand that *cheap* is the opposite of *expensive*. Such *antonyms* reinforce the meaning of each word in

the pair, though of course because a word can be polysemous it may have more than one antonym (e.g. *a rich person – a poor person, rich food – plain food*, etc.).

Words can also have *synonyms* that mean exactly or nearly the same as each other. We say that *bad* and *evil* are synonymous, as are *good* and *decent* in certain situations, such as *She's a good/decent pianist*. Once again, much will depend on the context in which the words appear. Yet in truth it is very difficult to find real synonyms. *Costly* and *expensive* might seem on the surface to mean the same, yet they are subtly different: we tend to use the former about larger projects and larger amounts, while *expensive* has a broader range of use. We would be unlikely to say *That pen you've got there looks very costly*, but *The new building programme is proving very costly* sounds perfectly all right.

Another relationship which defines the meaning of words to each other is that of *hyponymy*, where words like *banana, apple, orange, lemon*, etc. are all hyponyms of the superordinate *fruit*. And *fruit* itself is a hyponym of other items which are members of the food family. We can express this relationship in the following diagram.
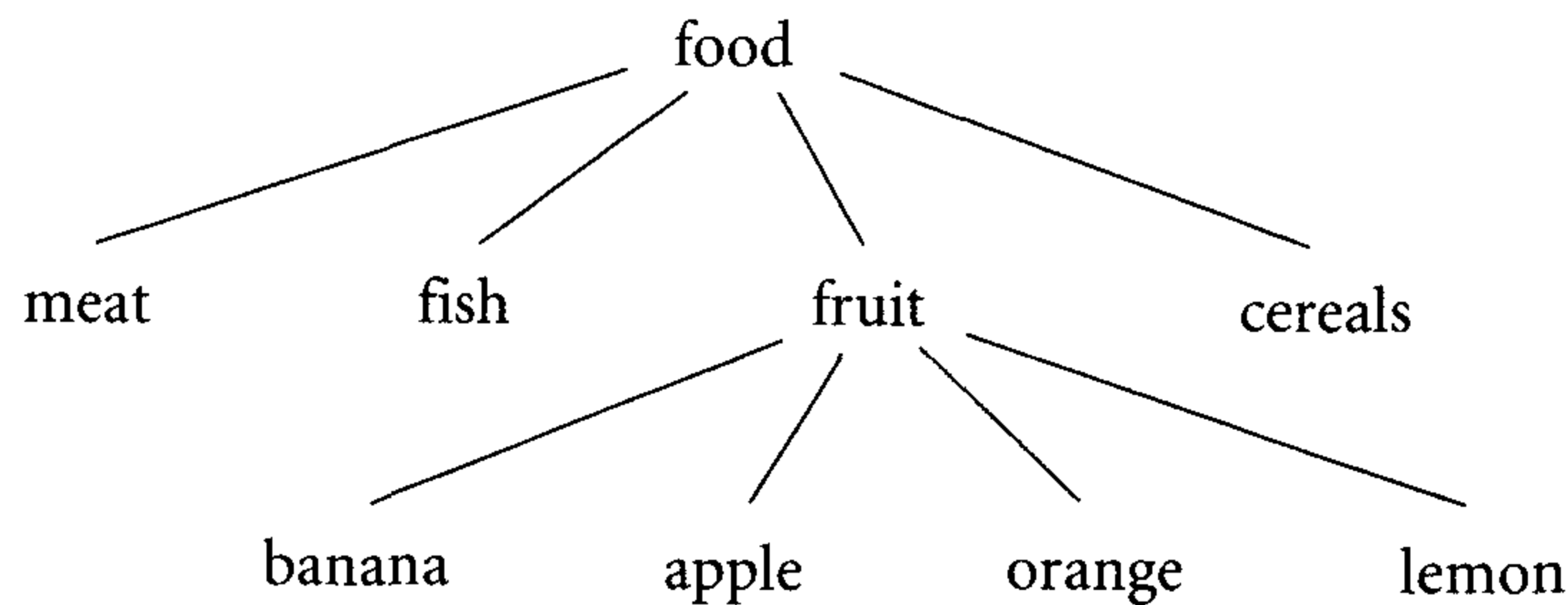

FIGURE 4: Hyponyms and superordinates

Part of a word's meaning, therefore, concerns its relations with other words, not only in terms of antonymy and synonymy, but also in terms of how it fits into the vocabulary hierarchy.

One final point should be made about word meaning, namely that what a word means is not necessarily the same as what it suggests – or rather that words have different *connotations*, often depending on the context they occur in. Thus the word *chubby* has a very positive connotation when it is combined with *baby*, but it suddenly becomes somewhat negative in tone if it is combined with *middle-aged English teacher*! And what about a sentence like *He's really smart*, where *smart* would seem to have a positive connotation of intelligence yet could be interpreted as suggesting the man is somewhat devious or self-seeking.

E3 Extending word use

Words do not just have different meanings, however. They can also be stretched and twisted to fit different contexts and different uses. We say that someone is *in a black mood* (very cross) or someone is *green* (naïve), yet we are not actually describing a colour. In such contexts *black* and *green* mean something else.

There are many examples of how the literal meaning of words can be extended. We say, for example, that *the price of mangoes went up* but *went up* here cannot mean the same as it does in *she went up the stairs*. When we say that *prices have taken a dramatic tumble*, how are we to explain the meanings of *dramatic* and *tumble*?

Such *metaphorical* use of words allows us to move beyond their purely *denotational* use (where a word only describes a thing, rather than the feelings or ideas it suggests). It helps us

extend our range of expression and interpretation, allowing us the opportunity to explain our feelings about things in a way that creates readily available images. Poets use such metaphors all the time, of course. Consider, for example, these lines:

> The wind clawed through the shrunken trees
> And scratched and bit and roared with rage.

Some metaphors become fixed into phrases which competent speakers recognise at once, even though the meaning of the phrase is not decipherable from any understanding of the individual words. We all know that *She kicked the bucket* means she died and that *He has bitten off more than he can chew* means that he has attempted something that is too difficult for him. If someone says *I've got him eating out of my hand*, we understand the metaphor, but it is not original; it is a common expression, an accepted *idiom*.

The metaphorical and idiomatic use of words and phrases is not always popular, however, as the following example shows. For some years it became commonplace for people to describe someone who had suffered a disappointment as being *as sick as a parrot*, and this idiomatic expression became so widely used that it began to irritate everybody, except, perhaps, when used ironically. *As sick as a parrot* had become a *cliché*, what Crystal calls a 'lexical zombie' (Crystal 2003b: 186). *Money doesn't grow on trees, you know* qualifies as a cliché, too, so does the phrase *to add insult to injury*.

However, a cliché is not necessarily strongly metaphorical all the time as the following two lines of dialogue from a recent radio soap opera episode show:

> EX-LOVER: *I never meant to hurt you.*
> JILTED LOVER: *Oh please, Richard, not that tired old cliché.*

E4 Word combinations

Although words can appear as single items which are combined in a sentence (*She was asleep*), we have seen (E1) that they can also occur in two-or-more item groups (*She was **half asleep** all through dinner, **but fast asleep** the moment coffee was served*).

Word combinations (also known as *collocations*) have become the subject of intense interest in the recent past, in part spurred on by discoveries from language corpora (see E1 above). Collocations are words which co-occur with each other and which language users, through custom and practice, have come to see as normal and acceptable. It is immediately apparent that while some words can live together, others cannot. We can talk about a *clenched fist* and even *clenched teeth*, yet we cannot talk about **clenched eyebrows*.

The way in which words combine collocationally and in larger chunks has led people to talk about *lexical phrases*. Such phrases are often part of longer memorised strings of speech. We know, for example, what the word *ironic* means, but we can also say that it is typically used in the phrase *It is ironic that ... .*

Lexical phrases or language chunks are like pre-fabricated building units. Apart from phrasal verbs, collocations and compound words, such as *traffic lights, walking stick* and *workshop* (where two words join together to form one vocabulary item), language also chunks itself into functional phrases (*by the way, on the other hand, if you see what I mean*), idiomatic or fixed expressions (*a close shave, an only child, in love*) and verbal expressions (*can't afford to, not supposed to, don't mind*) (Baigent 1999: 51). Michael Lewis, a proponent of the Lexical

approach – see Chapter 4, A7 – demonstrated how a 'lexical unit', like *I'll*, crops up time and time again in what he calls archetypal utterances, such as *I'll give you a ring*, *I'll drop you a line*, *I'll see what I can do*, *I'll see you later*, etc. (Lewis 1993: Chapter 5).

The chunking of language in this way suggests that talking about vocabulary exclusively in terms of words is not sufficient to account for the different kinds of meaning unit which language users have at their disposal. A *phrasal verb* (e.g. *take off*, *put up with*) is made up of two or more words (if we accept one definition of what a word is), yet it is only one meaning unit. We could argue that *wide awake* and *a close shave* are single meaning units, too. Some people refer to such meaning units as *lexemes* (see Crystal 2003b: 118), but whatever we call them, we need to see that words-in-combination have to be perceived as meaning units in their own right, just as single words such as *book* or *table* do.

What we are saying is that we use words either in prefabricated chunks or insert them into the templates provided by grammar. As Steven Pinker expresses it, '... the mind analyses language as some mixture of memorised chunks and rule-governed assemblies' (1999: 26).

F The sounds of the language

In writing, we represent words and grammar through orthography. When speaking, on the other hand, we construct words and phrases with individual sounds, and we also use pitch change, intonation and stress to convey different meanings.

The teaching of pronunciation will be the focus of Chapter 15, where we will also discuss how 'perfect' our students' pronunciation should be (Chapter 15, A1). In this section, however, we will look at five pronunciation issues: pitch, intonation, individual sounds, sounds and spelling, and stress.

F1 Pitch

One of the ways we recognise people is by the pitch of their voice. We say that one person has a very high voice whereas another has a deep voice. When their voice is very high, we talk about them having a 'high-pitched' voice.

While most of us have a pitch range that we normally operate at, in times of tension, for example, the pitch of our voices may change dramatically. We often speak at a higher pitch than normal if we are frightened or excited. When we are tired, bored or fed up, our pitch may be lower than is customary.

The pitch we use is, therefore, a device by which we communicate emotion and meaning. If we start speaking at a higher pitch than usual, this is noticeable. A low grunt gives some indication of mood, too!

F2 Intonation

On it's own, pitch is not very subtle, conveying, as we have seen, only the most basic information about mood and emotion. But once we start altering the pitch as we speak (e.g. changing pitch direction), we are able to convey a much subtler range of meanings. The music of speech, that is the intonation we use, is a crucial factor in speaking.

One of the uses of intonation is to show the *grammar* of what we are saying. For example, if the pitch of our voice falls when we say *clock* in the following sentence, this indicates that

we are making a statement:

I'll arrive at eight o'clock

Notice that the pitch direction changes on one syllable (*clock*). We call this the *nucleus* of the *tone unit* (*I'll arrive at eight o'clock*). A tone unit is any collection of sounds/words with one nucleus. The falling tone, therefore, indicates that this tone unit is a statement.

We could, however, use the words to mean something quite different grammatically, as in this example:

I'll arrive at eight o'clock

The rising tone now indicates that this is a question, and the fact that *eight* is the nucleus shows that this is the information in question.

Utterances are often made up of more than one tone unit, e.g.:

I'll arrive at eight o'clock, okay

Once again, the rising tone on *kay* indicates that this is a tag question, asking the listener to confirm the speaker's choice.

Intonation is also used to convey attitude. We have already seen how pitch tends to be higher overall when we are frightened, but the relative highs and lows of changes in pitch direction can indicate anything from surprise to excitement or even a lack of interest or dismissiveness. One of the things that characterises the way parents talk to children, for example, is the exaggerated highs and lows of pitch change. In the same way, we tend to exaggerate when we want to show particular enthusiasm or empathy, but the changes in pitch direction tend to be less extreme when we are being non-committal.

Finally, intonation plays a crucial role in spoken discourse since it signals when speakers have finished the points they wish to make, tells people when they wish to carry on with a turn (i.e. not yield the floor) and indicates agreement and disagreement. Thus a falling tone at the end of an utterance indicates that the speaker has finished their point, whereas a rising tone suggests they wish to keep going. High pitch in response to a previous speaker suggests that we wish to make a contrast with what they have said, whereas a low pitch tends to indicate that we wish to add something which is broadly in agreement with what has been said.

In this context, falling tones are sometimes called *proclaiming tones* and are used when giving new information (or adding to what has been said) whereas fall-rise tones (⌄↗) are called *referring tones* and are used when we refer to information we presume to be shared with our listeners or when we want to check information.

Intonation is a notoriously tricky area since very many students (to say nothing of their teachers) find it difficult to hear changes in pitch direction – or rather they sometimes cannot identify which direction it is. Nevertheless, there are ways we can help them with this, as we shall see in Chapter 15.

F3 Individual sounds

Words and sentences are made up of sounds (or *phonemes*) which, on their own, may not carry meaning, but which, in combination, make words and phrases. The phonemes /k/ (like

the *c* in *can*), /æ/ (like the *a* in *can*) or /t/ (like the *t* in *tooth*) are just sounds, but put them together in a certain order and we get /kæt/ (*cat*), a word that is instantly recognisable. If we change just one of these sounds (/b/ for /k/, for example) we will get a different word (*bat*); if, on the other hand, we changed /æ/ for /ɒ/ – like the *o* in *hot* – we would get another different word, /kɒt/ (*cot*).

Standard southern English has 44 phonemes as the following list shows:

iː	sheep	t	little	ə	again	z	lens	ʌ	son
ɪ	ship	d	dance	eɪ	play	ʃ	shell	ɜː	first
e	breath	k	cup	əʊ	ago	ʒ	measure	ð	then
æ	back	g	good	aɪ	climb	h	he	s	cell
ɑː	arm	tʃ	chin	aʊ	house	m	plumb	p	pen
ɒ	what	dʒ	July	ɔɪ	buoy	n	no	b	board
ɔː	law	f	fan	ɪə	cheer	ŋ	ring	j	yes
ʊ	would	v	van	eə	chair	l	let	w	when
uː	shoe	θ	think	ʊə	sure	r	wring		

The phonemes of standard southern English

Competent speakers of the language make these sounds by using various parts of the mouth (called *articulators*), such as the lips, the tongue, the teeth, the alveolar ridge (the flat little ridge behind the upper teeth), the palate, the velum (the flap of soft tissue hanging at the back of the palate, often called the soft palate) and the vocal cords (folds) (see Figure 5).
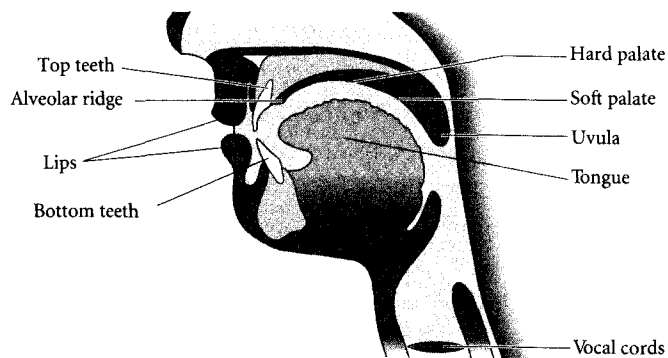

FIGURE 5: Parts of the mouth

As an example, we can see that the consonant /t/ is made when the tip of the tongue is placed on the alveolar ridge above it and when air from the lungs forces the tongue away from the ridge in an explosive burst. That is why /t/ is referred to as an alveolar plosive. Figure 6 shows which parts of the mouth are used for alveolar plosives.
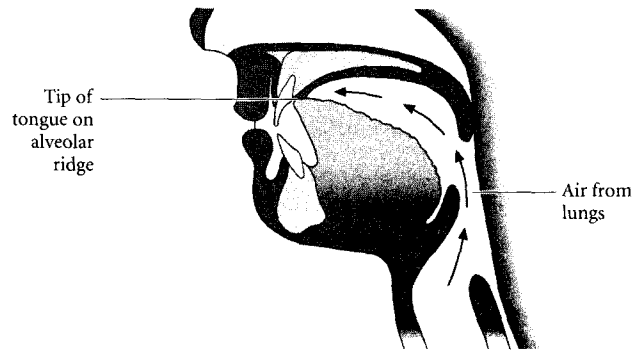
FIGURE 6: The alveolar plosive

The consonant /d/ is made in a similar way to /t/ but there are crucial differences. When we say /t/, as in /tʌn/ (*ton*), the first sound is just air expelled from the mouth (try saying *t, t, t* to yourself, holding your hand in front of your mouth). In the larynx the vocal cords (the two flaps of muscular tissue which, when pressed together, vibrate when air is forced through them) are completely open, so there is no obstruction for the air coming from the lungs. When we say /d/, as in /dʌn/ (*done*), however, the vocal cords are closed, the air from the lungs forces them to vibrate, and voiceless /t/ is now voiced to become /d/. Furthermore, there is little aspiration (air) compared to what there was with /t/ (again, if you hold your hand in front of your mouth this will become clear). Figure 7 shows the position of the vocal cords for voiceless sounds (like /p/, /t/ and /k/) and voiced consonants (like /b/, /d/ and /g/).
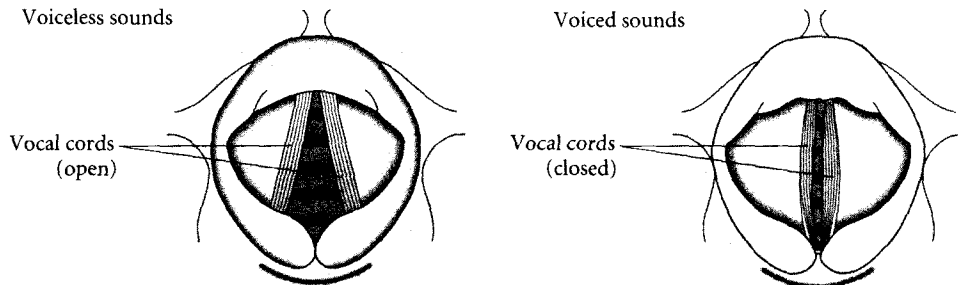

FIGURE 7: Position of the vocal cords (seen from above) for voiceless and voiced sounds

Vowels are all voiced, but there are features which differentiate them. The first is the place in the mouth where they are made. The second feature, which is easier to observe, is the position of the lips. For /ɑː/, the lips form something like a circle, whereas for /iː/, they are more stretched and spread. Figure 8 shows these two positions.

/ɑː/   /iː/

FIGURE 8: Position of the lips for /ɑː/ and /iː/

One sound which does not occur in many phonemic charts but which is nevertheless widely used, is the glottal stop, created when a closure of the vocal folds stops air completely

and we say /əpɑːʔmənt/ (*apartment*), for example, instead of /əpɑːtmənt/ or /aɪsɔːʔɪt/ (*I saw it*) instead of /aɪsɔːrɪt/. The glottal stop is often used instead of other stop (or plosive) consonants.

Speakers of different languages have different sounds. Thus there is no equivalent in English for the 'click' used by Xhosa speakers, so English speakers find it difficult to produce. French people are accustomed to the awkward way in which British speakers mangle French vowels because they are not the same as English ones. Japanese speakers, on the other hand, do not have different phonemes for /l/ and /r/ and so have difficulty differentiating between them, and often find it nearly impossible to make the different sounds.

F4 Sounds and spelling

Whereas in some languages there seems to be a close correlation between sounds and spelling, in English this is often not the case. The sound /ʌ/, for example, can be realised in a number of different spellings (e.g. w*o*n, y*ou*ng, f*u*nny, fl*oo*d). The letters *ou*, on the other hand, can be pronounced in a number of different ways (e.g. *cloud*, /klaʊd/, *pour* /pɔː/, *enough* /ɪnʌf/, *through* /θruː/, *though* /ðəʊ/, *trough* /trɒf/, or even *journey* /dʒɜːni/. A lot depends on the sounds that come before and after them, but the fact remains that we spell some sounds in a variety of different ways, and we have a variety of different sounds for some spellings.

Words can change their sound(s), too, and this is not indicated by the way we spell them. Thus we say that *was* sounds like this: /wɒz/. However, when it occurs in a sentence like *I was robbed*, the vowel sound changes from a stressed vowel /ɒ/ to an unstressed vowel /ə/, e.g. /aɪwəz'rɒbd/ (' before a syllable indicates that the syllable is stressed – see below). The unstressed sound in *was*, /ə/, is called the *schwa* and is one of the most frequent sounds in English, created by shortening of the vowel and the placing of stress elsewhere.

Other changes occur when sounds get close or slide into each other in connected speech: sometimes *elision* takes place where sounds 'disappear' into each other. Thus /kɑːnt/ (*can't*) finishes with the sound /t/, but when it is placed next to a word beginning with /d/, for example, the /t/ disappears (e.g. /aɪkɑːndɑːns/ – *I can't dance*). Sometimes *assimilation* takes place where the sound at the end of one word changes to be more like the sound at the beginning of the next. Thus the /d/ at the end of /bæd/ becomes a /g/ when placed next to a word starting with /g/, e.g. /bæg gaɪ/ (*bad guy*) or an /n/ becomes an /m/, e.g. /bɪm men/ (*bin men*).

F5 Stress

British and American English speakers often differ in where they place the stress in words. Thus *ballet* in British English is stressed on the first syllable (*bal*) whereas in American English, the stress usually falls on the second syllable (*let*).

Stress is the term we use to describe the point in a word or phrase where pitch changes, vowels lengthen and volume increases. In a one-syllable word like *dance*, we know which syllable is stressed since there is only one. A word with more than one syllable is more complex, however. We might stress the word *export* on the second syllable (*exPORT*) if we are using it as a verb. But if, on the contrary, we stress the first syllable (*EXport*), the verb is now a noun.

In multi-syllable words there is often more than one stressed syllable (e.g. *singularity*, *information*, *claustrophobia*). In such cases we call the strongest force the *primary stress* and

the weaker force the *secondary stress*, e.g. *ˌsingulˈarity, ˌinforˈmation, ˌclaustroˈphobia.* Note that primary stress has a superscript mark whereas secondary stress is marked below the line. Secondary stress is not the same as unstressed syllables, as the presence of the schwa shows, e.g. /ˌɪnfəˈmeɪʃən/.

Words are often not pronounced as one might expect from their spelling. The word *secretary* would appear, on paper, to have four syllables, but when it is spoken, there are sometimes only three and the first one is stressed /ˈsekrətri/, or even, in rapid speech, only two, e.g. /ˈsektri/.

It is worth noticing, too, that when a word changes shape morphologically, the stressed syllable may shift as well. In English we stress *Japan* on the second syllable (*jaPAN*), but when we turn the word into an adjective the stress moves to the new syllable (*japanESE*). However, this does not always happen (e.g. *amERica, amERican*).

Stress is vitally important in conveying meaning in phrases and sentences. We have already discussed the importance of pitch and intonation, and it is on the stressed part of a tone unit (the nucleus) that intonation changes are most marked. In British English the stress often falls on the end of the phrase, to give it end weight. So a neutral way of saying *He wants to marry my daughter* might have the stress on the *dau* of *daughter*. But if the speaker changes where the stress falls (and thus where the intonation change takes place), then the meaning of the sentence changes, too, so that an affirmative statement, for example, may well become a question, e.g.

> Brad wants to MARRY my daughter? (= I can't believe the relationship is that serious.)

or

> BRAD wants to marry my daughter? (= I can't believe it! I knew Steve was keen on her, but Brad?)

G Paralinguistic features of language

A number of features of communication take place outside the formal systems of language (sounds, grammar, etc.). These *paralinguistic features* fall into two broad categories, those that involve the voice and those that involve the body.

G1 Vocal paralinguistic features

There are many ways in which we choose how we say things, depending on the situation we are in, irrespective of the sounds, stress or intonation we are using. For example, we can decide how loud or soft we wish to be (volume): whispering suggests a desire for secrecy, whereas shouting suggests either anger or determination. When we make breathiness a characteristic of our speaking, it is usually because we want to express deep emotion (or sexual desire). We can make our voices nasal (which often indicates anxiety). Whether or not these *tones of voice* (different from the tone units of intonation – see F2 above) are voluntary or involuntary, they convey intention and circumstance.

G2 Physical paralinguistic features

We can convey a *number of meanings through the way in which we use our bodies*. The expressions on our faces, the gestures we make and even proximity or the way we sit, for example, may send powerful messages about how we feel or what we mean. We can look at some of these in more detail.

- **Facial expression:** facial expression is a powerful conveyor of meaning. Smiling is an almost universal signal of pleasure or welcome. Other facial expressions may not be so common, however. Raising eyebrows to suggest surprise or interest may be a part of one culture's normal currency, but may be more extreme for others. Other facial actions, such as biting your lip (indicating thought or uncertainty), compressing the lips (to show decision or obstinacy) and a visible clenching of the teeth to show anger are all powerful conveyors of meaning, too.

- **Gesture:** we use gesture to indicate a wide range of meanings, although, once again, the actual gestures we use may be specific to particular cultures. A few examples of British English behaviour show how powerful such gestures can be: shrugging shoulders may indicate indifference, an attitude of *I don't care*, or *I don't know*; crossing your arms may indicate relaxation, but it can also powerfully show boredom; waving can denote welcome and farewell, whereas scratching your head may indicate puzzlement.

  Each culture group also has its gestures for *go away*, both in its polite and ruder forms, and the use of arms, hands and fingers to make obscene gestures for insults is part and parcel of the currency of society. Other less threatening gestures may also be culture-bound.

  Some gestures, such as head-scratching, hand-clasping, 'cracking' finger joints, etc. may not be used to convey meanings. They may instead be unconscious 'ticks', or be used in some way to displace tension. Such *displacement activities* may convey a person's nervousness or distractedness, but do not send messages in the same way as a clenched fist or a beckoning finger.

- **Proximity, posture and echoing:** the physical distance between speakers can indicate a number of things and can also be used to send conscious messages about intent. Closeness, for example, indicates intimacy or threat to many speakers, while distance may denote formality or a lack of interest. Proximity is also both a matter of personal style and of culture: what may seem normal to a speaker from one culture may appear unnecessarily close or distant to a speaker from another. And standing close to someone may be quite appropriate in some situations such as an informal party, but completely out of place in others, such as a meeting with a superior.

  Posture can convey meaning, too. Hunched shoulders and a hanging head give a powerful indication of mood. A lowered head when speaking to a superior (with or without eye contact) can convey the appropriate relationship in some cultures. Direct level eye contact, on the other hand, changes the nature of the interaction, and can be seen as either open or challenging.

  A feature of posture and proximity that has been noted by several observers is that of *echoing*. An example of this sometimes occurs when two people who are keen to agree with each other find that unconsciously they have adopted the same posture, as if in imitation of each other. When it occurs naturally in this way, echoing appears to complement the verbal

communication, whereas when such imitation is carried out consciously, it often indicates some form of mockery.

Paralinguistic features such as tone of voice, gesture and posture are all part of the way we communicate with each other in face-to-face encounters. When teaching, we can draw our students' attention to this, particularly when we are using video material – as we shall see in Chapter 18.

H Speaking and writing

We have already seen how ellipsis is used in speech (C1 above), and we have also alluded (in E1) to how words are used differently in speech and writing (for example *asleep* is much more common in speech than in writing). There is also evidence that we use verb tenses differently in speaking and writing. For example, in speech present verb forms outnumber past verb forms by a factor of 2:1, and simple verb forms are significantly more common in speech than in writing. In speech it appears that passive verb forms are used only rarely, whereas *will*, *would* and *can* are much more common. There are other differences, too. For example, in conversation we tend to take turns rather than speak in well-formed sentences, e.g.

> A: *Biscuit?*
> B: *Yeah.*
> A: *Here.*

In face-to-face spontaneous conversation we are likely to use small units of conversation (*biscuit, yeah, here*) rather than long sentences. Indeed, rather than using sentences, we tend to organise utterances into different tone units (see F2 above).

Another feature of this kind of conversation is that turns are not necessarily neat and tidy, e.g.

> B: *Nice (talking about the biscuit)*
>
> A: *They're my fav-*
> |
>
> B: *I like gingernuts best*
> |
>
> A: *-ourite, but I*
> *thought ... you know when I was in town ... erm, I'm trying to cut down, you know ...*
>
> (|) indicates two people speaking at the same time

It is also noticeable that speakers often start sentences and then abandon them (*but I thought .../you know when I was in town ...*). They use hesitators such as *erm* and *you know* to buy thinking time.

Listeners in conversations are not just passive recipients of others' words. We use interjections and other words to indicate support and to show that we are listening (e.g. *Mm, yeah, right, yeah*). We use echo questions (e.g. *San Francisco? You went to San Francisco?*) to keep the conversation going or to check that we have understood, and we employ response forms (e.g. *Yeah, OK, got you, right*) to acknowledge requests and points made.

None of these features occur in writing (unless we are providing written transcripts of spontaneous speech). Indeed, a major difference between speaking and writing is that whereas the former is often co-constructed and, as we have seen, messy, writing tends to be well-formed and pre-organised. It is precisely because conversational speech occurs in real time that it is unplanned, which accounts for many of the features we have discussed above.

However, we need to remember that speaking is not one single entity; there are major differences between the language of informal conversation and the language of a prepared lecture. The latter is likely to be more similar to written language (because it has been planned and put together in a writing-like way) than spoken language. On the other hand, Internet chat (see Chapter 11, 12) using a keyboard is more like speaking than writing, and, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, texting is neither one nor the other. Perhaps, therefore, we should discuss different forms of speaking and writing on the basis of how speaking-like or writing-like they are. Then it will be useful to analyse different speaking and writing genres to see how they work so that we know what the conventions and constraints are for emailing, texting, giving presentations, writing postcards or letters, etc.

We have seen that face-to-face speakers have a number of features to help them indicate attitude, intimacy, etc. These include intonation, tone of voice and body movement. Writing cannot use these, of course, but it has its own range of signs and symbols, such as

    – dashes

    ! exclamations marks

    new paragraphs

    , commas

    CAPITAL letters, etc.

In this context it is interesting that emailers and text messagers frequently use emoticons as paralinguistic devices. There are many commercially produced graphics of this kind, but many people simply use keyboards to produce a range of helpful visuals to express feeling, such as smiley faces ☺, quizzical faces ☺ or unhappy faces ☹.

However, despite all the differences between writing and speaking, it is worth remembering that the vast majority of grammatical items and words are just as much at home in informal speech as they are in more formal writing. They are not different systems, but rather variations on the same system.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Language purpose**

  The whole issue of *performatives* first came to prominence in J L Austin (1962) – a collection of his articles published by his students after his death.

  The consideration of language *notions* and *functions* was first brought to prominence by Wilkins (1976).

- **Appropriacy and register**

  In *Systemic Functional Linguistics* (M A K Halliday 1994) the three dimensions of context

which account for register are *field* (the type of social action or what the text is about), *tenor* (i.e. the role relationships of the participants) and *mode* (written, spoken, etc.). Field and tenor are similar to (but not the same as) topic and tone.

- **Gender**
  See, for example, D Cameron (2006), J Sunderland (2006) and – one of the most influential (and popular) books in the field – D Tannen (1992).

- **Discourse and text**
  An excellent introduction to discourse analysis is S Thornbury (2005b). See also M Hoey (2001), M McCarthy (1991) and G Cook (1989).

- **Genre**
  See J Harmer (2004: Chapter 2), C Tribble (1996: Chapter 6) and K Hyland (2002: 10–22). The concept of genre as a goal-oriented social process is a feature of *Systemic Functional Linguistics* (M A K Halliday 1994).

- **Grammar**
  For an overview of what grammar is all about, see M Swan (2006). For clear and concise expositions of what grammar is, see the introduction to R Carter and M McCarthy (2006) and S Thornbury (1999a: Chapter 1).

  Of the many grammars on offer, serious researchers and students will want to look at D Biber *et al* (1999) and R Carter and M McCarthy (2006), both of which pay special attention to spoken as well as written grammar. M Swan (2005a) is a book which a large number of teachers and students rely on and B Cruikshank *et al* (2001) is also well worth looking at.

- **Vocabulary**
  On vocabulary in general, see N Schmitt (2002) and S Thornbury (2001a). On word meaning (and extended word meaning) see J Aitchison (1987: Chapter 4) and M Lewis (1993: Chapter 4).

  On **language corpora and language teaching**, see A Wichmann *et al* (1997). But see F Misham (2004) for discussions about problems which corpora throw up when used with learners. J Marks (2002) wants to keep corpora in perspective, too, especially in a world where ELF is more noticeable (see Chapter 1, B1 in this book). The Compleat Lexical Tutor (www.lextutor.ca) is a good place to start looking at language concordances.

  All major publishers have their own **MLDs** (Monolingual Learners' Dictionaries) and the more advanced ones are a vital resource for teachers and materials developers, too. See, for example, *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English*, *The Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners*, *Cambridge Advanced Learners' Dictionary*, *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary*. Publishers generally have dictionaries for students at lower levels and some have produced thesaurus-like production dictionaries such as *The Longman Language Activator*. There are many online dictionaries and most paper dictionaries have a CD-ROM version, too.

  On **lexical phrases/chunks**, see J Nattinger and J DeCarrio (1992). On a lexical approach to language teaching see M Lewis (1993, 1997) and D Willis (1990).

  On **collocations**, see M Lewis (2000) and for material to teach collocations, see M McCarthy and F O'Dell (2005).

- **Pronunciation**

  See G Kelly (2000), A Underhill (2005), J Clark and C Yallop (1995) and C Dalton and B Seidlhofer (1994).

- **Intonation**

  See D Brazil (1997).

- **Sounds**

  J Wells (2000) provides a reliable pronunciation dictionary.

- **Speaking (and writing)**

  A full account of the grammar of speech can be found in D Biber *et al* (1999: 1066–1108). R Carter and M McCarthy (2006: 164–167) summarise speaking characteristics succinctly. See also J Harmer (2004: 6–11).

3 | Background issues in language learning

A The miracle of language

Unless there is something wrong with them mentally or physically, all children acquire a language as they develop. Indeed, many children around the world acquire more than one language and by the age of six or seven are speaking as confident bi- or trilinguals. This miraculous language 'instinct' (Pinker 1994) seems, at first glance, to happen effortlessly. The question that language teachers want answered, therefore, is whether second language acquisition – that is language learnt in the classroom – can hope to replicate the conditions in which children acquire their first language(s).

As far as we can see, children are not taught language, nor do they set out to learn it consciously. Rather they acquire it subconsciously as a result of the massive exposure to it which they get from the adults and other children around them. Their instinct – the mental capability we are all born with – acts upon the language they hear and transforms it into a knowledge of the language and an ability to speak it. It's that simple.

Or rather it isn't quite that simple. For example, if we consider the language exposure that children receive, we find that it is a special kind of language. People don't speak to two and three year olds the way they speak to adults. Instead, they (parents especially) use exaggerated intonation with higher pitch than is customary. This conveys special interest and empathy. They simplify what they say, too, using shorter sentences and fewer subordinate clauses. They choose special vocabulary which the children can understand, rather than more sophisticated lexical items which they would not. They tend to include the children in the conversation, drawing them into interactions so that the actual language used is an integral part of the interaction itself. And even before children can themselves speak, parents act as if they were taking part in the conversation, as when a mother says, for example, *Do you want some more milk?* (the baby gurgles) *You do? Yes, you do. All right, then ...* . So, in a sense, children are being taught rules of discourse even though neither they nor their parents are conscious of this. Parents – and other adults – do not choose the simplified language or exaggerated intonation consciously, either. It is usually done subconsciously, so if you asked most people exactly how they speak to children, they would not be able to say on what basis they choose words and grammar.

Finally, children have a powerful incentive to communicate effectively. Even at the pre-word phase of their development they have an instinct to let people know when they are happy, miserable, hungry or alarmed. The more language they can understand – and especially speak – the better they can function.

All of this is bound up with the age of the child and what happens to us as our brains develop and grow. Language acquisition is '... guaranteed for children up to the age of six, is steadily compromised from then until shortly after puberty, and is rare thereafter' (Pinker

1994: 293). In other words, that instinctual ability to absorb language and context and to transform them into an ability to understand and speak 'perfectly' doesn't usually last for ever. However, at around the time of puberty, children start to develop an ability for abstraction, which makes them better learners (see below), but may also make them less able to respond to language on a purely instinctive level.

Despite the fact, then, that there is something special and unique about first language(s) acquisition, a concern of many theorists and methodologists has been to try to see how, if at all, we can replicate the success of that kind of language acquisition in the language-learning classroom. We will look at a number of theories (both historical and current) that have been advanced and which methodologists have used to help them decide what methods and techniques to espouse.

A1 Acquisition and learning

Some people 'pick up' second languages without going to lessons (though true mastery is unusual via this route). Others go to language classes and study the language they wish to learn. Of the two situations, picking up a language (simply absorbing it by, for example, living in a target-language community with no formal attention to language study) is, it would appear, closer to first-language acquisition than studying a language in a classroom is. This was recognised as long ago as 1921 by the man who can be credited 'more than any other single individual' with helping English language teaching to become a 'professionhood' (Howatt 2004: 264). In his book *The Principles of Language Study*, Harold Palmer was interested in the difference between 'spontaneous' and 'studial' capabilities. The former described the ability to acquire language naturally and subconsciously, whereas the latter allowed students to organise their learning and apply their conscious knowledge to the task in hand. Palmer suggested that spontaneous capabilities are brought into play for the acquisition of the spoken language, whereas studial capabilities are required for the development of literacy.

This distinction between subconscious acquisition and conscious learning is still of concern. In the early 1980s the American linguist Stephen Krashen put forward what he called the *Input hypothesis* (summarised in Krashen 1984). He claimed that language which we acquire subconsciously (especially when it is anxiety free) is language we can easily use in spontaneous conversation because it is instantly available when we need it. Language that is learnt, on the other hand, where 'learnt' means taught and studied as grammar and vocabulary, is not available for spontaneous use in this way. Indeed, it may be that the only use for learnt language is to help us to *monitor* (check) our spontaneous communication; but then the more we monitor what we are saying, the less spontaneous we become! In Krashen's view, therefore, acquired language and learnt language are different both in character and effect.

Krashen saw the successful acquisition by students of a second language as being bound up with the nature of the language input they received. It had to be comprehensible, even if it was slightly above their productive level. He called this *comprehensible input* i + 1 (that is, information the students already have plus the next level up), and the students had to be exposed to it in a relaxed setting. This input is *roughly-tuned* (rather as parent–child language is subconsciously moderated as we saw above) and is in stark contrast to the *finely-tuned input* of much language instruction, where specific graded language has been chosen for conscious learning. Roughly-tuned input aids acquisition, Krashen argued, whereas finely-tuned input combined with conscious learning does not.

If Stephen Krashen were right, the implications would be profound. It would mean that the most useful thing we could do with students would be to expose them to large amounts of comprehensible input in a relaxed setting. Perhaps we might have students learn language consciously at some later stage for the sake of their writing, for example, but otherwise, if we wanted students to be effective at spontaneous communication, comprehensible input would be enough.

A2 The contributions of behaviourism

Anyone who has ever studied a language knows that lessons based exclusively on the acquisition view of language described above are extremely rare. From the advent of the Direct method, there has generally been more learning (in Krashen's sense) than acquisition.

The Direct method emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and it laid the foundations for classroom practices which are still around today (thanks to people like Maximilian Berlitz and, later, Harold Palmer, whom we have already mentioned). The Direct method teacher used only English in the classroom; form and meaning associations were made using real objects, pictures or demonstration. The point here is that a concentration on form (rather than subconscious acquisition) was considered to be advantageous. This is the very antithesis of a purely acquisition-based view of second-language learning. Crucially, it depends on the idea that the *input* students receive (that is the language they are exposed to) will be the same as their *intake* (that is the language they actually absorb). Yet, as we shall see below, this is shown again and again not to be the case. Students take in only some of what they are exposed to. And sometimes they take in things which are incidental to the main focus of the language input they receive.

However, the Direct method, which believed essentially in a one-to-one correspondence between input and output, really got going when it was married to the theory of behaviourism.

In an article published in the early part of the twentieth century, two psychologists, Watson and Raynor, reported the results of an experiment they had carried out with a young boy called Albert (Watson and Raynor 1920). When he was nine months old, they discovered that the easiest way to frighten him was to make a loud noise by striking a steel bar with a hammer. At various intervals over the next three months they frightened Albert in this way while he was in the presence of various animals (a rat, a rabbit and a dog). The result was that after three months Albert showed fear when confronted with these animals even when the noise was not made, and even showed unease when a fur coat was put in front of him. Pleased with their progress, the scientists then proposed to continue their experiment by turning the young baby's fear back to pleasure, but they were unable to do so because, unsurprisingly, Albert was withdrawn from the experiment by his parents.

Despite its age, Watson and Raynor's experiment is of more than academic interest because the *conditioning* it demonstrated – and the way that such research into conditioning led on to the theory of *behaviourism* – had a profound effect upon teaching of all kinds. This is especially true of language teaching where, arguably, behaviourism still exerts a powerful influence (Bruton 1998).

In behaviourist theory, conditioning is the result of a three-stage procedure: *stimulus*, *response* and *reinforcement*. For example, in a classic experiment, when a light goes on (the stimulus) a rat goes up to a bar and presses it (response) and is rewarded by the dropping of a tasty food pellet at its feet (the reinforcement). If this procedure is repeated often enough, the

arrival of the food pellet as a reward reinforces the rat's actions to such an extent that it will always press the bar when the light comes on: it has learnt a new behaviour.

In a book called *Verbal Behaviour*, the psychologist Bernard Skinner suggested that much the same process happens in language learning, especially first language learning (Skinner 1957). The baby needs food (the incentive we discussed above), so it cries and food is produced. Later the infant swaps crying for one- or two-word utterances to produce the same effect, and because words are more precise than cries, it gradually learns to refine the words to get exactly what is wanted. In this *behaviourist* view of learning a similar stimulus–response–reinforcement pattern occurs with humans as with rats or any other animal that can be conditioned in the same kind of way.

In language learning, a behaviourist slant is evident when students are asked to repeat sentences correctly and are rewarded for such correctness by teacher praise or some other benefit. The more often this occurs, the more the learner is conditioned to produce the language successfully on all future occasions. As we shall see on page 64, behaviourism was directly responsible for *audiolingualism*, with its heavy emphasis on drilling (following the stimulus–response–reinforcement model). As such, the influence of behaviourism was – and is – the direct opposite of any theory of subconscious acquisition.

Behaviourism is sometimes derided and its contribution to language teaching practice heavily criticised. Yet, as Peter Castagnero suggests, the link between the audiolingual method and a simplistic view of behaviourism is 'fictitious'. 'Behaviour analysis is alive and well,' he writes, and is 'making significant contributions in applied language settings' (Castagnero 2006: 519).

A3 'Language learning will take care of itself'

In his book *Deschooling Society*, the educational theorist Ivan Illich questioned the whole purpose of formal education. As the title of his book indicates, he had a very bleak view of what happens in classrooms. We may think, he suggested, that the more input we are exposed to, the more we learn. We may even go so far as to assume that we can measure knowledge with tests and grades. But all this is a delusion.

> In fact, learning is the human activity which least needs manipulation by others. Most learning is not the result of instruction. It is rather the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting.
>
> (Illich 1972: 56)

At about the same time, Dick Allwright and his colleagues (who had the task of improving the English language skills of students from overseas who were soon to study on postgraduate courses at the University of Essex in England) started to question the ways they had been teaching. For example, they had asked students to study grammar; they had explained vocabulary and taught paragraph organisation. But it didn't seem to be working and it did not 'feel right'. How would it be, they wondered, if they abandoned all that and instead devoted their efforts to exposing students to English and getting them to use it, particularly given that they were highly motivated to learn. The hypothesis they were working on was, in Allwright's words, that:

> ... If the language teacher's management activities are directed exclusively at involving the learners in solving communication problems in the target language, then language learning will take care of itself ...
>
> (Allwright 1979: 170)

In the course which followed, students were given tasks to do outside the classroom (such as interviewing people and searching for library books), which involved them in speaking and reading: real tasks for which the teachers gave no language training, advice or, crucially, correction. Students also took part in communication games (see page 349) where the only objective was to complete the task using all and/or any language at their disposal. A student had to draw the same picture as their partner without looking at the partner's picture, for example, or they had to arrange objects in the same order as their partner without looking at their partner's objects – both tasks relying on verbal communication alone. The results, although not scientifically assessed, were apparently favourable. Everyone enjoyed the process far more (especially the teachers) and the students' progress appears to have been more impressive than in previous years.

Allwright and his colleagues had shifted the attention away from the *product* of learning (knowledge of grammar and lexis) to the learning *process* itself. In other words, he seemed to be suggesting, we learn to do something by doing it, and if the goal of language is communication, then communicating as we learn is the best way to go about it. Merrill Swain called this 'comprehensible output' in a clear echo of Krashen's comprehensible input (Swain 1985). Jane Willis says 'you must learn the language freely to learn to speak it, even if you make a lot of errors' (1996: 7). While not going as far as Allwright in suggesting that language learning might take care of itself, she suggests that students need chances to say what they think or feel and to experiment with using language they have heard or seen in a supportive atmosphere, without feeling threatened.

A4 Focus on form or focus on forms?

The idea that students should be involved in 'solving communication problems in the target language' – that is, performing communicative tasks in which they have to (mostly) speak their way out of trouble – has given rise to Task-based language teaching, which we will discuss in more detail in Chapter 4. Task-based learning has at its core the idea that students learn better when engaged in meaning-based tasks than if they are concentrating on language forms just for their own sake. This is not to suggest, as Allwright speculated, that language learning 'will take care of itself', but that learning should grow out of the performance of communicative tasks rather than putting the learning (of previously selected language forms) first and following it by having students perform communicative tasks.

In this context a distinction has been made between a focus on *form* and a focus on *forms*. Focus on form occurs when students direct their conscious attention to some feature of the language, such as a verb tense or the organisation of paragraphs. It can happen at any stage of a learning sequence as the result of intervention by the teacher, or because students themselves notice a language feature. It will occur naturally when students try to complete communicative tasks (and worry about how to do it – or how they did it) in Task-based learning, for example, or it might happen because the teacher gives feedback on a task the students have just been involved in. Focus on form is often incidental and opportunistic, growing out of tasks which students are involved in, rather than being pre-determined by a book or a syllabus.

Many language syllabuses and coursebooks are structured around a series of language forms, however. Teachers and students focus on them one by one because they are on the syllabus. This is often called 'focus on forms' because one of the chief organising principles behind a course is the learning of these forms.

Some commentators have argued passionately that focus on form – which grows incidentally out of communicative tasks – is significantly more effective than focusing on language forms just because they are there. Indeed Michael Long referred to the latter practices as 'neanderthal' (1988: 136). As Ron Sheen (who is largely unimpressed by the argument that focus on form in general is more effective than focus on forms) explains it, 'an underlying assumption of a focus on form approach is that all classroom activities need to be based on communicative tasks, and that any treatment of grammar should arise from difficulties in communicating any desired meaning' (Sheen 2003: 225). According to Sandra Fotos, 'Research ... suggests that task performance can significantly increase learner awareness of the target structure and improve accuracy in its use, as well as providing opportunities for meaning focused comprehension and production of the target language' (Fotos 1998: 307).

One way of focusing on form that has attracted a considerable amount of attention was described by Richard Schmidt as 'noticing'. He uses the term to describe a condition which is necessary if the language a student is exposed to is to become language 'intake', that is language that he or she takes in (Schmidt 1990). Unless the student notices the new language, he or she is unlikely to process it, and therefore the chances of learning it (and being able to use it) are slim.

According to Schmidt, and based to some extent on his own learning of Portuguese, second language learners notice a language construction if they come across it often enough or if it stands out in some way. One way of coming across it, of course, is through instruction – that is, if teachers draw their attention to it. But learners are quite capable of noticing language features for themselves (as Schmidt did) on an advertising billboard, in a TV programme or a newspaper or, for example, in what someone in a convenience store says to them every time they go to buy some milk. According to Tony Lynch, '... Noticing is certainly part of successful language learning; one can hardly imagine (adult) learners making substantial progress without it' (Lynch 2001: 25).

Noticing has one other characteristic, that of salience. Things that are salient (i.e. that stand out more) are more noticeable. Forms which call attention to themselves and are perceptually salient will have 'a greater chance of impinging on consciousness' (Skehan 1998: 49). Gerald Kelly, in his book on pronunciation, suggests that a language item needs '... to be relevant to the student at a particular time in order for there to be conscious intake and before the student can use it consistently' (Kelly 2000: 22). Salience, then, seems to apply to forms which have made themselves noticeable or prominent, and which also arrive just at the right moment because the learner is ready for them (they are relevant).

The argument might, then, go something like this: students acquire language best when they have focused on it either because they need it, or have come across it in a meaning-focused communicative task, or because in some other way they have noticed language which is relevant to them at a particular time; this kind of acquisition is intrinsically superior to asking students to focus on a series of pre-determined forms.

This, if it were true, would make the job of the syllabus or program designer extraordinarily difficult.

A5 Making sense of it all

We need to be able to make sense of the theories and hunches which have been offered to us, especially since they compete on a variety of different levels. For example, if we were to

accept that noticing was a pre-condition for acquisition, then the claim that students acquire language best by subconscious exposure to comprehensible input would be untenable. If we were attracted by the notion of language conditioning, then letting language learning 'take care of itself' would make no sense. If we were convinced by arguments for a focus on form, then focusing on discrete language forms in a syllabus would not be the right thing to do.

The problem for us as teachers is that we recognise the merits of many of these arguments. For example, repetition clearly works, and we are powerfully affected by rewards (they will be called 'medals' on page 138). Hence behaviourist influences on language teaching do not seem completely absurd. It is also clear that we do acquire some language subconsciously, and that, just as Krashen suggested, an exaggerated concern for accuracy when we monitor our output can impede spontaneous speech. It is evident that trying out the language we know we are learning in meaning-focused tasks actually helps us to sort things out in our heads. Indeed, it may be that in making efforts to retrieve and then use all and any of the language, we flick a 'switch' that takes language from the learnt to the acquired store (Ellis 1982). But at the same time, the argument that this is the best or only way to do things is '... undermined by the experience of the countless people who have apparently learnt languages successfully by "traditional" methods incompatible with the hypothesis' (Swan 2005b: 379).

When examining the various claims in detail, however, certain problems crop up. A behaviourist view of language learning, for example, seems unable to cope with the fact that language learners frequently come out with language that they have never seen or used before. We make new sentences all the time, yet this creativity flies in the face of a belief which says that all language is the result of conditioning.

It seems entirely plausible to suggest that noticing specific items of language helps them to become fixed in our language store, yet the suggestion that this is in some sentences a necessary pre-condition for acquisition is somewhat problematic. Michael Swan (echoing a point made by Noam Chomsky about first-language acquisition many years before) wonders how it is possible that competent non-native speakers know that we can make sentences such as *I offered/promised/guaranteed Andrew £100*, but not **I donated/presented Andrew £100*. As he points out, this knowledge cannot come about '... by noticing exemplars, since there are no exemplars to notice; the non-use of a structure is not manifested through specific instances' (2005b: 380). Nor is the concept of salience easy to sustain at all times when it is quite clear that students seem to notice things that aren't especially salient, yet don't seem to notice other things which are prominent – or which we bring to their attention.

Finally, the suggestion that acquisition and learning are such separate processes that learnt language cannot be part of the acquired store is not verifiable unless we are able to get inside the learners' brains. Otherwise we fall back on asking people whether the language they used was learnt or acquired (in other words whether it was the result of conscious or subconscious processes), and the problem is that they usually won't be able to tell us. We are left, then, with a hypothesis which is untestable and which seems counter-intuitive, even though we cannot be confident about that either.

What we can say with confidence, however, is that learning success is closely bound up with both the method of teaching and, more crucially, the personality and age of the learner. We will examine these issues in detail in Chapter 5, but here it is worth pointing out that adults, in contrast to children, often depend upon their 'considerable intellects' (Pinker 1994: 29) to

help them understand grammar; even if we wanted our students to only acquire language subconsciously (which they do some of the time), they would still think about what they were learning. Some students like to analyse what they are learning more than others.

In a wide-ranging survey article on the teaching of grammar, Rod Ellis suggests, among other things, that students need to focus not just on grammatical forms but also on their meanings, and that focus on forms is valid, provided that students are given chances to use the discrete forms they have studied in communication tasks (2006: 102). But it is also clear, he points out, that 'an incidental focus-on-form approach is of special value because it affords an opportunity for extensive treatment of grammatical problems (in contrast to the intensive treatment afforded by a focus-on-forms approach)'.

To sum up, therefore, students need considerable exposure to language for without it there is no chance of any acquisition. The best kind of language for this purpose is comprehensible input. Students also need to try to use language in meaning-focused tasks. This helps them to try out language and think through how it works. Students also need to *study* language – or focus on it – in some way or other. This may take place during or as a result of meaning-focused tasks, but it may also happen because students notice an aspect of language and think about it or because we bring that language to their attention. It is possible that some language is remembered as a result of repetitious practice – or at least that this practice leads to significant noticing – and that rewards such as success or teacher approval may help students to remember in this way.

Finally, we might agree with Guy Cook when he says that 'What is needed ... is a recognition of the complexity of language learning: that it is sometimes play and sometimes for real, sometimes form-focused and sometimes meaning-focused, sometimes fiction and sometimes fact' (1997: 231). We will discuss language play in Section F below.

B The importance of repetition

Repetition has always played a part in language learning, even if its efficiency in helping students to transfer knowledge from their short-term to their long-term memories is not firmly established. Nevertheless, we suppose that if students think about what they are repeating and try to organise it in their heads, they stand a better chance of remembering what they are learning than if they merely repeat it without thought (see Section C below).

However, one kind of repetition is of vital importance in language learning, and that is the repetition of encounters with language. It is this repetition which really helps fix things in the mind. In other words, if students see or hear some language once, they might, even when they notice it, forget it fairly quickly. But the more they come across this language – the more repeated encounters they have with it – the better chance they have of remembering (and being able to use) it.

However, repeating something a number of times, one after the other, isn't especially useful. What language students need is repeated encounters with language which are spaced out – that is, language which students come back to again and again, with time lapses in between.

Students also seem to gain from repeating tasks. Thus, if they have told a story, for example, and thought about how they did it, telling the story again allows them to re-use words and grammar, re-formulating what they said the first time in a way that helps them to think about

language even as they use it. Perhaps this will provoke the structuring and re-structuring of 'noticed' language that is necessary if the learner is to adjust the hypotheses they have formed (Batstone 1994: 40–43).

C Thinking about language

Many students seem to learn better if they are asked to think about the language they are coming into contact with. For example, we could get students to repeat a sentence such as *If I hadn't overslept, I wouldn't have missed the bus* and they might well understand it. But they might forget how it was constructed unless we allowed them to think about the arrangement of sentence elements and verb tenses. Thinking about the sentence allows students to employ their 'considerable intellects' (see page 55). Of course, as we shall see in Chapter 5, different students respond differently to such analysis (and we will be less likely to use it with younger learners), but common sense tells us that if we look carefully at something, we see it better than if we just glance at it.

We can go further and say that if students have to make decisions about the words and grammar they are studying – that is if their encounter with the language has some 'cognitive depth' – they are far more likely to understand and remember that language than if they meet the new language passively. Indeed, one school of thought which is widely accepted by language teachers is that the development of our conceptual understanding and cognitive skills (in this case by thinking about and making decisions about language) is a main objective of all education, even more important than the acquisition of factual information (Williams and Burden 1997: 24). Such conceptual understanding is arrived at not through 'blind learning', but through a process of exploration which leads to genuine understanding (Lewis 1986: 165).

The practical implications of this view are quite clear: instead of explicitly teaching the present perfect tense, for example, we could expose students to examples of it and then allow them, under our guidance, to work out for themselves how it is used. Instead of telling students which words collocate with *crime*, we can get them to look at a dictionary or a computer concordance of the word (see page 34) and discover the collocations on their own. Instead of telling them about spoken grammar, we can get them to look at transcripts and come to their own conclusions about how it differs from written grammar. What we are doing, effectively, is to provoke 'noticing for the learner' (see Batstone 1994: 72 and A4 above).

One powerful reason for encouraging language students to discover things for themselves is the complex nature of language itself. While there may be an argument at lower levels for reducing its complexity into manageable pieces, students who encounter real language outside the classroom will find that it is considerably 'messier' than it may appear in a language lesson. Their response to this may well depend on how prepared they are to observe this messy language and work out, for themselves, how it is put together. Any training in language analysis we have given them will make them more able to do so.

Discovery learning may not be suitable for all students, however, especially if it conflicts with their own learning expectations or culture. One student in a piece of research by Alan Fortune which compared discovery activities with more traditionally taught grammar said, 'I feel more secure with a rule because my intuition does not tell me a lot' (Fortune 1992: 168). Nor is it clear whether such techniques work equally well with all items of grammar or lexis.

If the language that students are exposed to is over-complex, they may find it difficult to make any meaningful analysis of it on their own, even if they understand more or less what it means. But in Alan Fortune's study, quoted above, experience of such activities caused a significant number of informants to end up preferring them to more familiar activities.

Getting students to think for themselves is one aspect of what is often referred to as 'learner-centredness'. Learner-centred classrooms and lessons (where the learners are doing most of the work, often in pairs and groups) are often seen as opposite to 'teacher-centred' lessons, where the teacher is deciding what should happen and where he or she is the centre of attention. For many commentators, learner-centred teaching is preferable to teacher-fronted lessons (where the teacher is at the front, 'teaching' the class). However, as we shall see in Chapter 6, teachers are called upon to play a number of different roles, and as we shall see in Chapter 5, putting students at the heart of learning demands their willing participation and agreement to take *agency* for what they are doing.

D Arousal, affect and humanistic teaching

If, when students meet new language, they are listless and disengaged, they are far less likely to remember what they encounter than if they are engaged and emotionally open to what is going on. A very high degree of attention seems to correlate with improved recall (Thornbury 2001a: 25). In the same way, the students' feelings about a word seem to matter. Do they like what it means? Do they like how it sounds and what it looks like? Do they have good or strong associations with the word? Indeed, when we introduce students to new words, can we create a 'cuddle factor' (Harmer 1991), which will help them to have an emotional attachment to (and therefore better recall of) the word or phrase?

Students' feelings (often referred to as *affect*) go way beyond concerns about how people learn and remember language items. They relate to the whole learning experience and influence how students feel about themselves. After all, 'in the presence of overly negative feelings such as anxiety, fear, stress, anger or depression, our optimal learning potential may be compromised' (Arnold and Brown 1999: 2). The American writer Earl Stevick called these negative feelings 'alienations' and suggested that to counter these states, humanist approaches are called for (Stevick 1976). Stephen Krashen, whose ideas were discussed in A1, would probably agree. His claim for the beneficial value of comprehensible input depends upon the students being relaxed and feeling positive and unthreatened. If they are not, then their *affective filter* is raised and blocks the input from being absorbed and processed. But if, on the other hand, the affective filter is lowered – because students are relaxed – then the comprehensible input the students are exposed to will contribute far more effectively to their acquisition of new language.

How, then, can teachers ensure that their students feel positive about learning – that the affective filter is lowered? The psychologist Carl Rogers, whose impact upon this line of thinking was (and remains) profound, suggested that learners need to feel that what they are learning is personally relevant to them, that they have to experience learning (rather than just being 'taught') and that their self image needs to be enhanced as part of the process (Rogers 1969). Education should speak to the whole person, in other words, not just to a small language-learning facility. In a humanist classroom, students are emotionally involved in the learning, they are encouraged to reflect on how learning happens and their creativity is fostered. The teacher can achieve

this by keeping criticism to a minimum and by encouraging them, in plain terms, to feel good about themselves. In a humanist classroom, learning a language is as much an issue of personal identity, self-knowledge, feelings and emotions as it is about language.

However, not everyone is happy with this humanistic view of the language learning experience. Some humanist activities, for example, encourage students to speak from their 'inner' selves, saying how they feel about their lives, or, perhaps, describing their closeness to different members of their families. John Morgan and Mario Rinvolucri describe such activities as allowing students to 'exteriorise their own internal text' (1988: 9). But critics question whether it is the teacher's job to ask students to reveal things of a private nature, and sometimes even to monitor and nurture the students' inner selves. There is some criticism, too, that there is a strong cultural bias to this view of teaching and learning which would be inappropriate in certain situations. Furthermore, a concentration on the inner self may limit the range of language that students can experience, with more emphasis being placed on interpersonal and informal language at the expense of other kinds. Lastly, some doubters suggest, paying too much attention to affective issues in learning may mean that teachers neglect their students' cognitive and intellectual development.

Nevertheless, it is clearly better for students to have positive rather than negative feelings about how and what they are learning. And we know that students are far more likely to learn and remember effectively if their attention is aroused and if they can 'cuddle' the lexis and grammar that they meet.

E When you're ready!

Many theorists and researchers have wondered whether a student's ability to learn new things depends on whether or not they are ready to learn it. For example, Manfred Pienemann suggests that teaching can promote acquisition if what we are teaching is close to the next form that would be acquired naturally in the learner's interlanguage. His 'teachability' hypothesis suggests that if you try to teach students language before they are ready for it, i.e. if you go directly from stage 2 to stage 4, without passing through stage 3, the student may always revert back to stage 2, because they were not ready for stage 4 (Pienemann 1998).

A similar concern with readiness informed the work of Lev Vygotsky, a psychologist working in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s. He believed that all learning, including language learning, is mediated by social interaction. Learning is 'assisted performance', and this happens when someone with more knowledge – say a parent or a teacher – helps the learner to progress. This help is called 'scaffolding', a kind of supportive framework for the construction of knowledge, and the scaffolding is only removed when the learners can appropriate the knowledge for themselves.

A key element of successful scaffolding is that the learners can only benefit from it if they are in the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) – in other words, if they are just getting to a stage (above their own current level of knowledge) where they are ready to learn the new thing with the assistance of others. Interestingly, this is not dissimilar to Krashen's idea of i + 1 (see page 50).

Patsy Lightbown and Nina Spada suggest (2006: 165) that teachability research is important primarily for helping teachers to understand why their students don't always learn what they

are taught – at least not immediately. It is, perhaps, less successful in helping us to decide what to teach since individual students will often be at different levels of readiness. Nevertheless, we will try to match the language we teach (or which the students notice or are made aware of) to an individual or a group's apparent level or readiness. However, even language which is too advanced may be of use if students notice it: when they are ready for it later, there is some familiarity about it.

In recent years the concept of scaffolding – that is helping students to progress through interaction with someone with better knowledge, such as a teacher – has gained widespread credence, and helped us to focus on how teachers and students interact, especially when, for example, we reformulate what students have said (see page 145), or when we help and prompt them to try out new language. Scaffolding is thus seen as different from introducing new language in a more formal way. However, entering into such a dialogic relationship with students (Thornbury 2001b) may be more problematic with a large class.

F Language play

In recent years researchers and theorists have turned their attention to the area of language humour and language play. There are many reasons for this, chief among which is the idea that it is not just work language or the transactional language of communicative tasks which attracts people when they are free to choose, but that of 'songs, games, humour, aggression, intimate relations and religion' (Cook 2000: 159). Cook points out that language play includes mimicry and repetition, the explicit discussion of rules and the liking for 'form-driven rather than meaning-driven behaviour' (page 171).

A moment's reflection will remind us of the formulaic nature of many jokes and playful rhymes. There is often repetition of structures and lines, and the use of meaning puns to create effects. Furthermore, play (and language play) is often a collaborative affair, and according to Asta Cekaite and Karin Aronsson (who observed children with limited L2 proficiency in spontaneous peer conversations), 'Playful mislabelings and puns often generated extended repair sequences that could be seen as informal "language lessons" focused on formal aspects of language' (Cekaite and Aronsson 2005: 169). They found that student joking included artful performance, alliteration, code switching, laughter and variations in pitch among other things. In other words, there were many ingredients for successful classroom-based language learning on view when children were playing in this way.

Play is seen as something that children do, but the case being made here is that it is highly appropriate in all L2 classrooms. The right kind of laughter works powerfully on student affect. Much play and humour is co-constructed, so students have to work together. A lot of play and joke-telling is rule-bound and linguistically repetitive. And at least some people remember jokes and play routines. Finally, as Guy Cook has pointed out, humour and playful activities occupy large amounts of our real-life existence, however 'unreal' they are. For all of these reasons, the formulaic jokes and dialogues of much ELT, when properly designed, may well be extremely useful for student language development.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Acquisition and learning**

  Probably the best (and most approachable) overview on second language acquisition research is P Lightbown and N Spada (2006).

  For more on the contribution of Harold E Palmer, see R C Smith (1999) and A Howatt (2004: Chapter 17).

  Krashen's views are effectively challenged in K Gregg (1984). See also J Harmer (1983) and a review of an earlier Krashen book in R Ellis (1983).

- **Behaviourism**

  For an easily digestible view of behaviourism, the work of Skinner (for example) and its use in audiolingualism and structuralism, see M Williams and R Burden (1997: 8–13).

- **Noticing**

  On noticing activities, leading on to structuring and re-structuring, see R Batstone (1994: Chapter 7). For a discussion about the merits of noticing, see J Harmer (2003).

- **Repetition**

  See G Cook (1994).

- **Humanistic teaching**

  Nearly ten years apart, D Atkinson (1989) and N Gadd (1998) express doubts about humanistic teaching and wonder how far it should be taken. However, humanism is defended passionately in A Underhill (1989) and J Arnold (1998). For a useful collection of articles on affect in language learning, see J Arnold (ed) (1999).

- **Readiness**

  See also M Pienemann (1999). L Vygotsky's work was not widely known for some time because of his status in post-revolutionary Russia, but see Vygotsky (1978).

- **Language play**

  See E Tarone (2000) and especially G Cook (2000). On humour in ELT, see P Medgyes (2000).

4 Popular methodology

A Approaches, methods, procedures and techniques

This chapter looks at how theory has been realised in methodological practice. Within the general area of methodology, people talk about approaches, methods, techniques, procedures and models, all of which go into the practice of English teaching. These terms, though somewhat vague, are definable:

- **Approach:** people use the term *approach* to refer to theories about the nature of language and language learning which are the source of the way things are done in the classroom and which provide the reasons for doing them. An approach describes how language is used and how its constituent parts interlock – it offers a model of language competence. An approach describes how people acquire their knowledge of the language and makes statements about the conditions which will promote successful language learning.

- **Method:** a method is the practical realisation of an approach. The originators of a method have arrived at decisions about types of activities, roles of teachers and learners, the kinds of material which will be helpful and some model of syllabus organisation. Methods include various procedures and techniques (see below) as part of their standard fare.

  When methods have fixed procedures, informed by a clearly articulated approach, they are easy to describe. However, if a method takes procedures and techniques from a wide range of sources (some of which are used in other methods or are informed by other beliefs), it is more difficult to continue describing it as a 'method'. We will return to this discussion when we discuss postmethod realities in B2.

- **Procedure:** a procedure is an ordered sequence of techniques. For example, a popular dictation procedure starts when students are put in small groups. Each group then sends one representative to the front of the class to read (and remember) the first line of a poem which has been placed on a desk there. Each student then goes back to their respective group and dictates that line. Each group then sends a second student up to read the second line. The procedure continues until one group has written the whole poem (see Example 5 in Chapter 19C).

  A procedure is a sequence which can be described in terms such as *First you do this, then you do that ...* . Smaller than a method, it is bigger than a technique.

- **Technique:** a common technique when using video or film material is called *silent viewing* (see Chapter 18, B1). This is where the teacher plays the video with no sound. Silent viewing is a single activity rather than a sequence, and as such is a technique rather than a whole procedure. Likewise the *finger technique* is used by some teachers; they hold up their hands

and allocate a word to each of their five fingers, e.g. *He is not playing tennis* and then by bringing the *is* and the *not* fingers together, show how the verb is contracted into *isn't*. Another technique is to tell all the students in a group to murmur a new word or phrase to themselves for a few seconds just to get their tongues round it.

This use and mis-use of these terms can make discussions of comparative methodology somewhat confusing. Some methodologists, for example, have new insights and claim a new approach as a result. Others claim the status of method for a technique or procedure. Some methods start as procedures and techniques which seem to work and for which an approach is then developed. Some approaches have to go in search of procedures and techniques with which to form a method. Some methods are explicit about the approach they exemplify and the procedures they employ; others are not.

What the interested teacher needs to do when confronted with a new method, for example, is to see if and/or how it incorporates theories of language and learning. What procedures does it incorporate? Are they appropriate and effective for the classroom situation that teacher works with? In the case of techniques and activities, two questions seem worth asking: *Are they satisfying for both students and teachers?* and *Do they actually achieve what they set out to achieve?*

Popular methodology includes ideas at all the various levels we have discussed, and it is these methods, procedures and approaches which influence the current state of English language teaching.

A1 Grammar-translation, Direct method and Audiolingualism

Many of the seeds which have grown into present-day methodology were sown in debates between more and less formal attitudes to language, and crucially, the place of the students' first language in the classroom. Before the nineteenth century many formal language learners were scholars who studied rules of grammar and consulted lists of foreign words in dictionaries (though, of course, countless migrants and traders picked up new languages in other ways, too). But in the nineteenth century moves were made to bring foreign-language learning into school curriculums, and so something more was needed. This gave rise to the Grammar-translation method (or rather series of methods).

Typically, Grammar-translation methods did exactly what they said. Students were given explanations of individual points of grammar, and then they were given sentences which exemplified these points. These sentences had to be translated from the target language (L2) back to the students' first language (L1) and vice versa.

A number of features of the Grammar-translation method are worth commenting on. In the first place, language was treated at the level of the sentence only, with little study, certainly at the early stages, of longer texts. Secondly, there was little if any consideration of the spoken language. And thirdly, accuracy was considered to be a necessity.

The Direct method, which arrived at the end of the nineteenth century, was the product of a reform movement which was reacting to the restrictions of Grammar-translation. Translation was abandoned in favour of the teacher and the students speaking together, relating the grammatical forms they were studying to objects and pictures, etc. in order to establish their meaning. The sentence was still the main object of interest, and accuracy was all important. Crucially (because of the influence this has had for many years since), it was considered vitally important that only the target language should be used in the classroom. This may have been

a reaction against incessant translation, but, allied to the increased numbers of monolingual native speakers who started, in the twentieth century, to travel the world teaching English, it created a powerful prejudice against the presence of the L1 in language lessons. As we shall see in Chapter 7D when we discuss monolingual, bilingual and multilingual classes, this position has shifted dramatically in the last few years, but for many decades L2-only methods were promoted all over the world.

When behaviourist accounts of language learning became popular in the 1920s and 1930s (see Chapter 3, A2), the Direct method morphed, especially in the USA, into the Audiolingual method. Using the stimulus–response–reinforcement model, it attempted, through a continuous process of such positive reinforcement, to engender good habits in language learners.

Audiolingualism relied heavily on drills to form these habits; substitution was built into these drills so that, in small steps, the student was constantly learning and, moreover, was shielded from the possibility of making mistakes by the design of the drill.

The following example shows a typical Audiolingual drill:

TEACHER: *There's a cup on the table ... repeat.*
STUDENTS: *There's a cup on the table.*
TEACHER: *Spoon.*
STUDENTS: *There's a spoon on the table.*
TEACHER: *Book.*
STUDENTS: *There's a book on the table.*
TEACHER: *On the chair.*
STUDENTS: *There's a book on the chair.*
ETC.

Much Audiolingual teaching stayed at the sentence level, and there was little placing of language in any kind of real-life context. A premium was still placed on accuracy; indeed Audiolingual methodology does its best to banish mistakes completely. The purpose was habit-formation through constant repetition of correct utterances, encouraged and supported by positive reinforcement.

A2 Presentation, practice and production

A variation on Audiolingualism is the procedure most often referred to (since the advent of Communicative Language Teaching – see below) as PPP, which stands for presentation, practice and production. This grew out of structural-situational teaching whose main departure from Audiolingualism was to place the language in clear situational contexts.

In this procedure the teacher introduces a situation which contextualises the language to be taught. The language, too, is then presented. The students now practise the language using accurate reproduction techniques such as choral repetition (where the students repeat a word, phrase or sentence all together with the teacher 'conducting'), individual repetition (where individual students repeat a word, phrase or sentence at the teacher's urging), and cue-response drills (where the teacher gives a cue such as *cinema*, nominates a student by name or by looking or pointing, and the student makes the desired response, e.g. *Would you like to come to the cinema?*). Cue–response drills have similarities with the classic kind of Audiolingual drill we saw above, but because they are contextualised by the situation that has

been presented, they carry more meaning than a simple substitution drill. Later, the students, using the new language, make sentences of their own, and this is referred to as production. The following elementary level example demonstrates the PPP procedure:

- **Presentation:** the teacher shows the students the following picture and asks them whether the people in it are at work or on holiday to elicit the fact that they are on holiday.
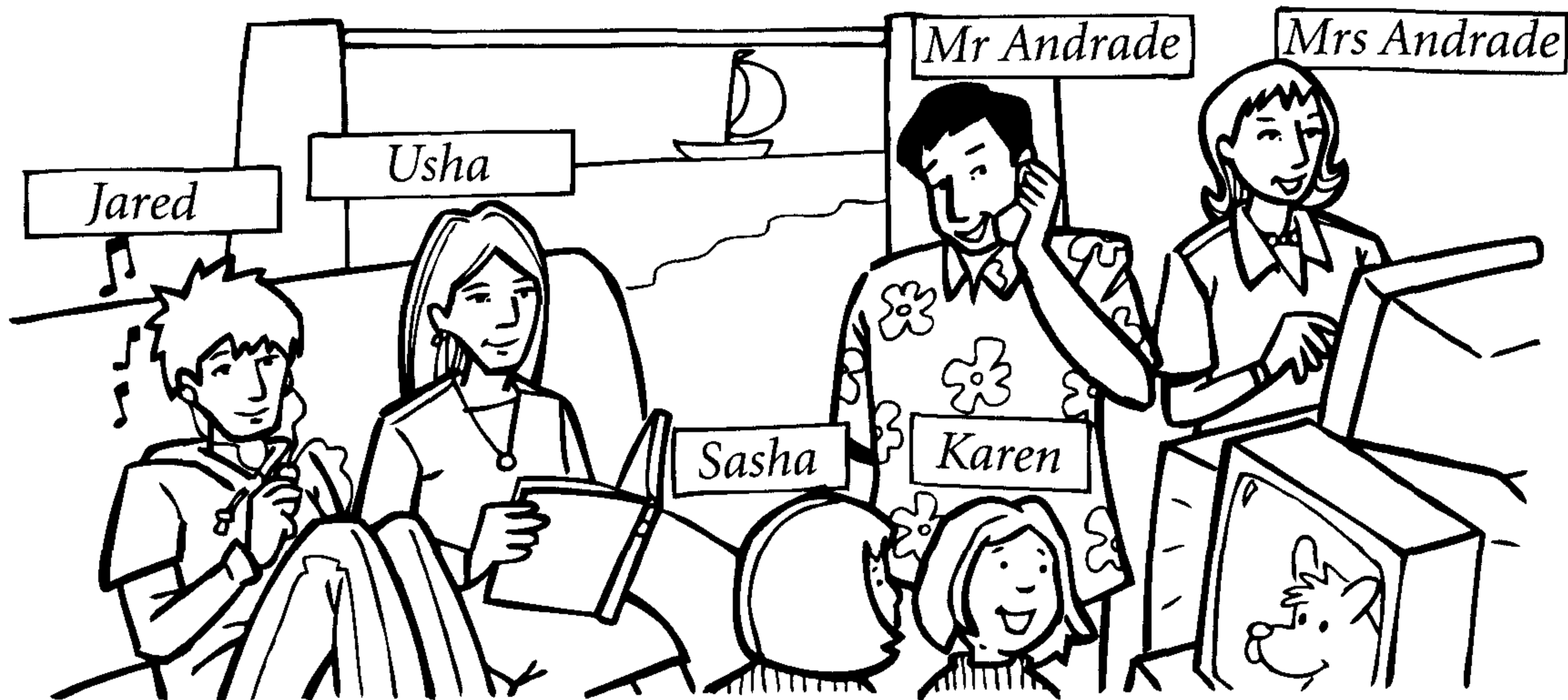
The teacher points to the teenage boy and attempts to elicit the sentence *He's listening to music* by saying *Can anybody tell me ... Jared ...?* or asking the question *What's Jared doing ... anybody?* The teacher then models the sentence (*He's listening to music*) before isolating the grammar she wants to focus on (*he's*), distorting it (*he's ... he is ... he is*), putting it back together again (*he's ... he's*) and then giving the model in a natural way once more (*Listen ... He's listening to music ... he's listening to music*). She may accompany this demonstration of form rules by using some physical means such as bringing two hands (for *he* and *is*) together to show how the contraction works, or by using the finger technique (see above).

- **Practice:** The teacher gets the students to repeat the sentence *He's listening to music* in chorus. She may then nominate certain students to repeat the sentence individually, and she corrects any mistakes she hears. Now she goes back and models more sentences from the picture (*Usha's reading a book, Mrs Andrade is writing an email*, etc.), getting choral and individual repetition where she thinks this is necessary. Now she is in a position to conduct a slightly freer kind of drill than the Audiolingual one above:

TEACHER: *Can anyone tell me? ... Usha? ... Yes, Sergio.*
STUDENT: *She's reading a book.*
TEACHER: *Good.*
ETC.

In this cue–response drill the teacher gives the cue (*Usha*) before nominating a student (*Sergio*) who will give the response (*She's reading a book*). By cueing before nominating she keeps everyone alert. She will avoid nominating students in a predictable order for the same reason.

Usually the teacher puts the students in pairs to practise the sentences a bit more before listening to a few examples just to check that the learning has been effective.

- **Production:** the end point of the PPP cycle is production, what some trainers have called 'immediate creativity'. Here the students are asked to use the new language (in this case the present continuous) in sentences of their own. For example, the teacher may get the students to think about what their friends and family are doing at this moment. They must now come up with sentences such as *My mother's working at the hospital, I think, My brother's lying on the beach. I'm sure. He's on holiday*, etc.

A3   PPP and alternatives to PPP

The PPP procedure, which was offered to teacher trainees as a significant teaching procedure from the middle of the 1960s onwards (though not then referred to as PPP), came under a sustained attack in the 1990s. It was, critics argued, clearly teacher-centred (at least in the kind of procedure which we have demonstrated above), and therefore sits uneasily in a more humanistic and learner-centred framework. It also seems to assume that students learn 'in straight lines' – that is, starting from no knowledge, through highly restricted sentence-based utterances and on to immediate production. Yet human learning probably isn't like that; it's more random, more convoluted. And, by breaking language down into small pieces to learn, it may be cheating the students of a language which, in Tessa Woodward's phrase, is full of 'interlocking variables and systems' (Woodward 1993: 3). Michael Lewis suggested that PPP was inadequate because it reflected neither the nature of language nor the nature of learning (Lewis 1993: 190), and Jim Scrivener even wrote that it was 'fundamentally disabling, not enabling' (Scrivener 1994a: 15).

In response to these criticisms many people have offered variations on PPP and alternatives to it. As long ago as 1982 Keith Johnson suggested the 'deep-end strategy' as an alternative (Johnson 1982), where by encouraging the students into immediate production (throwing them in at the deep end), you turn the procedure on its head. The teacher can now see if and where students are having problems during this production phase and return to either presentation or practice as and when necessary after the production phase is over. A few years later, Donn Byrne suggested much the same thing (Byrne 1986: 3), joining the three phases in a circle (see Figure 1). Teachers and students can decide at which stage to enter the procedure.
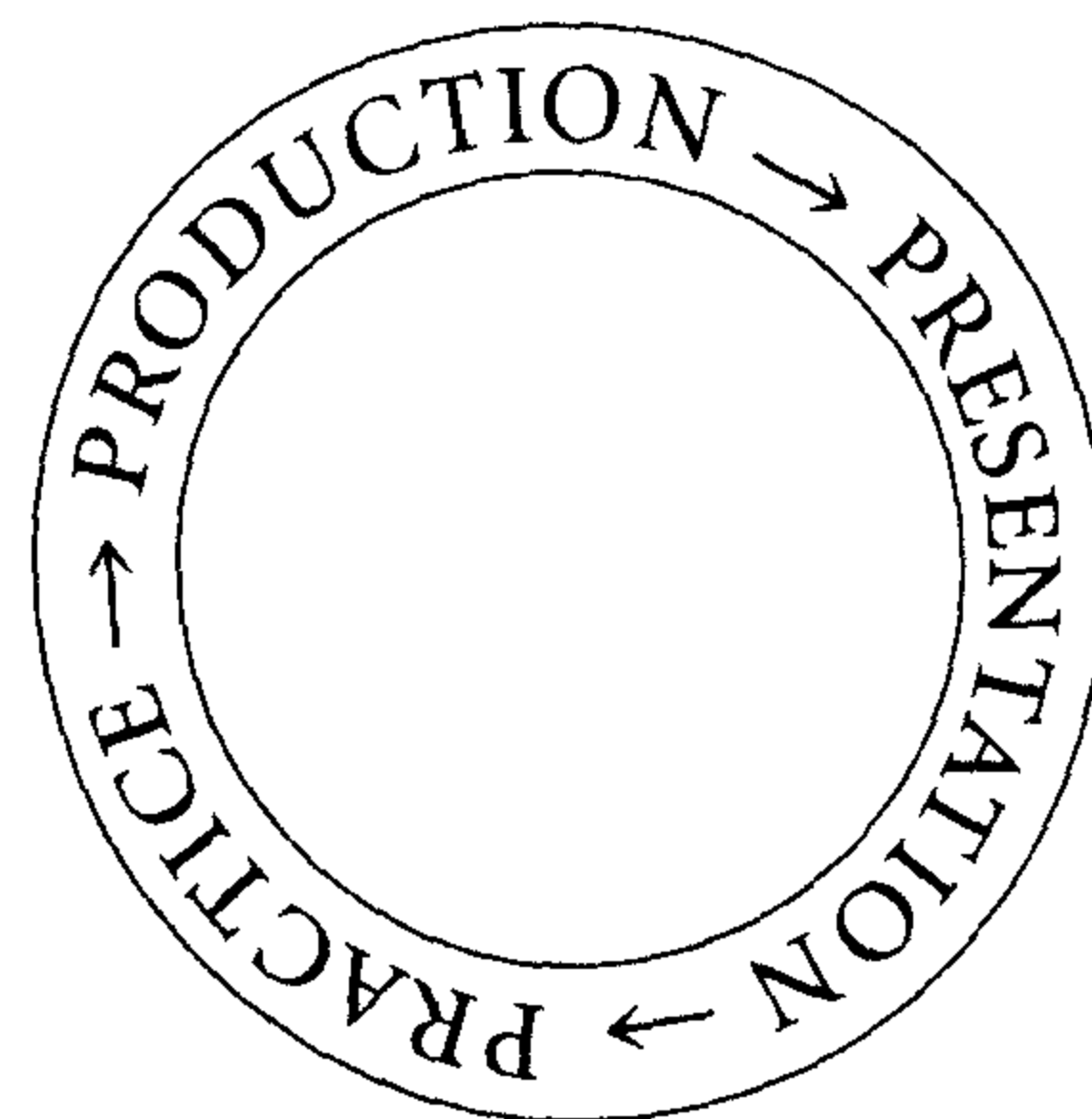

FIGURE 1: Byrne's 'alternative approach'

A different trilogy of teaching sequence elements is ESA: Engage, Study and Activate (Harmer 2007: Chapter 4).

E stands for *engage*. As we saw on page 58, arousal and affect are important for successful learning. The point is that unless students are emotionally engaged with what is going on, their learning will be less effective.

S stands for *study* and describes any teaching and learning element where the focus is on how something is constructed, whether it is relative clauses, specific intonation patterns, the construction of a paragraph or text, the way a lexical phrase is made and used, or the collocation of a particular word. Crucially, in this model, study may be part of a 'focus on forms' syllabus, or may grow out of a communicative task where the students' attention to form is drawn to it either by the teacher or through their own noticing activities.

A stands for *activate* and this means any stage at which students are encouraged to use all and/or any of the language they know. Communicative tasks, for example, (see page 70) are designed to activate the students' language knowledge. But students also activate their language knowledge when they read for pleasure or for general interest. Indeed any meaning-focused activity where the language is not restricted provokes students into language activation.

ESA allows for three basic lesson procedures. In the first ('Straight arrows', see Figure 2) the sequence is ESA, much like PPP. The teacher engages students by presenting a picture or a situation, or by drawing them in by some other means. At the study stage of the procedure, the meaning and form of the language are explained. The teacher then models the language and the students repeat and practise it. Finally, they activate the new language by using it in sentences of their own.

A 'Boomerang' procedure, on the other hand, follows a more task-based or deep-end approach (see Figure 3). Here the order is EAS; the teacher gets the students engaged before asking them to do something like a written task, a communication game or a role-play. Based on what happens there, the students will then, after the activity has finished, study some aspect of language which they lacked or which they used incorrectly.

'Patchwork' lessons (see Figure 4), which are different from the previous two procedures, may follow a variety of sequences. For example, engaged students are encouraged to activate their knowledge before studying one and then another language element, and then returning to more activating tasks, after which the teacher re-engages them before doing some more study, etc.

What the Engage/Study/Activate trilogy has tried to capture is the fact that PPP is just '... a tool used by teachers for *one* of their many possible purposes' (Swan 2005b: 380, my italics). In other words, PPP is extremely useful in a focus-on-forms lesson, especially at lower levels, but is irrelevant in a skills lesson, where focus-on-form may occur as a result of something students hear or read. It is useful, perhaps, in teaching grammar points such as the use of *can* and *can't*, but has little place when students are analysing their own language use after doing a
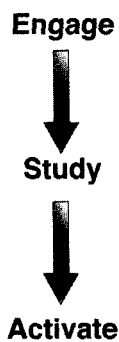
Engage

Study

Activate

FIGURE 2: A Straight arrows lesson procedure

Engage

Study

Activate

FIGURE 3: A Boomerang lesson procedure

Engage

Study

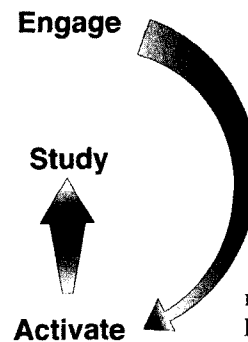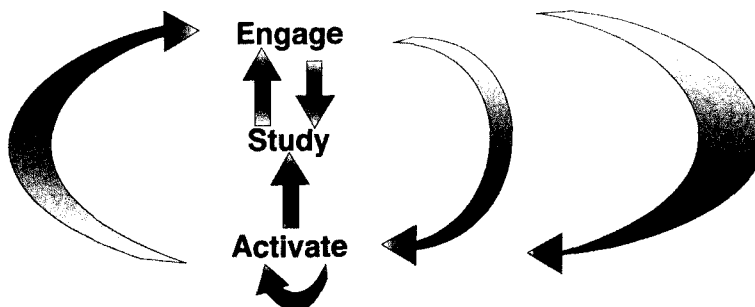**Activate**

FIGURE 4: An example of a Patchwork lesson procedure

communicative task. Nevertheless, a look at modern coursebooks shows that PPP is alive and well, but in a context of a wide range of other techniques and procedures. And while it is true that PPP is still used in one form or another all over the world, it is also the case that students are exposed to many other techniques and procedures. PPP is a kind of ESA, as we saw, but there are many other lesson sequences, too, such the Boomerang and Patchwork sequences mentioned above.

A4 Four methods

Four methods, developed in the 1970s and 1980s, are often considered together. While, individually, they are rarely used exclusively in 'mainstream' teaching, in different ways their influence is still felt today.

In the classic form of Community Language Learning, a 'knower' stands outside a circle of students and helps the students say what they want to say by translating, suggesting or amending the students' utterances. The students' utterances may then be recorded so that they can be analysed at a later date. Students, with the teacher's help, reflect on how they felt about the activities.

Suggestopaedia was developed by Georgi Lozanov and is concerned above all with the physical environment in which the learning takes place. Students need to be comfortable and relaxed so that their affective filter is lowered. Students take on different names and exist in a child–parent relationship with the teacher (Lozanov calls this 'infantilisation'). Traumatic topics are avoided, and at one stage of a three-part procedure, the teacher reads a previously-studied dialogue to the accompaniment of music (preferably Baroque). During this phase there are also 'several minutes of solemn silence' (Lozanov 1978: 272) and the students leave the room silently.

A typical Total Physical Response (TPR) lesson might involve the teacher telling students to 'pick up the triangle from the table and give it to me' or 'walk quickly to the door and hit it' (Asher 1977: 54–56). When the students can all respond to commands correctly, one of them can then start giving instructions to other classmates. James Asher believed that since children learn a lot of their language from commands directed at them, second-language learners can benefit from this, too. Crucially, in TPR students don't have to give instructions themselves until they are ready.

One of the most notable features of the Silent Way is the behaviour of the teacher who, rather than entering into conversation with the students, says as little as possible. This is because the founder of the method, Caleb Gattegno, believed that learning is best facilitated if the learner discovers and creates language rather than just remembering and repeating what has been taught. The learner should be in the driving seat, in other words, not the teacher.

In the Silent Way, the teacher frequently points to different sounds on a phonemic chart, modelling them before indicating that students should say the sounds. The teacher is then silent, indicating only by gesture or action when individual students should speak (they keep trying to work out whether they are saying the sound correctly) and then showing when sounds and words are said correctly by moving on to the next item. Because of the teacher's silent non-involvement, it is up to the students – under the controlling but indirect influence of the teacher – to solve problems and learn the language. Typically, the Silent Way also gets students to use Cuisenaire rods (wooden blocks of different colours and sizes, see page 180) to solve communication problems.

To some, the Silent Way has seemed somewhat inhuman, with the teacher's silence acting as a barrier rather than an incentive. But to others, the reliance students are forced to place upon themselves and upon each other is exciting and liberating. It is students who should take responsibility for their learning; it is the teacher's job to organise this.

Some of the procedures employed in these four methods may strike us as being (or having been) outside the mainstream of classroom practice, or even somewhat eccentric. Nevertheless, in their own ways, they contain truths about successful language learning. Community Language Learning, for example, reminds us that teachers are in classrooms to facilitate learning and to help students with what they want to say. Suggestopaedia's insistence on lowering the affective filter reminds us how important affect is in language learning. Nor is there any doubt about the appropriacy of getting students to move around in lessons, as in TPR. For students with a more kinaesthetic inclination (see page 89), this will be especially useful. Finally, getting students to think about what they are learning and to rely on themselves matches our concern for cognitive depth (see page 57), where close attention to language by individual students has a beneficial effect on the learning process.

A5 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

The real problem when attempting to define CLT (or the Communicative approach as it was originally called) is that it means different things to different people. Or perhaps it is like an extended family of different approaches, and '... as is the case with most families, not all members live harmoniously together all of the time. There are squabbles and disagreements, if not outright wars, from time to time. However, no one is willing to assert that they do not belong to the family' (Nunan 2004: 7).

One of the things that CLT embraces within its family is the concept of how language is used. Instead of concentrating solely on grammar, pioneers such as David Wilkins in the 1970s looked at what notions language expressed and what communicative functions people performed with language (Wilkins 1976). The concern was with spoken functions as much as with written grammar, and notions of when and how it was appropriate to say certain things were of primary importance. Thus communicative language teachers taught people to invite and apologise, to agree and disagree, alongside making sure they could use the past perfect or the second conditional.

A major strand of CLT centres around the essential belief that if students are involved in meaning-focused communicative tasks, then 'language learning will take care of itself' (see page 52), and that plentiful exposure to language in use and plenty of opportunities to use it are vitally important for a student's development of knowledge and skill. Activities in CLT typically involve students in real or realistic communication, where the successful achievement of the communicative task they are performing is at least as important as the accuracy of their language use. Thus role-play and simulation have become very popular in CLT. For example, students might simulate a television programme or a scene at an airport – or they might put together the simulated front page of a newspaper. In other communicative activities, students have to solve a puzzle and can only do so by sharing information. Sometimes they have to write a poem or construct a story together.

In order for these activities to be truly communicative, it was suggested from the very beginning, students should have a desire to communicate something. They should have a

purpose for communicating (e.g. to make a point, to buy an airline ticket or to write a letter to a newspaper). They should be focused on the content of what they are saying or writing rather than on a particular language form. They should use a variety of language rather than just one language structure. The teacher will not intervene to stop the activity; and the materials he or she relies on will not dictate what specific language forms the students use either. In other words, such activities should attempt to replicate real communication. All this is seen as being in marked contrast to the kind of teaching and learning we saw in A1 above. They are at opposite ends of a 'communication continuum' as shown in Figure 5.

Non-communicative activities

- no communicative desire
- no communicative purpose
- form not content
- one language item only
- teacher intervention
- materials control

Communicative activities

- a desire to communicate
- a communicative purpose
- content not form
- variety of language
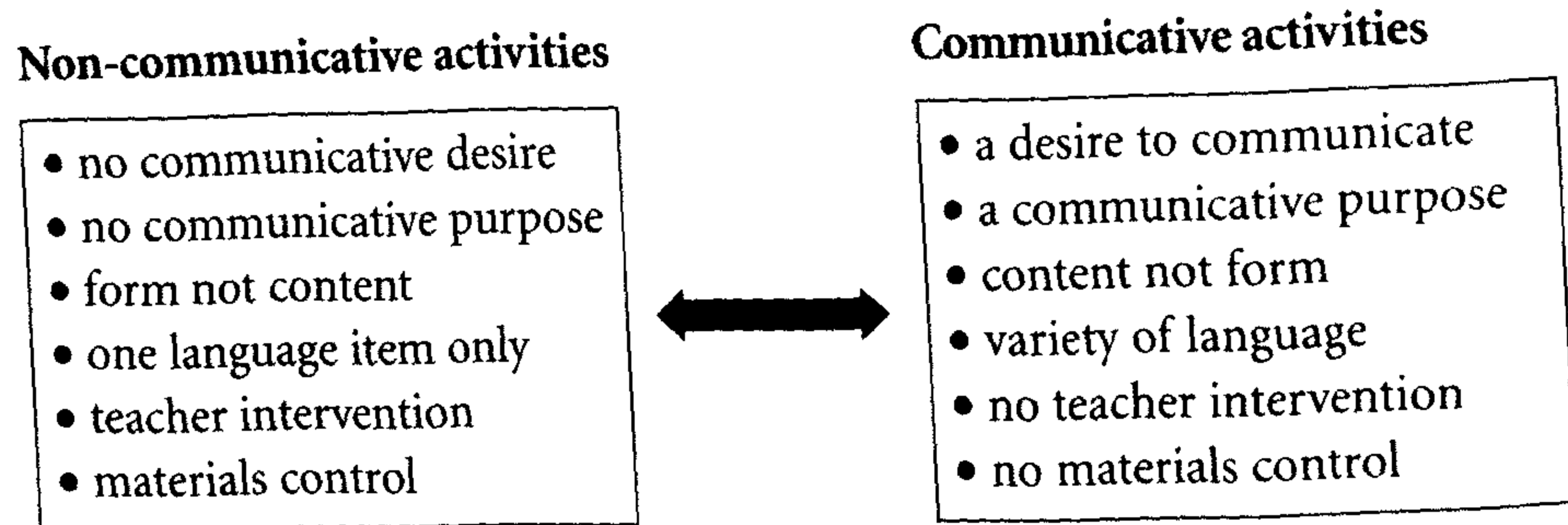- no teacher intervention
- no materials control

FIGURE 5: The communication continuum

Not all activities in CLT occur at either extreme of the continuum, however. Some may be further towards the communicative end, whereas some may be more non-communicative. An activity in which students have to go round the class asking questions with a communicative purpose, but using certain prescribed structures (e.g. *Have you ever done a bungee jump? Have you ever climbed a mountain? Have you ever been white-water rafting?*) may be edging towards the non-communicative end of the continuum, whereas another, where students have to interview each other about a holiday they went on, might be nearer the communicative end.

A key to the enhancement of communicative purpose and the desire to communicate is the information gap. A traditional classroom exchange in which one student asks *Where's the library?* and another student answers *It's on Green Street, opposite the bank* when they can both see it and both know the answer, is not much like real communication. If, however, the first student has a map which does not have the library shown on it, while the other student has a different map with *library* written on the correct building – but which the first student cannot see – then there is a gap between the knowledge which the two participants have. In order for the first student to locate the library on their map, that information gap needs to be closed.

CLT, therefore, with its different strands of what to teach (utterances as well as sentences, functions as well as grammar) and how to teach it (meaning-focused communicative tasks as well as more traditional study techniques), has become a generalised 'umbrella' term to describe learning sequences which aim to improve the students' ability to communicate. This is in stark contrast to teaching which is aimed more at learning bits of language just because they exist – without focusing on their use in communication.

However, CLT has come under attack for being prejudiced in favour of native-speaker teachers by demanding a relatively uncontrolled range of language use on the part of the student, and thus expecting the teacher to be able to respond to any and every language problem which may come up (Medgyes 1992). In promoting a methodology which is based around group- and pairwork, with teacher intervention kept to a minimum during, say, a role-play, CLT may also

offend against educational traditions which rely on a more teacher-centred approach. CLT has sometimes been seen as having eroded the explicit teaching of grammar with a consequent loss among students of accuracy in the pursuit of fluency. Perhaps there is a danger in 'a general over-emphasis on performance at the expense of progress' (Wicksteed 1998: 3). Finally, some commentators suggest that many so-called communicative activities are no more or less real than traditional exercises. Getting people to write a letter, buy an airline ticket, find out train times (see Prabhu, quoted below), or go and look something up (see Allwright's study on page 52), is just as contrived as many more traditional exercises, and does not, in fact, arise from any genuine communicative purpose.

Despite these reservations, however, the Communicative approach has left an indelible mark on teaching and learning, resulting in the use of communicative activities in classrooms all over the world.

A6 Task-based learning (TBL)

Task-based learning (sometimes referred to as Task-based instruction, or TBI) makes the performance of meaningful tasks central to the learning process. It is informed by a belief that if students are focused on the completion of a task, they are just as likely to learn language as they are if they are focusing on language forms. Instead of a language structure or function to be learnt, students are presented with a task they have to perform or a problem they have to solve. For example, in an early example of TBL, after a class performs some pre-task activities which involve questions and vocabulary checking (e.g. *What is this? It's a timetable. What does 'arrival' mean?*), they ask and answer questions to solve a problem, such as finding train-timetable information, e.g. *When does the Brindavan express leave Madras/arrive in Bangalore?* (Prahbu 1987: 32). Although the present simple may frequently be used in such an activity, the focus of the lesson is the task, not the structure.

One way of looking at Task-based learning is to see it as a kind of 'deep-end' strategy (see Johnson 1982), or, in the words of Jane Willis, 'like a sort of PPP upside down' (Willis 1994: 19). In other words, students are given a task to perform and only when the task has been completed does the teacher discuss the language that was used, making corrections and adjustments which the students' performance of the task has shown to be desirable. This is similar to the Boomerang procedure we mentioned on page 67. However, as Willis herself makes clear, task-based methodology is, in fact, considerably more complicated than this. She suggests three basic stages: the Pre-task, the Task cycle and the Language focus (see Figure 6).

Pre-task
Introduction to topic and task

Task cycle
Task
Planning
Report

Language focus
Analysis
Practice

FIGURE 6: The Willis TBL framework (Willis 1996: 52)

In the Pre-task stage, the teacher explores the topic with the class and may highlight useful words and phrases, helping students to understand the task instructions. The students may hear a recording of other people doing the same task. During the Task cycle stage, the students perform the task in pairs or small groups while the teacher monitors from a distance. The students then plan how they will tell the rest of the class what they did and how it went, and
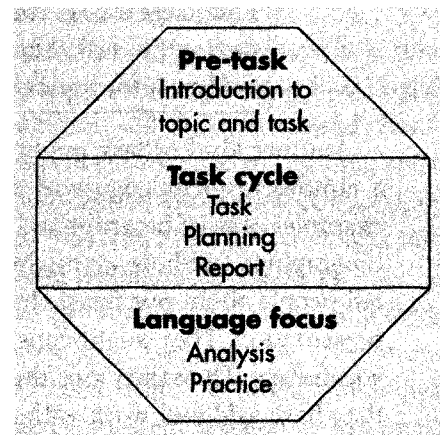
they then report on the task either orally or in writing, and/or compare notes on what has happened. In the Language focus stage, the students examine and discuss specific features of any listening or reading text which they have looked at for the task and/or the teacher may conduct some form of practice of specific language features which the task has provoked.

One of the examples that Jane Willis gives of such a procedure concerns a woman's phobia about spiders (Willis 1996: 161–164). The woman lived with her husband but could never be left alone because of her fear of spiders. Part of the procedure (which I have shortened and slightly amended) goes like this:

> **Pre-task:** The teacher explains the woman's situation and asks students, in pairs, to brainstorm three consecutive steps they might take to help cure the woman of her phobia.

> **Task:** Pairs list possible ways to help the woman get over her phobia.
>
> **Planning:** Pairs rehearse how to explain the steps they recommend, and justify the order they are in.
>
> **Report and reading:** The pairs tell the class their proposals and justify them. The class listen and count how many ideas they come up with.
>
> The teacher lets the class decide and vote on which three steps might be similar to those in a newspaper report about the phobic woman's dilemma. She writes these on the board.
>
> The teacher gives out the text. She asks students to read to see whether their three steps were in the report. Finally, she asks which pair had the most steps that were similar.

> **Language focus:** The teacher helps students with any mistakes she heard during the task. She then directs students back to the article and they analyse it for topic vocabulary, time expressions, syntax elements, etc.

Another kind of task might be to ask students to give a short presentation on the life of a famous historical figure of their choice. We could start by getting them to look at some examples of brief biographies (on the Internet, for example) before discussing what is in such biographies and how we might change the sequence of the information if we were going to tell people about our figure. In pairs or groups, students now choose a figure and plan their presentation. They might consult language books or ask us to help them with grammar and vocabulary. They then give their presentations and subsequently we and they analyse what they have said and work with language items that need attention. When all that is over, we might get them to re-plan and re-deliver their presentations in order to take advantage of what they learnt from the feedback on their first attempts (see 'The importance of repetition' on page 56).

David Nunan's task sequence is somewhat different (Nunan 2004: Chapter 2). He starts with the same kind of pre-task to build the students' schema (see page 271), but he then gives students controlled language practice for the vocabulary they might need for their task. They then listen to native speakers performing a similar task and analyse the language that was used. Finally,

after some free practice of language, they reach the pedagogical task where they discuss issues and make a decision. This is not at all like 'PPP upside down' since language focus activities lead towards a task rather than occurring as a result of it. This, Nunan suggests, is because 'learners should be encouraged to move from reproductive to creative language use' (2004: 37).

There is some confusion, then, about what Task-based learning means. In one view, tasks are the building blocks of a language course. Students perform the tasks and focus on language form as they do the tasks, or as a result of having done them. In another version, however, tasks are still the building blocks of the course, but we will provide students with the language to do them before they set out to perform these tasks. It is the first of these two approaches to TBL that is essentially based on the belief that 'get performance right and competence will, with some prompting, take care of itself' (Widdowson 2003: 18).

Dave and Jane Willis are quite clear that despite different approaches to TBL (see above), its advocates 'have rejected a reliance on presentation methodology' and that further 'the basis for language development is the learner's attempt to deploy language for meaning' (Willis and Willis 2003: 2).

Critics of TBL have raised a number of concerns about its overall applicability. William Littlewood, for example, has difficulty, as we have done above, in pinning down exactly what it means and so wishes to abandon the term altogether (Littlewood 2004a). Paul Seedhouse suggests that while it may be highly appropriate to base some learning on tasks, it would be 'unsound' to make tasks 'the basis for an entire pedagogical methodology' (Seedhouse 1999: 155). He points out that the kind of interaction which typical tasks promote leads to the use of specific 'task-solving' linguistic forms. These fail to include the kind of language we might expect from discussion, debate or social interactions of other kinds. As we saw on page 60, Guy Cook thinks that there is more to language learning than just 'work' language; it is one of his main arguments for the inclusion of language play. Michael Swan worries that 'while TBI may successfully develop learners' command of what is known, it is considerably less effective for the systematic teaching of new language' (2005b: 376). He also worries about how appropriate tasks are in a situation where teachers have little time, and this point is taken up by Penny Ur. Working in a state school with only three or four English lessons a week, she has to 'make sure they learn the most common and useful words and chunks as fast as possible. We don't have time to wait until such items are encountered in communicative tasks' (2006). However, as someone who wrote a book on 'task-centred discussions' (Ur 1981), she does not argue that there is no place for communicative tasks, but rather that they are a 'necessary added component of a structured, language-based syllabus and methodology' (2006: 3).

Finally, a central claim of TBL is that 'opportunities for production may force students to pay close attention to form and to the relationship between form and meaning' (Beglar and Hunt 2002: 97), although Rob Batstone wonders whether tasks which require simultaneous processing of form and meaning might 'overload the learner's system, leading to less intake rather than more' (1996: 273).

Perhaps Task-based learning, like Communicative Language Teaching before it, is really a family of slightly argumentative members who, despite their differences, really want to stay together. In its pure form (that a curriculum should be based on tasks, and that learning should emerge from the tasks rather than preceding them), it accurately reflects an approach to learning exemplified by proponents of focus-on-form, rather than those who base their curriculum on teaching a sequence of pre-selected forms. But the claims made for it, while

extremely attractive, sometimes seem more like hypotheses than fact. In the end, it is indubitably the case that having students perform meaning-related tasks is good for language processing and for giving them opportunities for trying out language (and getting feedback on their language use), but whether a programme based exclusively on such tasks is appropriate (and where it might be appropriate – see Section B below) is open to question.

A7 The Lexical approach

The Lexical approach, discussed by Dave Willis (Willis 1990) and popularised by Michael Lewis (1993, 1997), is based on the assertion that 'language consists not of traditional grammar and vocabulary but often of multi-word prefabricated chunks' (Lewis 1997: 3). These are the 'lexical phrases', 'lexical chunks' and other word combinations that we discussed in Chapter 2, E4, i.e. the collocations, idioms, fixed and semi-fixed phrases which form such an important part of the language. Adult language users have literally thousands of these chunks at their disposal, such as *How are you?, See you later, You must be joking, I'll give it my best shot, changing the subject slightly ..., might as well, ... if it'll help*. Lewis proposes that fluency is the result of acquisition of a large store of these fixed and semi-fixed pre-fabricated items which are 'available as the foundation for any linguistic novelty or creativity' (1997: 15).

This highlighting of an area of language that was, perhaps, previously undervalued, has played a valuable role in provoking debate about what students should study. A Lexical approach would steer us away from an over-concentration on syntax and tense usage (with vocabulary slotted into these grammar patterns) towards the teaching of phrases which show words in combination, and which are generative in a different way from traditional grammar substitution tables. Thus, instead of teaching *will* for the future, we might instead have students focus on its use in a series of 'archetypical utterances' (Lewis 1993: 97), such as *I'll give you a ring, I'll be in touch, I'll see what I can do, I'll be back in a minute*, etc.

In the area of methodology, Lewis's account of a Lexical approach is fairly straightforward. Typical activities include asking students to add intensifiers to semi-fixed expressions, e.g. *It's obvious something's gone wrong (quite)* (Lewis 1997: 96), and getting students, once they have read a text, to underline all the nouns they can find and then to underline any verbs that collocate with those nouns (1997: 109). Word-order exercises can be adapted to focus on particular phrase components, as in this example for expressions with *get*:

> Rearrange these to make fixed expressions with the verb *(get)*.
>
> 1. Things much can't worse get.
> 2. What we to there are supposed time get?
> 3. I you the very weren't happy impression got.
> 4. We've we as as the for can far moment got.
> 5. We be to don't anywhere seem getting.
> 6. What you I can get?
>
> Which of these suggests:
>
> flying   offering a drink   frustration   despair

'Sentence anagrams' from *Implementing the Lexical Approach* by M Lewis (Language Teaching Publications)

Elsewhere, however, Lewis suggests that exposure to enough suitable input, not formal teaching, is the 'key to increasing the learner's lexicon', and that 'most vocabulary is acquired, not taught' (1997: 197).

Suggesting that language should be taught in such a Lexical approach is not without problems, however. In the first place, no one has yet explained how the learning of fixed and semi-fixed phrases can be incorporated into the understanding of a language system. Indeed, it can be argued that learning the system is a vital pre-requisite of the ability to string phrases together into a coherent whole. Otherwise we are left with the danger of having to learn an endless succession of phrase-book utterances – 'all chunks but no pineapple' (Thornbury 1998: 12).

Another problem is determining the way in which we might order such phrases for teaching and learning purposes or, if we believe that exposure to enough suitable input is the key, deciding what kind of input that should be.

Finally, we need to ask in what way a Lexical approach differs from other accounts of language teaching since there are as yet no sets of procedures to exemplify such an approach to language learning.

Despite these reservations, however, the Lexical approach has certainly drawn our attention to facts about the composition of language; what it has not yet done is to make the leap from that to a set of pedagogic principles or syllabus specifications which could be incorporated into a method. However, we will return to the issue of lexical phrases in Chapter 14.

A8 Teachers and students in dialogue together

In 1995 a group of film-makers led by the Danish director Lars Von Trier drafted the manifesto of the Dogme 95 Film-makers' Collective in which they pledged to rescue cinema from big budget, special effects-dominated Hollywood movies. They wanted to return to core values, using no artificial lighting, no special effects, etc. This prompted Scott Thornbury to write a 'short uncharacteristically provocative article' (Thornbury 2005c, describing the original article published in 2000) suggesting that ELT needed similar rescue action, notably a return to a materials- and technology-free classroom in which language emerges as teachers and students engage in a dialogic relationship. This original article provoked considerable interest and a group of teachers emerged who wanted to apply certain principles to language learning. They reasoned that language is co-constructed between teachers and students, where it emerges (as it is scaffolded by the teacher) rather than being acquired. They were hostile to materials being brought into the classroom since these interfered with the dialogic relationship between teacher and student. In this return to a 'pedagogy of bare essentials' students learn because they get to express what they want to say – rather like the consumers of Community Language Learning (see page 68) – instead of taking their cue from coursebooks and school syllabuses.

Critics of this line of reasoning point out that this kind of dialogic model favours native-speaker teachers (see page 119), that it is extremely difficult to countenance in large classes, that syllabuses are necessary organising constructs, and that materials such as coursebooks, in particular, are highly prized by both teachers and students alike for a variety of reasons (see page 181). Furthermore, in the words of Angeles Clemente, 'When I teach, I certainly do more than talk, and that is why teachers around the world still have students attending their classes' (Clemente 2001: 401). Nevertheless, the Dogme discussion provokes us into thinking carefully about our role as teachers, and about how an over-reliance on focus-on-forms, based on over-used materials, may stifle the creativity of both teacher and students.

B What methodology?

With so many different approaches and methods available, many teachers are unsure of which to choose and how to go about making that choice. In this section we will look at some of the cultural implications of the methods we use, and come to some conclusions about the bases on which we can decide on our approach to teaching.

B1 Methods and culture

The writer Adrian Holliday has come up with the term *native speakerism* to describe the way that British and American teaching methodology and practices have been exported around the world, almost without question by the exporters, though they are increasingly questioned by commentators, both native speaker and non-native speaker alike. Holliday's worry about native speakerism is that it is often premised on a view of 'us' and 'them'. Native speakerism, he worries, 'cuts into and divides World TESOL by creating a negatively reduced image of the foreign Other of non-native speaker students and educators' (2005: 16). We will discuss the specific issue of native- and non-native-speaker teachers in Chapter 6. In this section, however, it is methodology and its relationship with educational and social culture which concerns us.

Many years ago, Dilys Thorp wrote an article that identifies a problem which occurs when different educational cultures come into contact with each other. What, she wondered, are we to make of the following comment by a British lecturer about an Indonesian student: 'His work shows that he's very bright, but he's quiet in class' (Thorp 1991: 112)? If the comment was made about a British student, she suggests, it might indeed indicate that the student was of a quiet and shy disposition, and that this was a pity, whereas for the Indonesian student the judgement might not be about that student's personality at all, but rather about norms of classroom behaviour (see page 155) that the student feels are culturally appropriate. 'It is far too easy,' she writes, 'to think that our own ideas as to what constitutes "good" learning are universal, and forget their cultural specificity' (1991: 117).

The fact is that many of the approaches and teaching methods we have discussed in this chapter are based on a very western idea of what constitutes 'good' learning. For example, we have expected active participation in class, and we have encouraged adventurous students who are prepared to have a go even when they are not completely sure of the language they are trying to use. We sometimes ask students to talk about themselves and their lives in a potentially revealing way. We tell students that they should take charge of their learning, that the teacher is a helper and guide rather than the source of knowledge and authority. Yet all of these tenets may well fly in the face of educational traditions from different cultures. Thus British and American teachers working in other countries sometimes complain that their students have 'nothing to say', when in fact it is not an issue of the students' intelligence, knowledge or creativity which makes them reluctant to communicate in a British or American way, but their educational culture.

However, we are not suggesting for one minute that it is necessarily the case that ideas with an ideological origin in English-speaking TESOL are by their very nature inappropriate. On the contrary, many of them are sound and have a proven usefulness. However, what we are saying is that if teachers (native or non-native speakers) grounded in English-speaking western TESOL assume a methodological superiority (and as a result perceive other kinds of learning as inherently inferior), they will be doing their students and themselves a potential disservice.

For, as Alastair Pennycook has said, 'we need to see English language teaching as located in the domain of popular culture as much as in the domain of applied linguistics' (Pennycook 1998: 162). Our attitudes to the language, and to the way it is taught, reflect cultural biases and beliefs about how we should communicate and how we should educate each other.

When teachers from one culture (e.g. Britain, the USA, Australia) teach students from another (e.g. Cambodia, Argentina, Saudi Arabia), it is often easy to see where cultural and educational differences reside. However, as we have suggested, it is the methodological culture that matters here, not the background of the teachers themselves. In 1998 an Argentinian teacher, Pablo Toledo, posted a message on an Internet discussion list for teachers from South America which he called 'Howl' after the celebrated poem by the American Allan Ginsberg (republished in Toledo 2001). In his posting, he lamented the fact that teachers who try affective learning and humanistic teaching, who try drama and role-play and other communicative techniques, fall flat on their faces in secondary classes where the students are not interested and merely wish to get good grades. He argues passionately for a new kind of methodology to suit that kind of reality since the ideas developed in 'comfy little schools with highly motivated students' just aren't right for less 'privileged' contexts. 'Not,' he writes, 'because there is something wrong with the ideas, but they just were not made for our teaching reality, and do not deal with our problems.'

Adrian Holliday would almost certainly agree. He describes his own use of a basic Audiolingual methodology at the beginning of his career in 1970s Iran. His approach, he writes, 'was entirely methodology-centred in that students and business clients alike were expected to submit to its wisdom, as recipients of a superior treatment' (2005: 60–61). He suggests that in many situations it was entirely inappropriate and certainly 'native speakerist' (see page 119).

All we are saying here is that applying a particular methodology thoughtlessly to any and every learning context we come into contact with may not always be appropriate. What we need to ask ourselves, therefore, is how to decide what is appropriate, and how to apply the methodological beliefs that guide our teaching practice.

B2 Bargains, postmethod and context-sensitivity

One approach for context-sensitive teachers is to try to create a bridge between their methodological beliefs and the students' preferences. For example, Dilys Thorp, whose article was cited above, had what she saw as a problem with students in China when they were confronted with listening tasks. An important skill for students is listening for gist (general understanding) without getting hung up on the meaning of every single word. Yet Thorp's students were not used to this idea; they wanted to be able to listen to tapes again and again, translating word for word. It is worth quoting her response to this situation in full:

> In listening, where they needed the skill of listening for gist and not every word, and where they wanted to listen time and time again, we gradually weaned them away from this by initially allowing them to listen as often as they liked; but in return – and this was their part of the bargain – they were to concentrate on the gist and answer guided questions. These guided questions moved them away from a sentence-by-sentence analysis towards inferential interpretation of the text. Then, we gradually reduced the number of times they were allowed to listen. This seemed to work: it was a system with which they were happy, and which enabled them to see real improvements in their listening skills.   (Thorp 1991: 115)

Thorp's solution was to make a bargain so that two essentially opposing methodological beliefs could be accommodated together as a result of negotiation between teacher and students.

A more radical suggestion is that we have reached a 'postmethod' phase. Looked at this way, taking a method into class (say Task-based learning), is actually limiting since it gets in the way of teachers and students learning how to learn together. What is needed, Kumaravadivelu suggests, is not alternative methods, but 'an alternative to method' (2006: 67). Instead of one method, he suggests ten 'macrostrategies, such as "maximise learning opportunities, facilitate negotiation, foster language awareness, promote learner autonomy" etc.' (Kumaravadivelu 2001, 2006). Of course, these aims represent a kind of methodological 'wishlist', and while not confined to a one-size-fits-all restrictive methodology, nevertheless make methodological assumptions which might, without reflection and negotiation, be as inappropriate as some of the practices Pablo Toledo 'howled' about (see page 77).

Dick Allwright is also concerned to get away from methods as the central focus of decisions about teaching. For him, the quality of life in any classroom is much more important than instructional efficiency. In what he calls *exploratory practice* (Allwright and Lenzuen 1997, Allwright 2003), teachers should determine and understand the classroom quality of life. Then they should identify a learning puzzle (find something that is puzzling in class – e.g. why certain things happen or don't happen when teaching students), reflect on it, gather data and try out different ways of solving the puzzle, reflecting at each stage on what happens in order to decide what to do next. We will discuss reflective teaching in more detail in Chapter 24.

Stephen Bax has similar concerns about the imposition of a method without taking the context where the learning is happening into account. He points out that methodology is just one factor in language learning. Other factors may be important, and other methods and approaches may be equally valid (2003: 281). His solution is for teachers to do some kind of 'context analysis' before they start teaching so that they can develop their own procedures from the range of methodological knowledge and techniques they have available to them. They then reflect on and evaluate what has happened in order to decide how to proceed (Bax 2006).

B3 Making choices

We need to be able to say, as Kumaravadivelu attempted, what is important in methodological terms, especially if we concede that a choice of one method alone may not be right in many situations. We have to be able to extract the key components of the various methods we have been describing. What is it that students need, and what should we offer them?

Six strands have emerged from our discussion in this and in the previous chapter:

- **Affect:** students learn better when they are engaged with what is happening. Their feelings and attitudes matter both in relation to their encounters with the language itself, and also in terms of the learning experience in general.

- **Input:** students need constant exposure to the language otherwise they will not learn how to use it. The input they receive may be in the form of reading or in the way the teacher talks to them. It may sometimes be roughly-tuned (see page 50) or, for more form-focused sequences, finely-tuned. Comprehensible input is not enough in itself, unless there is some language study or some opportunity for noticing or consciousness-raising to help students remember specific language. Focus on form – and especially at lower levels, on language forms – is a vital component of successful language learning.

- **Output:** students need chances to activate their language knowledge through meaning-focused tasks. This activation is achieved when they try to deploy all or any of the language they know either to produce language (spoken or written) or to read or listen for meaning.

- **Cognitive effort:** students should be encouraged to think about language as they work with it since, we are sure, this aids retention. Where appropriate, we should encourage students to do some of the work for themselves, discovering how language works rather than being given information about language construction 'on a plate'.

- **Grammar and lexis:** lexis is as important as grammar. Showing how words combine together and behave both semantically and grammatically is an important part of any language-learning programme.

- **How, why and where:** the actual way we do things depends not on the choice of a method (though it is possible that a method – or a version of a method – may be appropriate), but rather on why and where we are teaching. What do we want to achieve, with whom and in what context? We need to analyse these features and then choose from the procedures and techniques at our command those that best fit the situation we are in. At all levels and at all stages of teaching we should be able to say clearly why we are doing what we are doing – an issue we will discuss in more detail in Chapter 21.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Approaches and methods**
  For a discussion of 'approach' versus 'method', etc., see J Richards and T Rodgers (2001: Chapter 2).

  Many teachers use metaphors to separate out these different levels of abstraction. For example, the trainer David Valente turns to the art of cooking. The approach is our belief about cooking, the method is the recipe book, the procedures are actions such as mixing, chopping, marinating, etc. and the techniques are how we mix and chop, for example.

- **Audiolingualism**
  For a concise description of Audiolingualism, see M Williams and R Burden (1997: 10–13). Chapters 2 and 3 of J Richards and T Rodgers (2001) put Audiolingual methodology into its context.

- **PPP and teaching models**
  For a classic description of PPP, see D Byrne (1986: Chapter 1). Some of the books and articles which influenced the PPP debate of the 1990s are M Lewis (1993, 1996) – whose attacks became increasingly strident – articles in Sections 1 and 2 of J Willis and D Willis (eds) (1996), T Woodward (1993) and J Harmer (1996).

  J Scrivener described lessons in terms of **Authentic Use, Restricted Use and Clarification and focus** (Scrivener 1994b). By labelling different parts of any lesson A, R or C, he was able to describe lessons as, for example, RCRA (where the teacher presents a situation, clarifies

the language point, institutes restricted (controlled) practice, before getting 'authentic' use), whereas a different lesson – for example a task-based lesson – might follow a procedure such as CACACR. S Thornbury (1996) discusses Scrivener's ARC model. In a later edition of his book, Scrivener incorporates the concept of ARC into a more complex account of input, learning and use (2005: 111–117).

- **CLT**

  J Harmer (1982) described the characteristics of a communicative activity.

  The appropriacy of the Communicative approach both in and outside 'inner circle' countries (see Chapter 1, A3) has come under attack from Peter Medgyes (1986) and G Ellis (1996).

  The whole value of the Communicative approach was the subject of a bitter clash in the mid 1980s between Michael Swan (Swan 1985) and Henry Widdowson (Widdowson 1985).

- **Task-based learning**

  On TBL in general, see G Crookes and S Gass (1993a and b) and D Willis (1990). J Willis (1996) suggests a specific approach to TBL. P Skehan (1998: Chapters 5 and 6) offers a psycholinguistic perspective on TBL.

  On teacher and learner roles in TBL, see D Nunan (2004: 64–70).

  K McDonough and W Chaikitmongkol (2007) report on the positive attitudes of teachers and learners when TBL was introduced in a Thai context.

- **Four methods**

  For a concise description of the four methods mentioned here, see M Celce-Murcia (1981). J Richards and T Rogers (2001) have excellent separate chapters for each.

  On Community Language Learning, see C Curran (1976) and P La Forge (1983).

  On the Silent Way, see C Gattegno (1976) and R Rossner (1982).

  On Suggestopaedia, read G Lozanov (1978). More easily accessible examples can be found in J Cureau (1982) and M Lawlor (1986).

  On Total Physical Response, see J Asher (1977).

- **The Lexical approach**

  A major populariser of the Lexical approach has been Michael Lewis (1993, 1997). D Willis (1990) wrote about a lexical syllabus.

  An impressive critique of Lewis's work is S Thornbury (1998). An enthusiast for the Lexical approach is M Baigent (1999).

- **Methodology and culture**

  C Kramsch and P Sullivan (1996) write about appropriate pedagogy from their experiences of teaching and researching in Vietnam.

  We should avoid making assumptions about what students from different methodological cultures appreciate. J Flowerdew, for example, shows how groupwork is appropriate in a Hong Kong setting (Flowerdew 1998).

5 | Describing learners

A Age

The age of our students is a major factor in our decisions about how and what to teach. People of different ages have different needs, competences and cognitive skills; we might expect children of primary age to acquire much of a foreign language through play, for example, whereas for adults we can reasonably expect a greater use of abstract thought.

One of the most common beliefs about age and language learning is that young children learn faster and more effectively than any other age group. Most people can think of examples which appear to bear this out – as when children move to a new country and appear to pick up a new language with remarkable ease. However, as we shall see, this is not always true of children in that situation, and the story of child language facility may be something of a myth.

It is certainly true that children who learn a new language early have a facility with the pronunciation which is sometimes denied older learners. Lynne Cameron suggests that children 'reproduce the accent of their teachers with deadly accuracy' (2003: 111). Carol Read recounts how she hears a young student of hers saying *Listen. Quiet now. Attention, please!* in such a perfect imitation of the teacher that 'the thought of parody passes through my head' (2003: 7).

Apart from pronunciation ability, however, it appears that older children (that is children from about the age of 12) 'seem to be far better learners than younger ones in most aspects of acquisition, pronunciation excluded' (Yu, 2006: 53). Patsy Lightbown and Nina Spada, reviewing the literature on the subject, point to the various studies showing that older children and adolescents make more progress than younger learners (2006: 67–74).

The relative superiority of older children as language learners (especially in formal educational settings) may have something to do with their increased cognitive abilities, which allow them to benefit from more abstract approaches to language teaching. It may also have something to do with the way younger children are taught. Lynne Cameron, quoted above, suggests that teachers of young learners need to be especially alert and adaptive in their response to tasks and have to be able to adjust activities on the spot.

It is not being suggested that young children cannot acquire second languages successfully. As we have already said, many of them achieve significant competence, especially in bilingual situations. But in learning situations, teenagers are often more effective learners. Yet English is increasingly being taught at younger and younger ages. This may have great benefits in terms of citizenship, democracy, tolerance and multiculturalism, for example (Read 2003), but especially when there is ineffective transfer of skills and methodology from primary to secondary school, early learning does not always appear to offer the substantial success often claimed for it.

Nor is it true that older learners are necessarily ineffective language learners. Research has shown that they 'can reach high levels of proficiency in their second language' (Lightbown

and Spada 2006: 73). They may have greater difficulty in approximating native speaker pronunciation than children do, but sometimes this is a deliberate (or even subconscious) retention of their cultural and linguistic identity.

In what follows we will consider students at different ages as if all the members of each age group are the same. Yet each student is an individual with different experiences both in and outside the classroom. Comments here about young children, teenagers and adults can only be generalisations. Much also depends upon individual learner differences and upon motivation (see Section D below).

A1 Young children

Young children, especially those up to the ages of nine or ten, learn differently from older children, adolescents and adults in the following ways:

- They respond to meaning even if they do not understand individual words.

- They often learn indirectly rather than directly – that is they take in information from all sides, learning from everything around them rather than only focusing on the precise topic they are being taught.

- Their understanding comes not just from explanation, but also from what they see and hear and, crucially, have a chance to touch and interact with.

- They find abstract concepts such as grammar rules difficult to grasp.

- They generally display an enthusiasm for learning and a curiosity about the world around them.

- They have a need for individual attention and approval from the teacher.

- They are keen to talk about themselves and respond well to learning that uses themselves and their own lives as main topics in the classroom.

- They have a limited attention span; unless activities are extremely engaging, they can get easily bored, losing interest after ten minutes or so.

It is important, when discussing young learners, to take account of changes which take place within this varied and varying age span. Gül Keskil and Pasa Tevfik Cephe, for example, note that 'while pupils who are 10 and 11 years old like games, puzzles and songs most, those who are 12 and 13 years old like activities built around dialogues, question-and-answer activities and matching exercises most' (2001: 61).

Various theorists have described the way that children develop and the various ages and stages they go through. Piaget suggested that children start at the *sensori-motor stage*, and then proceed through the *intuitive stage* and the *concrete-operational stage* before finally reaching the *formal operational stage* where abstraction becomes increasingly possible. Leo Vygotsky (see page 59) emphasised the place of social interaction in development and the role of a 'knower' providing 'scaffolding' to help a child who has entered the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) where they are ready to learn new things. Both Erik Erikson and Abraham Maslow saw development as being closely bound up in the child's confidence and self-esteem, while Reuven Feuerstein suggested that children's cognitive structures are infinitely modifiable with the help of a modifier – much like Vygotsky's knower.

But however we describe the way children develop (and though there are significant differences between, say, a four year old and a nine year old), we can make some recommendations about younger learners in general, that is children up to about ten and eleven.

In the first place, good teachers at this level need to provide a rich diet of learning experiences which encourage their students to get information from a variety of sources. They need to work with their students individually and in groups, developing good and affective relationships (see page 100). They need to plan a range of activities for a given time period, and be flexible enough to move on to the next exercise when they see their students getting bored.

Teachers of young learners need to spend time understanding how their students think and operate. They need to be able to pick up on their students' current interests so that they can use them to motivate the children. And they need good oral skills in English since speaking and listening are the skills which will be used most of all at this age. The teacher's pronunciation really matters here, too, precisely because, as we have said, children imitate it so well.

All of this reminds us that once a decision has been taken to teach English to younger learners, there is a need for highly skilled and dedicated teaching. This may well be the most difficult (but rewarding) age to teach, but when teachers do it well (and the conditions are right), there is no reason why students should not defy some of the research results we mentioned above and be highly successful learners – provided, of course, that this success is followed up as they move to a new school or grade.

We can also draw some conclusions about what a classroom for young children should look like and what might be going on in it. First of all, we will want the classroom to be bright and colourful, with windows the children can see out of, and with enough room for different activities to be taking place. We might expect the students to be working in groups in different parts of the classroom, changing their activity every ten minutes or so. 'We are obviously,' Susan Halliwell writes, 'not talking about classrooms where children spend all their time sitting still in rows or talking only to the teacher' (1992: 18). Because children love discovering things, and because they respond well to being asked to use their imagination, they may well be involved in puzzle-like activities, in making things, in drawing things, in games, in physical movement or in songs. A good primary classroom mixes play and learning in an atmosphere of cheerful and supportive harmony.

A2 Adolescents

It is strange that, despite their relative success as language learners, adolescents are often seen as problem students. Yet with their greater ability for abstract thought and their passionate commitment to what they are doing once they are engaged, adolescents may well be the most exciting students of all. Most of them understand the need for learning and, with the right goals, can be responsible enough to do what is asked of them.

It is perfectly true that there are times when things don't seem to go very well. Adolescence is bound up, after all, with a pronounced search for identity and a need for self-esteem; adolescents need to feel good about themselves and valued. All of this is reflected in the secondary student who convincingly argued that a good teacher 'is someone who knows our names' (Harmer 2007: 26). But it's not just teachers, of course; teenage students often have an acute need for peer approval, too (or, at the very least, are extremely vulnerable to the negative judgements of their own age group).

We will discuss how teachers can ensure successful learning (preventing indiscipline, but acting effectively if it occurs) in Chapter 9, but we should not become too preoccupied with the issue of disruptive behaviour, for while we will all remember unsatisfactory classes, we will also look back with pleasure on those groups and lessons which were successful. There is almost nothing more exciting than a class of involved young people at this age pursuing a learning goal with enthusiasm. Our job, therefore, must be to provoke student engagement with material which is relevant and involving. At the same time, we need to do what we can to bolster our students' self-esteem, and be conscious, always, of their need for identity.

Herbert Puchta and Michael Schratz see problems with teenagers as resulting, in part, from '... the teacher's failure to build bridges between what they want and have to teach and their students' worlds of thought and experience' (1993: 4). They advocate linking language teaching far more closely to the students' everyday interests through, in particular, the use of 'humanistic' teaching (see Chapter 3D). Thus, as we shall see in some of the examples in Chapters 16–20, material has to be designed at the students' level, with topics which they can react to. They must be encouraged to respond to texts and situations with their own thoughts and experiences, rather than just by answering questions and doing abstract learning activities. We must give them tasks which they are able to do, rather than risk humiliating them.

We have come some way from the teaching of young children. We can ask teenagers to address learning issues directly in a way that younger learners might not appreciate. We are able to discuss abstract issues with them. Indeed, part of our job is to provoke intellectual activity by helping them to be aware of contrasting ideas and concepts which they can resolve for themselves – though still with our guidance. There are many ways of studying language (see Chapters 12–15) and practising language skills (see Chapters 16–20), and most of these are appropriate for teenagers.

A3 Adult learners

Adult language learners are notable for a number of special characteristics:

- They can engage with abstract thought. This suggests that we do not have to rely exclusively on activities such as games and songs – though these may be appropriate for some students.

- They have a whole range of life experiences to draw on.

- They have expectations about the learning process, and they already have their own set patterns of learning.

- Adults tend, on the whole, to be more disciplined than other age groups, and, crucially, they are often prepared to struggle on despite boredom.

- They come into classrooms with a rich range of experiences which allow teachers to use a wide range of activities with them.

- Unlike young children and teenagers, they often have a clear understanding of why they are learning and what they want to get out of it. As we shall see in Section D below, motivation is a critical factor in successful learning, and knowing what you want to achieve is an important part of this. Many adults are able to sustain a level of motivation (see D2) by holding on to a distant goal in a way that teenagers find more difficult.

However, adults are never entirely problem-free learners, and they have a number of characteristics which can sometimes make learning and teaching problematic.

- They can be critical of teaching methods. Their previous learning experiences may have predisposed them to one particular methodological style which makes them uncomfortable with unfamiliar teaching patterns. Conversely, they may be hostile to certain teaching and learning activities which replicate the teaching they received earlier in their educational careers.

- They may have experienced failure or criticism at school which makes them anxious and under-confident about learning a language.

- Many older adults worry that their intellectual powers may be diminishing with age. They are concerned to keep their creative powers alive, to maintain a 'sense of generativity' (Williams and Burden 1997: 32). However, as Alan Rogers points out, this generativity is directly related to how much learning has been going on in adult life before they come to a new learning experience (1996: 54).

Good teachers of adults take all of these factors into account. They are aware that their students will often be prepared to stick with an activity for longer than younger learners (though too much boredom can obviously have a disastrous effect on motivation). As well as involving their students in more indirect learning through reading, listening and communicative speaking and writing, they also allow them to use their intellects to learn consciously where this is appropriate. They encourage their students to use their own life experience in the learning process, too.

As teachers of adults we should recognise the need to minimise the bad effects of past learning experiences. We can diminish the fear of failure by offering activities which are achievable and by paying special attention to the level of challenge presented by exercises. We need to listen to students' concerns, too, and, in many cases, modify what we do to suit their learning tastes.

B Learner differences

The moment we realise that a class is composed of individuals (rather than being some kind of unified whole), we have to start thinking about how to respond to these students individually so that while we may frequently teach the group as a whole, we will also, in different ways, pay attention to the different identities we are faced with.

We will discuss differentiation in relation to mixed ability in Chapter 7C. In this section, however, we will look at the various ways researchers have tried to identify individual needs and behaviour profiles.

B1 Aptitude and intelligence

Some students are better at learning languages than others. At least that is the generally held view, and in the 1950s and 1960s it crystallised around the belief that it was possible to predict a student's future progress on the basis of linguistic aptitude tests. But it soon became clear that such tests were flawed in a number of ways. They didn't appear to measure anything other than general intellectual ability even though they ostensibly looked for linguistic talents. Furthermore, they favoured analytic-type learners over their more 'holistic' counterparts, so the tests were especially suited to people who have little trouble doing grammar-focused tasks. Those with a

more 'general' view of things – whose analytical abilities are not so highly developed, and who receive and use language in a more message-oriented way – appeared to be at a disadvantage. In fact, analytic aptitude is probably not the critical factor in success. Peter Skehan, for example, believes that what distinguishes exceptional students from the rest is that they have unusual memories, particularly for the retention of things that they hear (1998: 234).

Another damning criticism of traditional aptitude tests is that while they may discriminate between the most and the least 'intelligent' students, they are less effective at distinguishing between the majority of students who fall between these two extremes. What they do accomplish is to influence the way in which both teachers and students behave. It has been suggested that students who score badly on aptitude tests will become demotivated and that this will then contribute to precisely the failure that the test predicted. Moreover, teachers who know that particular students have achieved high scores will be tempted to treat those students differently from students whose score was low. Aptitude tests end up being self-fulfilling prophecies whereas it would be much better for both teacher and students to be optimistic about all of the people in the class.

It is possible that people have different aptitudes for different kinds of study. However, if we consider aptitude and intelligence for learning language in general, our own experience of people we know who speak two or more languages can only support the view that 'learners with a wide variety of intellectual abilities can be successful language learners. This is especially true if the emphasis is on oral communication skills rather than metalinguistic knowledge' (Lightbown and Spada 2006: 185).

B2 Good learner characteristics

Another line of enquiry has been to try to tease out what a 'good learner' is. If we can narrow down a number of characteristics that all good learners share, then we can, perhaps, cultivate these characteristics in all our students.

Neil Naiman and his colleagues included a tolerance of ambiguity as a feature of good learning, together with factors such as positive task orientation (being prepared to approach tasks in a positive fashion), ego involvement (where success is important for a student's self-image), high aspirations, goal orientation and perseverance (Naiman et al 1978).

Joan Rubin and Irene Thompson listed no fewer than 14 good learner characteristics, among which learning to live with uncertainty (much like the tolerance of ambiguity mentioned above) is a notable factor (Rubin and Thompson 1982). But the Rubin and Thompson version of a good learner also mentions students who can find their own way (without always having to be guided by the teacher through learning tasks), who are creative, who make intelligent guesses, who make their own opportunities for practice, who make errors work for them not against them, and who use contextual clues.

Patsy Lightbown and Nina Spada summarise the main consensus about good learner characteristics (see Figure 1). As they point out, the characteristics can be classified in several categories (motivation, intellectual abilities, learning preferences), and some, such as 'willing to make mistakes', can be 'considered a personality characteristic' (Lightbown and Spada 2006: 54). In other words, this wish list cuts across a number of learner variables.

Much of what various people have said about good learners is based on cultural assumptions which underpin much current teaching practice in western-influenced methodologies.

In these cultures we appreciate self-reliant students and promote learner autonomy as a main goal (see Chapter 23). We tend to see the tolerance of ambiguity as a goal of student development, wishing to wean our students away from a need for things to be always cut and dried. We encourage students to read texts for general understanding without stopping to look up all the words they do not understand; we ask students to speak communicatively even when they have difficulty because of words they don't know or can't pronounce, and we involve students in creative writing (see Chapter 19, B3). In all these endeavours we expect our students to aspire beyond their current language level.

Rate each of the following characteristics on a scale of 1–5. Use 1 to indicate a characteristic that you think is 'very important' and 5 to indicate a characteristic that you consider 'not at all important' in predicting success in second language learning.

A good language learner:

a is a willing and accurate guesser	1	2	3	4	5
b tries to get a message across even if specific language knowledge is lacking	1	2	3	4	5
c is willing to make mistakes	1	2	3	4	5
d constantly looks for patterns in the language	1	2	3	4	5
e practises as often as possible	1	2	3	4	5
f analyses his or her own speech and the speech of others	1	2	3	4	5
g attends to whether his or her performance meets the standards he or she has learned	1	2	3	4	5
h enjoys grammar exercises	1	2	3	4	5
i begins learning in childhood	1	2	3	4	5
j has an above-average IQ	1	2	3	4	5
k has good academic skills	1	2	3	4	5
l has a good self-image and lots of confidence	1	2	3	4	5

FIGURE 1: Good learner characteristics (Lightbown and Spada 2006: 55)

Different cultures value different learning behaviours, however. Our insistence upon one kind of 'good learner' profile may encourage us to demand that students should act in class in certain ways, whatever their learning background. When we espouse some of the techniques mentioned above, we risk imposing a methodology on our students that is inimical to their culture. Yet it is precisely because this is not perhaps in the best interests of the students that we discussed context-sensitive methodology in Chapter 4B. Furthermore, some students may not enjoy grammar exercises, but this does not mean they are doomed to learning failure.

There is nothing wrong with trying to describe good language learning behaviour. Nevertheless, we need to recognise that some of our assumptions are heavily culture-bound and that students can be successful even if they do not follow these characteristics to the letter.

B3 Learner styles and strategies

A preoccupation with learner personalities and styles has been a major factor in psycholinguistic research. Are there different kinds of learner? Are there different kinds of behaviour in a group? How can we tailor our teaching to match the personalities in front of us?

The methodologist Tony Wright described four different learner styles within a group (1987: 117–118). The 'enthusiast' looks to the teacher as a point of reference and is concerned with the goals of the learning group. The 'oracular' also focuses on the teacher but is more oriented towards the satisfaction of personal goals. The 'participator' tends to concentrate on group goals and group solidarity, whereas the 'rebel', while referring to the learning group for his or her point of reference, is mainly concerned with the satisfaction of his or her own goals.

Keith Willing, working with adult students in Australia, suggested four learner categories:

- **Convergers:** these are students who are by nature solitary, prefer to avoid groups, and who are independent and confident in their own abilities. Most importantly they are analytic and can impose their own structures on learning. They tend to be cool and pragmatic.

- **Conformists:** these are students who prefer to emphasise learning 'about language' over learning to use it. They tend to be dependent on those in authority and are perfectly happy to work in non-communicative classrooms, doing what they are told. A classroom of conformists is one which prefers to see well-organised teachers.

- **Concrete learners:** though they are like conformists, they also enjoy the social aspects of learning and like to learn from direct experience. They are interested in language use and language as communication rather than language as a system. They enjoy games and groupwork in class.

- **Communicative learners:** these are language use oriented. They are comfortable out of class and show a degree of confidence and a willingness to take risks which their colleagues may lack. They are much more interested in social interaction with other speakers of the language than they are with analysis of how the language works. They are perfectly happy to operate without the guidance of a teacher

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FIGURE 2: Learning styles based on Willing (1987)

Wright and Willing's categorisations are just two of a large number of descriptions that different researchers have come up with to try to explain different learner styles and strategies. Frank Coffield, David Moseley, Elaine Hall and Kathryn Ecclestone, in an extensive study of the literature available, identify an extremely large list of opposed styles which different theorists have advocated (see Figure 3). But while this may be of considerable interest to theorists, they 'advise against pedagogical intervention based solely on any of the learning style instruments' (Coffield *et al* 2004: 140).

convergers versus **divergers**	**initiators** versus **reasoners**
verbalisers versus **imagers**	**intuitionists** versus **analysts**
holists versus **serialists**	**extroverts** versus **introverts**
deep versus **surface learning**	**sensing** versus **intuition**
activists versus **reflectors**	**thinking** versus **feeling**
pragmatists versus **theorists**	**judging** versus **perceiving**
adaptors versus **innovators**	**left brainers** versus **right brainers**
assimilators versus **explorers**	**meaning-directed** versus **undirected**
field dependent versus **field independent**	**theorists** versus **humanitarians**
globalists versus **analysts**	**activists** versus **theorists**
assimilators versus **accommodators**	**pragmatists** versus **reflectors**
imaginative versus **analytic learners**	**organisers** versus **innovators**
non-committers versus **plungers**	**lefts/analytics/inductives/successive**
common-sense versus **dynamic learners**	**processors** versus **rights/globals/**
concrete versus **abstract learners**	**deductives/simultaneous processors**
random versus **sequential learners**	**executives/hierarchics/conservatives**
	versus **legislatives/anarchics/liberals**

FIGURE 3: Different learner descriptions (from Coffield *et al* 2004: 136)

Coffield and his colleagues have two main reasons for their scepticism. The first is that there are so many different models available (as the list in Figure 3 shows) that it is almost impossible to choose between them. This is a big worry, especially since there is no kind of consensus among researchers about what they are looking at and what they have identified. Secondly, some of the more popular methods, Coffield *et al* suggest, are driven by commercial interests which have identified themselves with particular models. This is not to suggest that there is anything intrinsically wrong with commercial interests, but rather to introduce a note of caution into our evaluation of different learner style descriptions.

It may sound as if, therefore, there is no point in reading about different learner styles at all – or trying to incorporate them into our teaching. But that is not the case. We should do as much as we can to understand the individual differences within a group. We should try to find descriptions that chime with our own perceptions, and we should endeavour to teach individuals as well as groups.

B4 Individual variations

If some people are better at some things than others – better at analysing, for example – this would indicate that there are differences in the ways individual brains work. It also suggests that people respond differently to the same stimuli. How might such variation determine the ways in which individual students learn most readily? How might it affect the ways in which we teach? There are two models in particular which have tried to account for such perceived individual variation, and which teachers have attempted to use for the benefit of their learners.

- **Neuro-Linguistic Programming:** according to practitioners of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), we use a number of 'primary representational systems' to experience the world. These systems are described in the acronym 'VAKOG' which stands for *Visual* (we look and see), *Auditory* (we hear and listen), *Kinaesthetic* (we feel externally, internally

or through movement), *Olfactory* (we smell things) and *Gustatory* (we taste things).

Most people, while using all these systems to experience the world, nevertheless have one 'preferred primary system' (Revell and Norman 1997: 31). Some people are particularly stimulated by music when their preferred primary system is auditory, whereas others, whose primary preferred system is visual, respond most powerfully to images. An extension of this is when a visual person 'sees' music, or has a strong sense of different colours for different sounds. The VAKOG formulation, while somewhat problematic in the distinctions it attempts to make, offers a framework to analyse different student responses to stimuli and environments.

NLP gives teachers the chance to offer students activities which suit their primary preferred systems. According to Radislav Millrood, it shows how teachers can operate in the *C-Zone* – the zone of congruence, where teachers and students interact affectively – rather than in the *R-Zone* – the zone of student resistance, where students do not appreciate how the teacher tries to make them behave (Millrood 2004). NLP practitioners also use techniques such as 'three-position thinking' (Baker and Rinvolucri 2005a) to get teachers and students to see things from other people's points of view so that they can be more effective communicators and interactors.

- **MI theory:** MI stands for Multiple Intelligences, a concept introduced by the Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner. In his book *Frames of Mind*, he suggested that we do not possess a single intelligence, but a range of 'intelligences' (Gardner 1983). He listed seven of these: Musical/rhythmical, Verbal/linguistic, Visual/spatial, Bodily/kinaesthetic, Logical/ mathematical, Intrapersonal and Interpersonal. All people have all of these intelligences, he said, but in each person one (or more) of them is more pronounced. This allowed him to predict that a typical occupation (or 'end state') for people with a strength in logical/ mathematical intelligence is that of the scientist, whereas a typical end state for people with strengths in visual/spatial intelligence might well be that of the navigator. The athlete might be the typical end state for people who are strong in bodily/kinaesthetic intelligence, and so on. Gardner has since added an eighth intelligence which he calls Naturalistic intelligence (Gardner 1993) to account for the ability to recognise and classify patterns in nature; Daniel Goleman has added a ninth 'emotional intelligence' (Goleman 1995). This includes the ability to empathise, control impulse and self-motivate.

  If we accept that different intelligences predominate in different people, it suggests that the same learning task may not be appropriate for all of our students. While people with a strong logical/mathematical intelligence might respond well to a complex grammar explanation, a different student might need the comfort of diagrams and physical demonstration because their strength is in the visual/spatial area. Other students who have a strong interpersonal intelligence may require a more interactive climate if their learning is to be effective. Rosie Tanner (2001) has produced a chart (see Figure 4) to show what kind of activities might be suitable for people with special strengths in the different intelligences.

Armed with this information, teachers can see whether they have given their class a variety of activities to help the various types of learner described here. Although we cannot teach directly to each individual student in our class all of the time, we can ensure that we sometimes give opportunities for visualisation, for students to work on their own, for sharing and comparing and for physical movement. By keeping our eye on different individuals, we can direct them to learning activities which are best suited to their own proclivities.

Teaching Intelligently: Language Skills Activities Chart

Skill → / Intelligence ↓	Listening	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Grammar	Vocabulary	Literature
Bodily-Kinaesthetic	Learners listen to three sections of a tape in three different places, then form groups to collaborate on their answers to a task.	Learners re-order a cut-up jumbled reading text.	Learners write stories in groups by writing the first sentence of a story on a piece of paper and passing it to another learner for continuation.	Learners play a game where they obtain information from various places in the classroom and report back.	Learners play a board game with counters and dice to practise tenses.	Learners label objects in the classroom with names.	Learners create a similar scene to one they have read about and act it out (eg a conflict, a time you were let down).
Interpersonal	Learners check their answers to a listening task in pairs or groups before listening a second time.	Learners discuss answers to questions on a text in groups.	Learners write a dialogue in pairs.	Learners read problem-page letters and discuss responses.	Learners do a 'find someone who ...' activity related to a grammar point (eg present perfect: find someone who has been to Spain).	Learners test each other's vocabulary.	In groups, learners discuss their preferences for characters in a book.
Intrapersonal	Learners think individually about how they might have reacted, compared with someone on a video they have seen.	Learners reflect on characters in a text and how similar or different they are to them.	Learners write learning diaries.	Learners record a speech or talk on a cassette.	Learners complete sentences about themselves, practising a grammar point (eg complete the sentence 'I am as ... as ...' five times).	Learners make their own vocabulary booklet which contains words they think are important to learn.	Learners write a diary for a few days in the life of a character in a book.
Linguistic	Learners write a letter after listening to a text.	Learners answer true/false questions about a text.	Learners write a short story.	In groups, learners discuss statements about a controversial topic.	The teacher provides a written worksheet on a grammar point.	Learners make mind maps of related words.	Learners rewrite part of a book as a film script, with instructions for the director and actors.
Logical-Mathematical	Learners listen to three pieces of text and decide what the correct sequence is.	Learners compare two characters or opinions in a text.	Learners write steps in a process (eg a recipe).	Learners in a group each have a picture. They discuss and re-order them, without showing them, to create a story.	Learners learn grammar inductively, ie they work out how a grammar rule works by using discovery activities.	Learners discuss how many words they can think of related to another word (eg photograph, photographer).	Learners re-order a jumbled version of events in a chapter of a novel they have read.
Musical	Learners complete gaps in the lyrics of a pop song.	Learners listen to music extracts and decide how they relate to a text they have read.	Learners write the lyrics to an existing melody about a text or topic they have been dealing with in class.	Learners listen to a musical video clip (with the TV covered up) and discuss which images might accompany the music.	Learners create a mnemonic or rhyme to help them remember a grammar point.	Learners decide which new words they would like to learn from a pop song.	Learners find a piece of appropriate music to accompany a passage from a book.
Naturalist	Learners listen to sounds inside and outside the classroom and discuss what they have heard.	Learners work with a text on environmental issues.	Learners write a text describing a nature scene.	Learners discuss an environmental issue.	Learners do an activity associated with nature (eg walk by the sea) and write a story in the past tense about it.	Learners make a mind map with a word related to nature (eg bird, tree).	Learners read descriptions of nature in a novel and then write their own.
Spatial	Learners complete a chart or diagram while listening.	Learners predict the contents of a text using an accompanying picture or photo.	Learners make a collage with illustrations and text about a place in their country.	In pairs, learners discover the differences between two pictures without showing them to each other.	The teacher illustrates a grammar point with a series of pictures (eg daily activities to show present simple).	Learners cut out a picture from a magazine and label it.	Learners draw a cartoon version of a story.

FIGURE 4: Activities for different intelligences, taken from Tanner (2001)

B5 What to do about individual differences

Faced with the different descriptions of learner types and styles which have been listed here, it may seem that the teacher's task is overwhelmingly complex. We want to satisfy the many different students in front of us, teaching to their individual strengths with activities designed to produce the best results for each of them, yet we also want to address our teaching to the group as a whole.

Our task as teachers will be greatly helped if we can establish who the different students in our classes are and recognise how they are different. We can do this through observation or, as in the following two examples, through more formal devices. For example, we might ask students what their learning preferences are in questionnaires with items (perhaps in the students' first language) such as the following:

> **When answering comprehension questions about reading passages I prefer to work**
> a on my own. ☐
> b with another student. ☐
> c with a group of students. ☐

Or we might try to find out which preferred sensory system our students respond to. Revell and Norman suggest the activity shown in Figure 5.

THE LEAD VAK TEST: READ AND IMAGINE

Follow each instruction in your mind and give yourself a mark:
0 = impossible   1 = difficult   2 = OK   3 = easy

—SEE a kangaroo
—SEE your front door
—SEE your toothbrush
—SEE a friend's face
—SEE a plate of food
—SEE a TV show ...
—WATCH the TV scene change

—HEAR a song
—HEAR rain
—HEAR a fire alarm
—HEAR a friend's voice
—HEAR your own voice
—HEAR birds singing ...
—HEAR the birdsong change to a call of alarm

—FEEL excited
—FEEL yourself swimming
—FEEL grass under your feet
—FEEL a cat* on your lap
—FEEL hot
—FEEL your fingers on a piano keyboard
—FEEL your fingers playing a few notes

When you've done the test:
* Add up your scores for each sense: SEE __ HEAR __ FEEL __
* Does the highest score correspond with what you think your preferred lead system is? How did you fare when it came to changing the scenes slightly in the last one of each section?
* Think of ways to enhance the systems you don't find so easy.

FIGURE 5: 'The Lead VAK Test' from *In Your Hands* by J Revell and S Norman (Saffire Pre   )

S Askey *et al* (in a webquest described in more detail on page 280), get students to do a test so that they can come up with a personal Multiple Intelligences (MI) profile which they can then share with the teacher. The students are led through a series of questions, as a result of which the software produces an MI profile for each individual student (see Figure 6).

Linguistic	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬33
Mathematics	▬▬▬▬▬22
Visual/Spatial	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬28
Body/Kinesthetic	▬▬▬▬▬24
Naturalistic	▬▬▬▬17
Music	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬42
Interpersonal	▬▬▬▬▬▬▬34
Intrapersonal	▬▬▬▬▬25

FIGURE 6: An MI profile

As with the descriptions of learner styles above (see page 88), we might not want to view some of the results of NLP and MI tests uncritically. This is partly because of the doubts expressed by Frank Coffield and his colleagues (see above), but it is also because neither MI theory nor NLP have been subjected to any kind of rigorous scientific evaluation. However, it is clear that they both address self-evident truths – namely that different students react differently to different stimuli and that different students have different kinds of mental abilities. And so, as a result of getting information about individuals, we will be in a position to try to organise activities which provide maximal advantage to the many different people in the class, offering activities which favour, at different times, students with different learning styles. It is then up to us to keep a record of what works and what doesn't, either formally or informally. We can also ask our students (either face to face, or, more effectively, through written feedback) how they respond to these activities. The following (unedited) comments, from a multinational group of adult students in Britain, were written in response to a lesson in which they were asked to write an imaginary film scene based on a particular piece of music:

I liked this subject because everyone could find a connection part of them. After we listened a part of music we could describe what we think by own sentences. That is why it was very attractive and that type of study was pushing us to talking a lot.

(Turkish female)

I didn't like that kind of music. I prefer different kind of music.

(Italian male)

I think that music is an excellent way to learn. But I think that it will be more interesting if we work with the lyrics of songs. We can learn new expressions, new words and memorize them easily because when we see the words again, we will be able to remember the song, the context the words were used in the songs and consequently your meanings.

(Brazilian female)

> I love to learn about music.

(Turkish male)

> It is difficult to express your feelings even in my mother language but finally I could written down something.

(Argentinian female)

> I was interested in this theme. Because all students can all enjoy music. But I didn't like making composition from music.

(Japanese female)

> I liked this lesson. Because it was funny. And everyone joined at this matters.

(Turkish male)

> This part was interesting as well because we had the opportunity to create something ourself (talking about music listening) using a certain language, immediate, strong and easy at the same time - what I mean is that I never thought that I could, from a piece of music, write down a scene and less of all in English! I liked it and it was not that difficult, well only because we don't have the vocabulary to write something really good.

(Italian female)

Apart from demonstrating how individuals respond differently to the same activity, these comments help us to decide whether to use a similar kind of activity again, whether to amend it or whether to abandon it.

Such feedback, coupled with questionnaires and our own observation, helps us to build a picture of the best kinds of activity for the mix of individuals in a particular class. This kind of feedback enables us, over time, to respond to our students with an appropriate blend of tasks and exercises.

This does not mean, of course, that everyone will be happy all of the time (as the feedback above shows). On the contrary, it clearly suggests that some lessons (or parts of lessons) will be more useful for some students than for others. But if we are aware of this and act accordingly, then there is a good chance that most of the class will be engaged with the learning process most of the time.

There is one last issue which should be addressed. We have already referred to the danger of pre-judging student ability through aptitude tests (see B1 above), but we might go further and worry about fixed descriptions of student differences. If students are always the same (in terms of their preferred primary system or their different intelligences), this suggests that they cannot change. Yet all learning is, in a sense, about change of one kind or another and part of our role as teachers is to help students effect change. Our job is surely to broaden students' abilities and perceptions, not merely to reinforce their natural prejudices or emphasise their limitations.

The whole area of learner difference is, as we have seen, complex and sometimes perplexing. As Frank Coffield and his colleagues write in their study of learner styles that we discussed above, teachers 'need to be knowledgeable about the strengths and limitations of the model they are using; to be aware of the dangers of labelling and discrimination; and to be prepared to respect the views of students who may well resist any attempts to change their preferred learning style' (2004: 133).

C Language levels

Students are generally described in three levels, *beginner*, *intermediate* and *advanced*, and these categories are further qualified by talking about *real beginners* and *false beginners*. Between beginner and intermediate we often class students as *elementary*. The intermediate level itself is often sub-divided into *lower intermediate* and *upper intermediate* and even *mid-intermediate*. One version of different levels, therefore, has the progression shown in Figure 7.

advanced

↑

upper intermediate

↑

mid-intermediate

↑

lower intermediate/pre-intermediate

↑

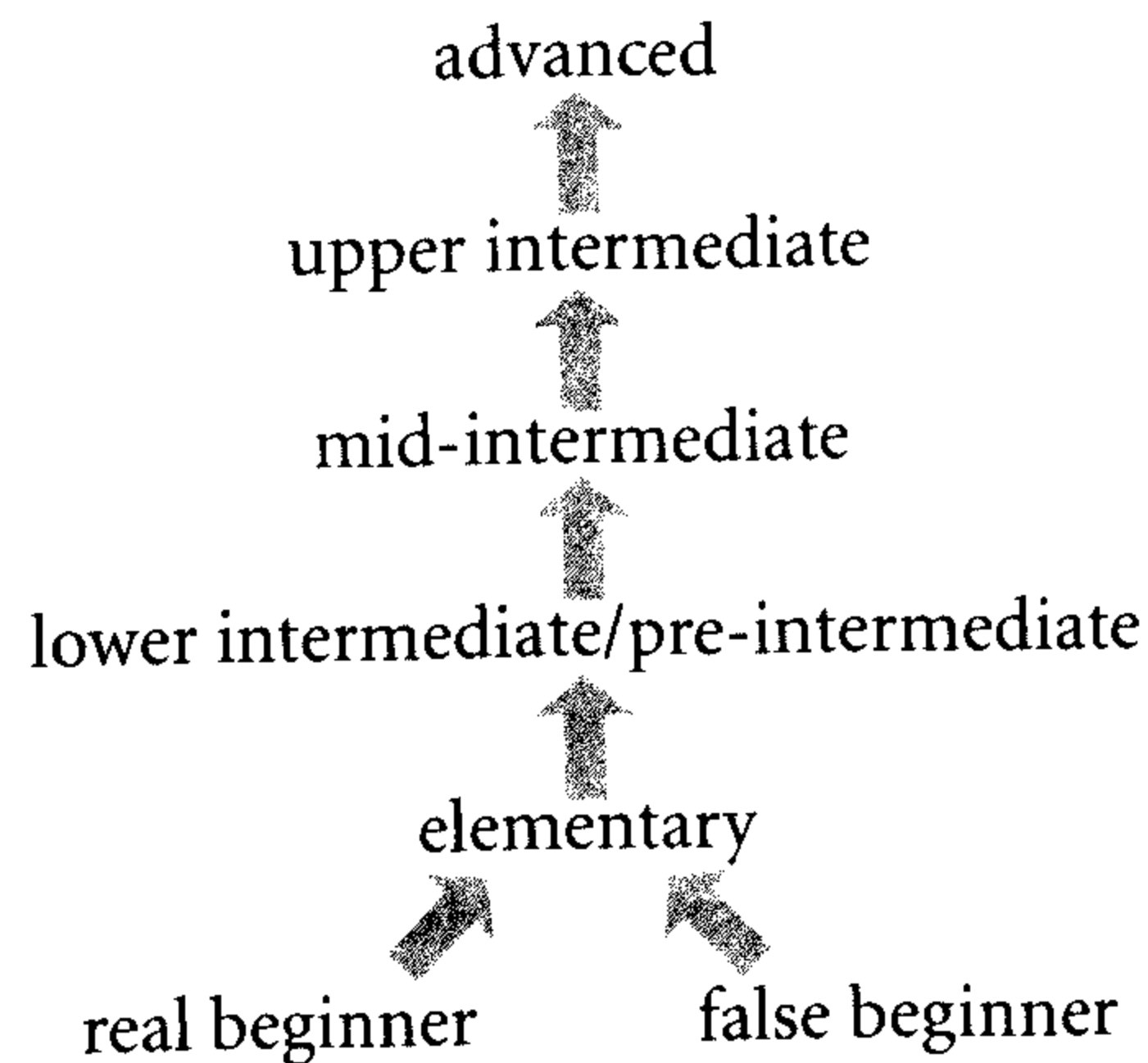elementary

↖ ↗

real beginner   false beginner

FIGURE 7: Representing different student levels

These terms are used somewhat indiscriminately, so that what one school calls intermediate is sometimes thought of as nearer elementary by others, and someone else might describe a student as advanced despite the fact that in another institution he or she would be classed as upper intermediate. Some coherence is arrived at as a result of the general consensus that exists between publishers about what levels their courses are divided into, but even here there is some variation (often depending on different views about what students at certain levels are capable of doing).

In recent years, the Council of Europe and the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) have been working to define language competency levels for learners of a number of different languages. The result of these efforts is the Common European Framework (a document setting out in detail what students 'can do' at various levels) and a series of ALTE levels ranging from A1 (roughly equivalent to elementary level) to C2 (very advanced). Figure 8 shows the different levels in sequence.

Beginners   Intermediate   Advanced

A1   A2   B1   B2   C1 C2

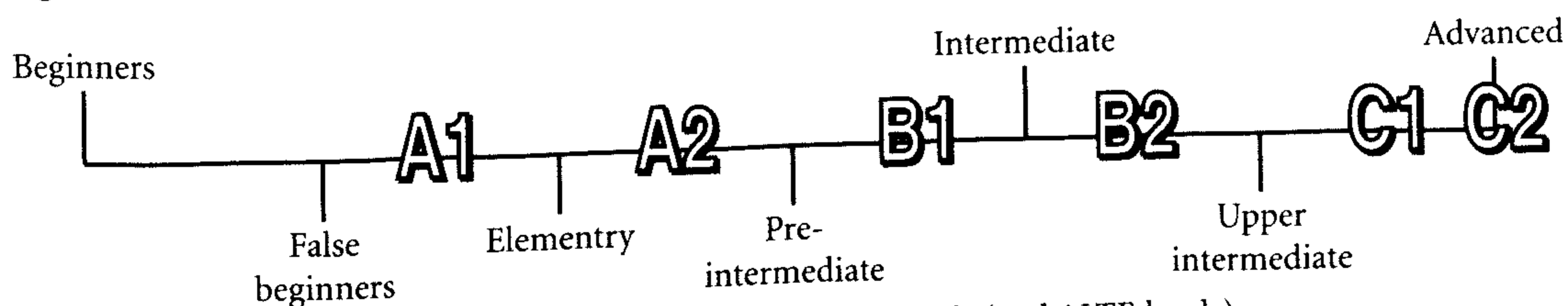False beginners   Elementry   Pre-intermediate   Upper intermediate

FIGURE 8: Terms for different student levels (and ALTE levels)

ALTE has produced 'can do' statements to try to show students, as well as teachers, what these levels mean, as the example in Figure 9 for the skill of writing demonstrates (A1 is at the left, C2 at the right).

Can complete basic forms and write notes including times, dates and places.	Can complete forms and write short simple letters or postcards related to personal information.	Can write letters or make notes on familiar or predicatable matters.	Can make notes while someone is talking or write a letter including non-standard questions.	Can prepare/draft professional correspondence, take reasonably accurate notes in meetings or write an essay which shows an ability to communicate.	Can write letters on any subject and full notes of meetings or seminars with good expression or accuracy.

© ALTE: Can Do statements produced by the members of the Association of Language Testers in Europe

FIGURE 9: ALTE 'Can do' statements for writing

ALTE levels and 'can do' statements (alongside the more traditional terms we have mentioned) are being used increasingly by coursebook writers and curriculum designers, not only in Europe but across much of the language-learning world (for more of the statements, see page 141). They are especially useful when translated into the students' L1 because they allow students to say what they can do, rather than having to be told by the teacher what standard they measure up against.

However, it is worth pointing out that the ALTE standards are just one way of measuring proficiency. There are also ESL standards which were developed by the TESOL organisation in the USA (see www.tesol.org/s_tesol/seccss.asp?CID=86&DID=1556), and many exam systems have their own level descriptors. We also need to remember that students' abilities within any particular level may be varied, too (e.g. they may be much better at speaking than writing).

The level students have reached often has an effect on their motivation. For example, students who have considerable trouble understanding and producing language at beginner levels often fail to progress to higher levels; this accounts for the relatively high 'drop-out' rate of some adult beginners. Sometimes students who arrive at, say, an intermediate level, tend to suffer from the so-called 'plateau effect' because for them it is not easy to see progress in their abilities from one week to the next. This can have a very demotivating effect.

Teachers need to be sensitive to the plateau effect, taking special measures to counteract it. Such efforts may include setting achievement goals (see below) so that students have a clear learning target to aim at, explaining what still needs to be done, making sure that activities are especially engaging, and sparking the students' interest in the more subtle distinctions of language use.

Other variations in level-dependent teacher behaviour are important, too, especially in terms of both methodology and the kind of language (and the topics) which we expose our students to.

C1 Methodology

Some techniques and exercises that are suitable for beginners look less appropriate for students at higher levels, and some assumptions about advanced students' abilities are less successful when transposed, without thought, to students at lower levels. This is especially true in speaking tasks. It is quite feasible to ask advanced students to get into pairs or groups to discuss a topic of some kind without structuring the activity in any way. But when asking elementary students to have a discussion in pairs or groups, we need to be far more rigorous

in telling them exactly what they should do, and we will probably help them with some of the language they might want to use. The instructions we give may well be accompanied by a demonstration so that everyone is absolutely clear about the task, whereas at higher levels this may not be so necessary and might even seem strange and patronising (for an example of this, see *Speaking* on the DVD which accompanies Harmer 2007). At advanced levels it is easy to organise discussion – whether pre-planned or opportunistic (see page 201) – whereas for beginners this option will not be available.

At lower levels we may well want to have students repeat sentences and phrases chorally (see page 206), and we may organise controlled cue–response drills (pages 206–207). This is because students sometimes have difficulty getting their mouths round some of the sounds (and stress and intonation patterns) of English; choral repetition and drills can help them get over this and, furthermore, allow them to practise in an enjoyable and stress-free way. Advanced students, however, might feel rather surprised to be asked to practise like this.

In general, we will give students more support when they are at beginner or intermediate levels than we need to do when they are more advanced. This does not mean that we will not approach more advanced tasks with care or be precise about what we are asking students to do. But at higher levels we may well be entitled to expect that students will be more resourceful and, as a result, have less need for us to explain everything in such a careful and supportive way.

C2 Language, task and topic

We have said that students acquire language partly as a result of the comprehensible input they receive – especially from the teacher (see Chapter 6, D3). This means, of course, that we will have to adjust the language we use to the level of the students we are teaching. Experienced teachers are very good at rough-tuning their language to the level they are dealing with. Such rough-tuning involves, at beginner and elementary levels, using words and phrases that are as clear as possible, avoiding some of the more opaque idioms which the language contains. At lower levels we will do our best not to confuse our students by offering them too many different accents or varieties of English (see Chapter 1, B3), even though we will want to make sure they are exposed to more Englishes later on. We will also take special care at lower levels to moderate the speed we speak at and to make our instructions especially clear.

This preoccupation with suiting our language to the level of the students extends to what we ask them to read, listen to, write and speak about. As we shall see on page 273, there are things that students can do with authentic English – that is English not specially moderated for use by language students – but in general, we will want to get students to read and listen to things that they have a chance of understanding. Of course, it depends on how much we want them to get from a text, but we always need to bear in mind the demotivating effect of a text which students find depressingly impenetrable.

The same is true for what we get students to write and speak about. If we ask students to express a complex opinion and they do not have the language to do it, the result will be an unhappy one for both students and teacher. If we try to force students to write a complex letter when they are clearly unable to do such a thing, everyone will feel let down. We will discuss the concept of trying to ensure achievement below.

One problem with some beginner coursebook material in particular is the way in which quite complex topics are reduced to banalities because the language available at that level makes it impossible to treat them in any depth. The result is a kind of 'dumbing-down',

which sometimes makes English language learning material appear condescending and almost childish. We must do our best to avoid this, matching topics to the level, and reserving complex issues for more advanced classes.

D Motivation

It is accepted for most fields of learning that motivation is essential to success: that we have to want to do something to succeed at it. Without such motivation we will almost certainly fail to make the necessary effort. We need, therefore, to develop our understanding of motivation – what it means, where it comes from and how it can be sustained.

D1 Defining motivation

At its most basic level, motivation is some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something. In his discussion of motivation, Douglas Brown includes the need for ego enhancement as a prime motivator. This is the need 'for the self to be known and to be approved of by others' (Brown 2007: 169). This, presumably, is what causes people to spend hours in the gym! Such a view of motivation also accounts for our need for exploration ('the other side of the mountain').

Marion Williams and Robert Burden suggest that motivation is a 'state of cognitive arousal' which provokes a 'decision to act', as a result of which there is 'sustained intellectual and/ or physical effort' so that the person can achieve some 'previously set goal' (Williams and Burden 1997: 120). They go on to point out that the strength of that motivation will depend on how much value the individual places on the outcome he or she wishes to achieve. Adults may have clearly defined or vague goals. Children's goals, on the other hand, are often more amorphous and less easy to describe, but they can still be very powerful.

In discussions of motivation an accepted distinction is made between *extrinsic* and *intrinsic* motivation, that is motivation which comes from 'outside' and from 'inside'.

Extrinsic motivation is the result of any number of outside factors, for example the need to pass an exam, the hope of financial reward or the possibility of future travel. Intrinsic motivation, by contrast, comes from within the individual. Thus a person might be motivated by the enjoyment of the learning process itself or by a desire to make themselves feel better.

Most researchers and methodologists have come to the view that intrinsic motivation produces better results than its extrinsic counterpart (but see page 104). Even where the original reason for taking up a language course, for example, is extrinsic, the chances of success will be greatly enhanced if the students come to love the learning process.

D2 External sources of motivation

The motivation that brings students to the task of learning English can be affected and influenced by the attitude of a number of people. It is worth considering what and who these are since they form part of the environment from which the student engages with the learning process.

- **The goal:** one of the strongest outside sources of motivation is the goal which students perceive themselves to be learning for. Frequently this is provided by a forthcoming exam, and in this respect it is no surprise to note that teachers often find their exam classes more

committed than other groups who do not have something definite to work towards.

However, students may have other less well-defined goals, too, such as a general desire to be able to converse in English, to be able to use English to get a better job or to understand English-language websites, etc.

Some students, of course, may not have any real English-learning goals at all. This is especially true for younger learners. In such situations they may acquire their attitude to (and motivation for) learning English from other sources.

- **The society we live in:** outside any classroom there are attitudes to language learning and the English language in particular. How important is the learning of English considered to be in the society the student lives in? In a school situation, for example, is the language learning part of the curriculum of high or low status? If school students were offered the choice of two languages to learn, which one would they choose and why? Are the cultural images associated with English positive or negative?

  All these views of language learning will affect the student's attitude to the language being studied, and the nature and strength of this attitude will, in its turn, have a profound effect on the degree of motivation the student brings to class and whether or not that motivation continues. Even where adult students have made their own decision to come to a class to study English, they will bring with them attitudes from the society they live in, developed over years, whether these attitudes are thoroughly positive or somewhat negative.

- **The people around us:** in addition to the culture of the world around them, students' attitudes to language learning will be greatly influenced by the people who are close to them. The attitude of parents and older siblings will be crucial. Do they approve of language learning, for example, or do they think that maths and reading are what count, and clearly show that they are more concerned with those subjects than with the student's success in English?

  The attitude of a student's peers is also crucial: if they are critical of the subject or activity, a student may well lose any enthusiasm they once had for learning English. If peers are enthusiastic about learning English, however, there is a much greater chance that the same student may feel more motivated to learn the subject.

- **Curiosity:** we should not underestimate a student's natural curiosity. At the beginning of a term or semester, most students have at least a mild interest in who their new teacher is and what it will be like to be in his or her lessons. When students start English for the first time, most are interested (to some extent) to see what it is like. This initial motivation is precious. Without it, getting a class off the ground and building rapport will be that much more difficult.

Even when teachers find themselves facing a class of motivated students, they cannot relax. For it is what happens next that really counts. Sustaining students' motivation is one area where we can make a real difference – and for that we need a motivation angel.

D3 The motivation angel

In the north-east of England, outside the city of Gateshead, stands a remarkable statue by Antony Gormley, the 20-metre-high *Angel of the North*. It can be seen from the motorway, from the nearby train line and for miles around. It is, by common consent, a work of uplifting beauty

and inspires almost all who see it, whatever their religion or even if they have none at all.

The *Angel of the North* provides us with a satisfying metaphor to deal with the greatest difficulty teachers face in terms of motivation. For as Alan Rodgers wrote many years ago, '... we forget that initial motivation to learn may be weak and die; alternatively it can be increased and directed into new channels' (Rogers 1996: 61). In other words, we can have a powerful effect on how or even whether students remain motivated after whatever initial enthusiasm they brought to the course has dissipated. We have the ability, as well, to gradually create motivation in students where, initially, there is none. This is not to say that it is a teacher's sole responsibility to build and nurture motivation. On the contrary, students need to play their part, too. But insofar as we can have a positive effect, we need to be able to build our own 'motivation angel' to keep students engaged and involved as lesson succeeds lesson, as week succeeds week.

The angel needs to be built on the solid base of the extrinsic motivation which the students bring with them to class (see Figure 10). And on this base we will build our statue in five distinct stages.

EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION

FIGURE 10: The motivation base

- **Affect:** affect, as we said on page 58, is concerned with students' feelings, and here we as teachers can have a dramatic effect. In the words of some eleven-year-old students I interviewed, 'a good teacher is someone who asks the people who don't always put their hands up' and 'a good teacher is someone who knows our names' (Harmer 2007: 26). In other words, students are far more likely to stay motivated over a period of time if they think that the teacher cares about them. This can be done by building good teacher–student rapport (see Chapter 6C), which in turn is dependent on listening to students' views and attempts with respect, and intervening (i.e. for correction) in an appropriate and constructive way.

  When students feel that the teacher has little interest in them (or is unprepared to make the effort to treat them with consideration), they will have little incentive to remain motivated. When the teacher is caring and helpful, however, they are much more likely to retain an interest in what is going on, and as a result, their self-esteem (an important ingredient in success) is likely to be nurtured.
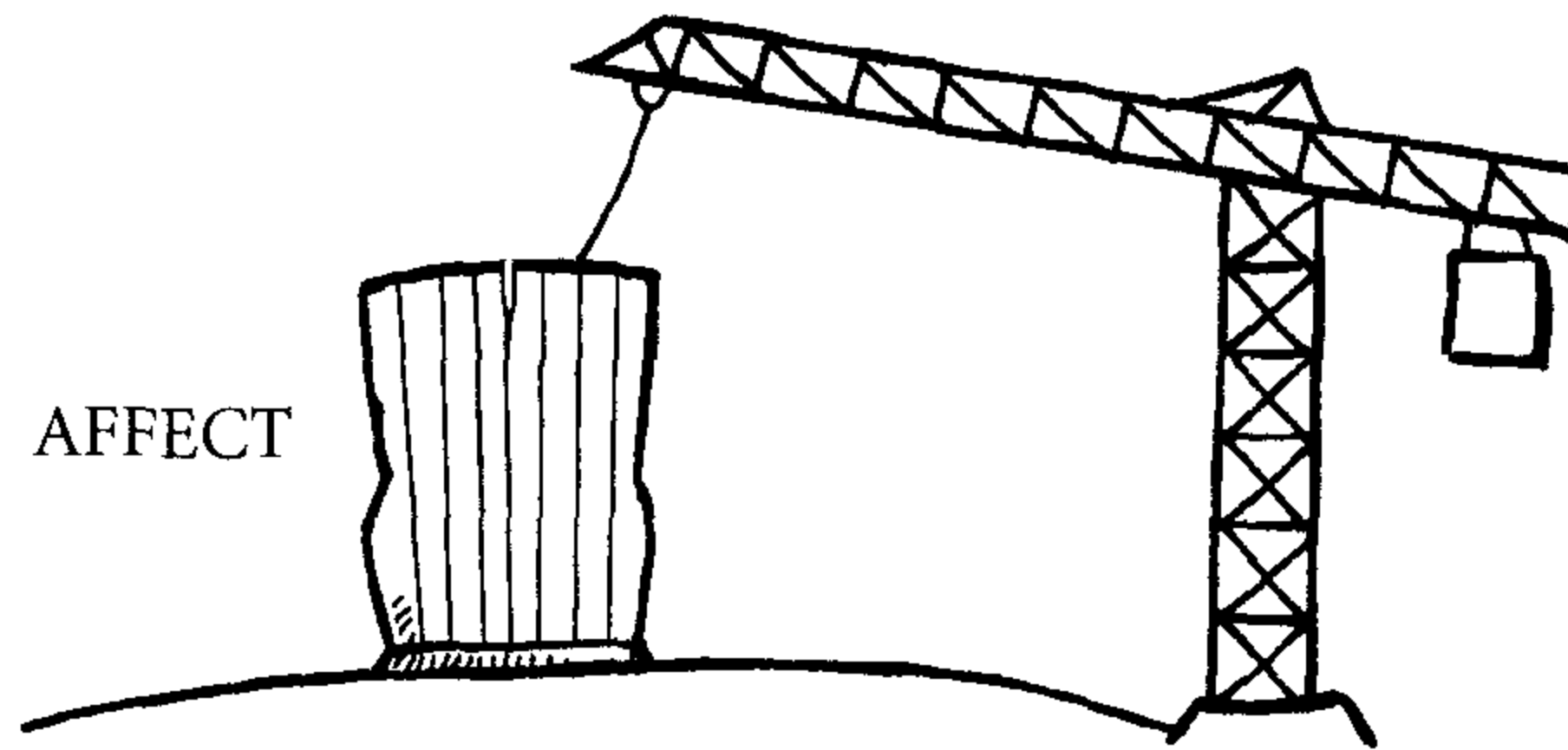
FIGURE 11: Affect

- **Achievement:** nothing motivates like success. Nothing demotivates like continual failure. It is part of the teacher's art, therefore, to try to ensure that students are successful, because the longer their success continues, the more likely they are to stay motivated to learn.

  However, success without effort does not seem to be that motivating. If everything is just too easy, students are likely to lose their respect for the task of learning. The same is true if success is too difficult to attain. What students need to feel is a real sense of achievement, which has cost them something to acquire but has not bankrupted them in the process.

  Part of a teacher's job, therefore, is to set an appropriate level of challenge for the students. This means setting tests that are not too difficult or too easy, and involving students in learning tasks they can succeed in. It also means being able to guide students towards success by showing them how to get things right next time.
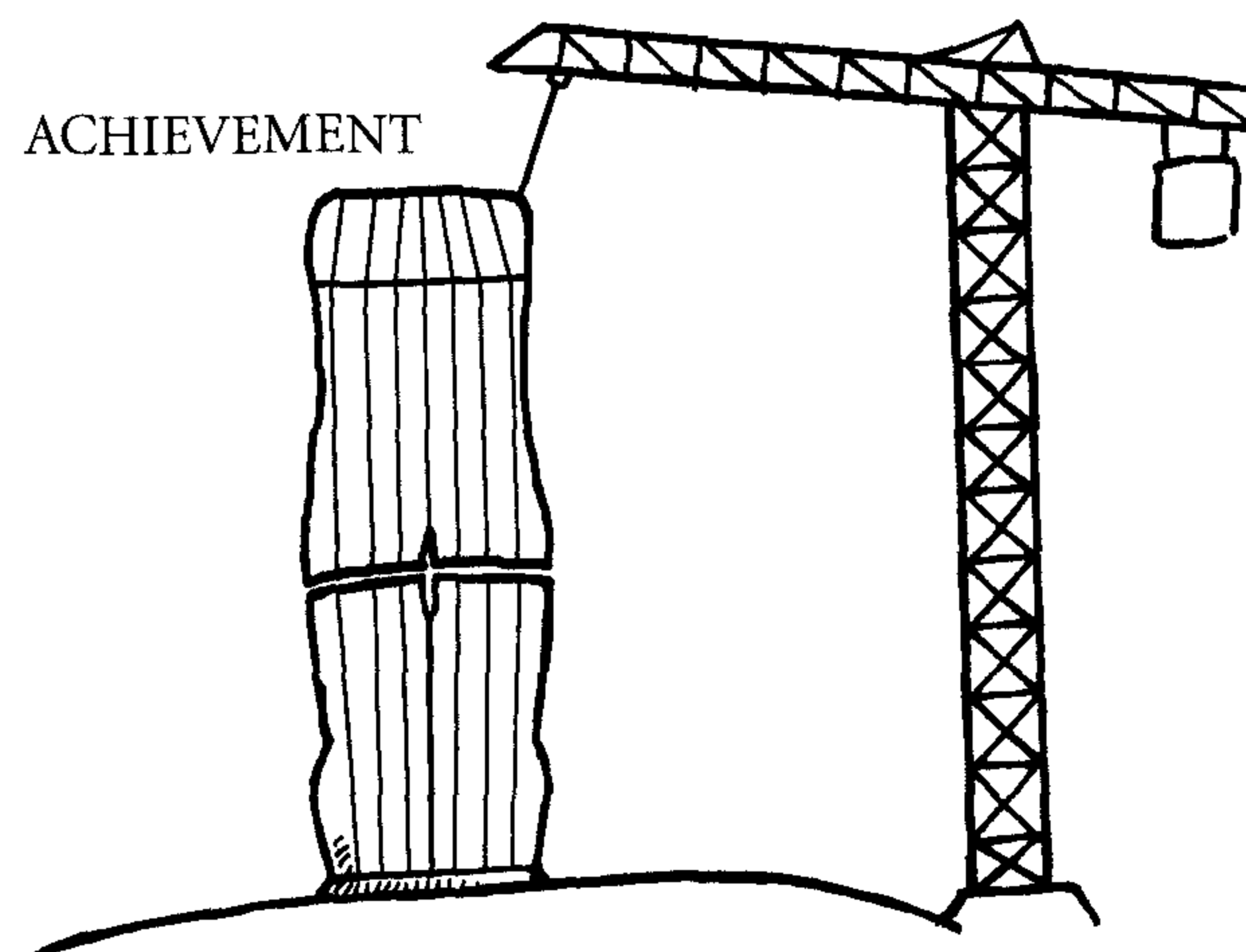

FIGURE 12: Achievement

- **Attitude:** however nice teachers are, students are unlikely to follow them willingly (and do what is asked of them) unless they have confidence in their professional abilities. Students need to believe that we know what we are doing.

  This confidence in a teacher may start the moment we walk into the classroom for the first time – because of the students' perception of our attitude to the job (see Figure 13). Aspects such as the way we dress, where we stand and the way we talk to the class all have a bearing here. Students also need to feel that we know about the subject we are teaching. Consciously or unconsciously they need to feel that we are prepared to teach English in general and that we are prepared to teach this lesson in particular. As we shall see, one

101

of the chief reasons (but not the only one, of course) why classes occasionally become undisciplined is because teachers do not have enough for the students to do – or seem not to be quite sure what to do next.

When students have confidence in the teacher, they are likely to remain engaged with what is going on. If they lose that confidence, it becomes difficult for them to sustain the motivation they might have started with.
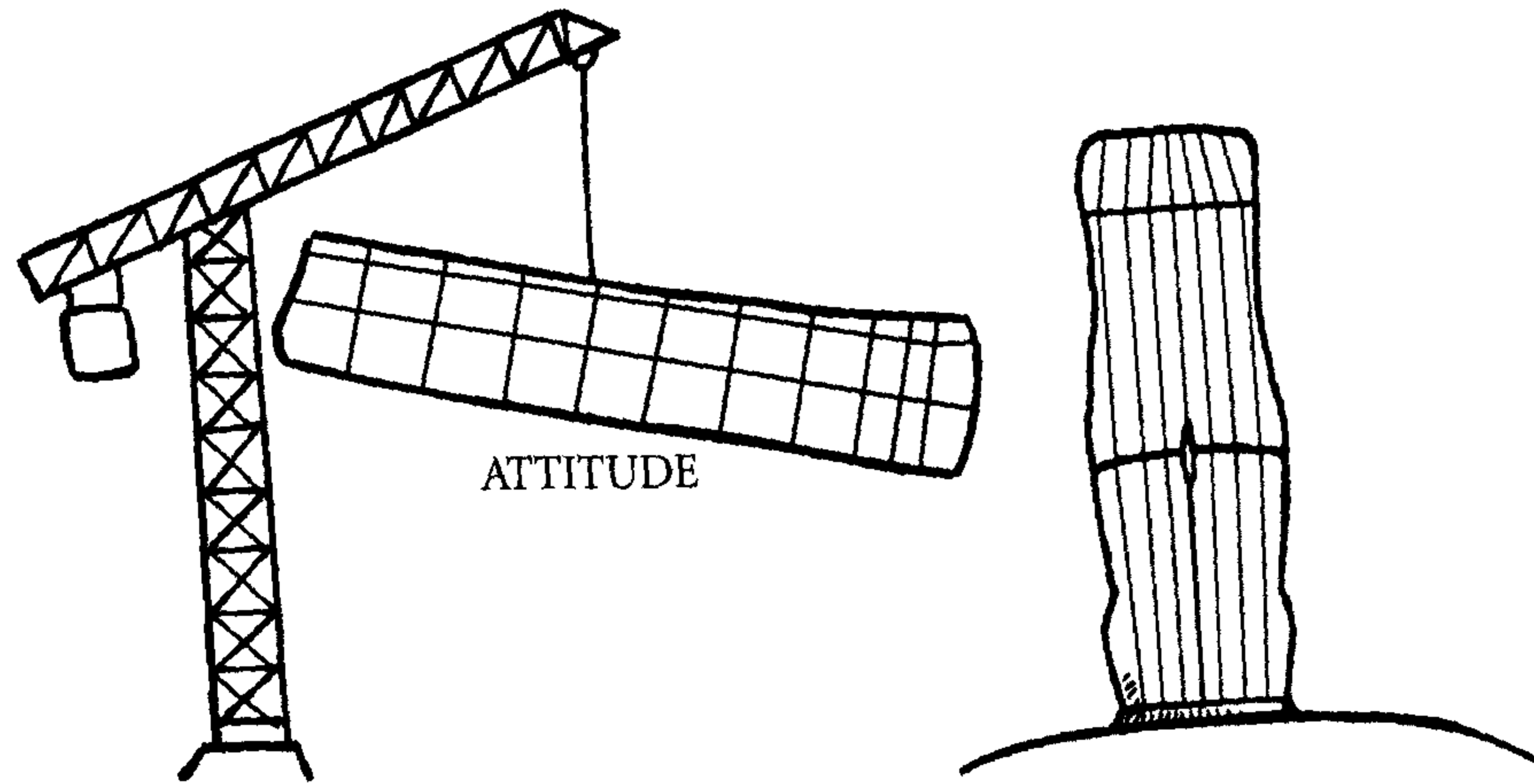

FIGURE 13: (Perceived) attitude (of the teacher)

- **Activities:** our students' motivation is far more likely to remain healthy if they are doing things they enjoy doing, and which they can see the point of. Our choice of what we ask them to do has an important role, therefore, in their continuing engagement with the learning process.

  It sometimes seems to be suggested that students only enjoy activities which involve game-like communication and other interactive tasks. However, this is not necessarily the case. Different students, as we have seen earlier in this chapter, have different styles and preferences. While some may want to sing songs and write poems, others might be much more motivated by concentrated language study and poring over reading texts.

  We need to try to match the activities (see Figure 14) we take into lessons with the students we are teaching. One way of doing this is to keep a constant eye on what they respond well to and what they feel less engaged with. Only then can we be sure that the activities we take into class have at least a chance of helping to keep students engaged with the learning process.
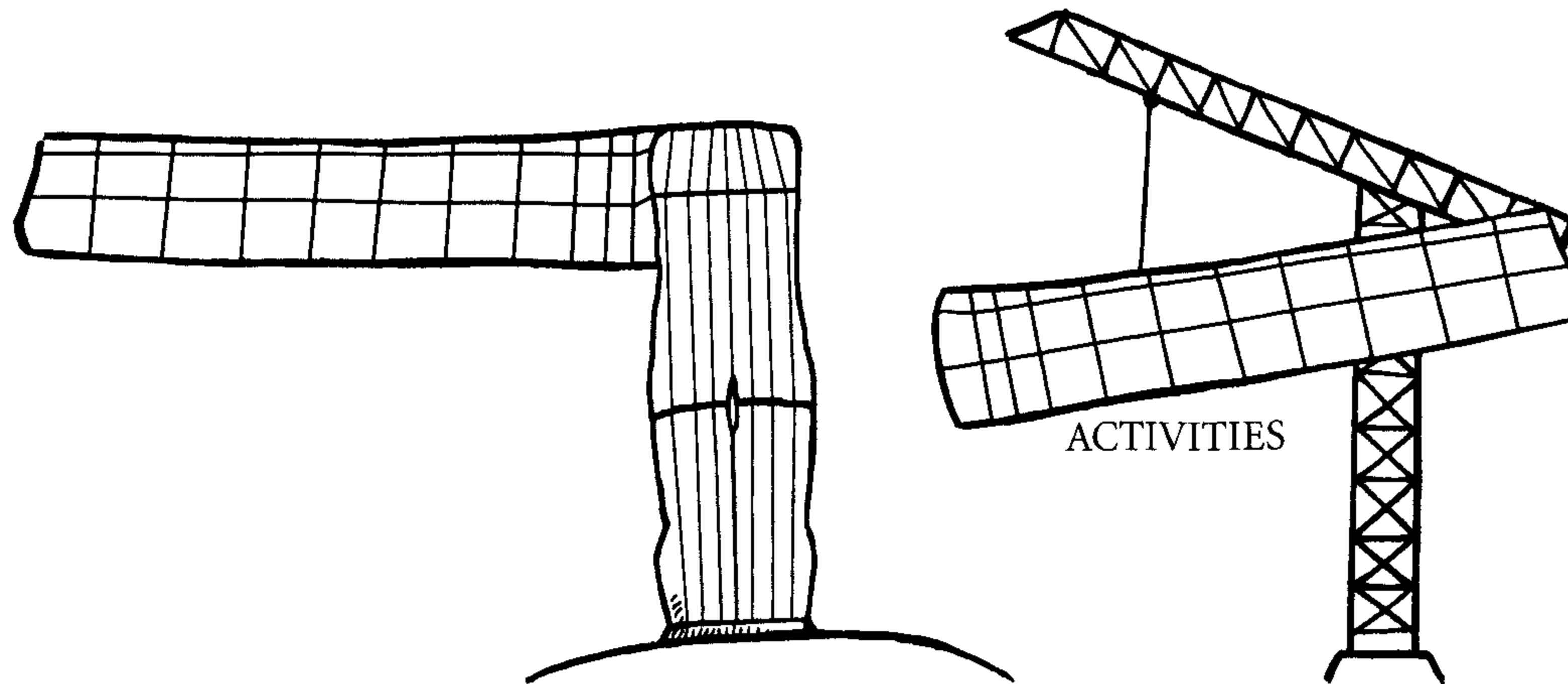
FIGURE 14: Activities

- **Agency:** *agency* is a term borrowed from social sciences (see for example Taylor 1977, Frankfurt 1988, Belz 2002). Here it is appropriated to mean something similar to the agent of a passive sentence, that is, in the words of some grammarians, the person or thing 'that does'.

  A lot of the time, in some classes, students have things done *to* them and, as a result, risk being passive recipients of whatever is being handed down. We should be equally interested, however, in things done *by* the students.

  When students have agency (see Figure 15), they get to make some of the decisions about what is going on, and, as a consequence, they take some responsibility for their learning. For example, we might allow students to tell us when and if they want to be corrected in a fluency activity (Rinvolucri 1998) rather than always deciding ourselves when correction is appropriate and when it is not. We might have students tell us what words they find difficult to pronounce rather than assuming they all have the same difficulties.

  J J Wilson suggests that wherever possible students should be allowed to make decisions. He wants to give students ownership of class materials, letting them write on the board or control the CD player, for example (Wilson 2005). For Jenny de Sonneville, while the teacher may decide on broad learning outcomes, he or she should design tasks 'in which the students are empowered to take a more active role in the course design' (2005: 11). For Lesley Painter, it was allowing students to choose what homework they wanted and needed to do that was the key to motivating her students to do the tasks that were set (Painter 1999). Real agency occurs, finally, when students take responsibility for their own learning, and we can provoke them to do this in the various ways we will discuss in Chapter 23A. A student we have trained to use dictionaries effectively has the potential for agency which a student who cannot access the wealth of information in a dictionary (especially a monolingual dictionary) is cut off from.

  No one is suggesting that students should have complete control of what happens in lessons. But the more we empower them and give them agency, the more likely they are to stay motivated over a long period.
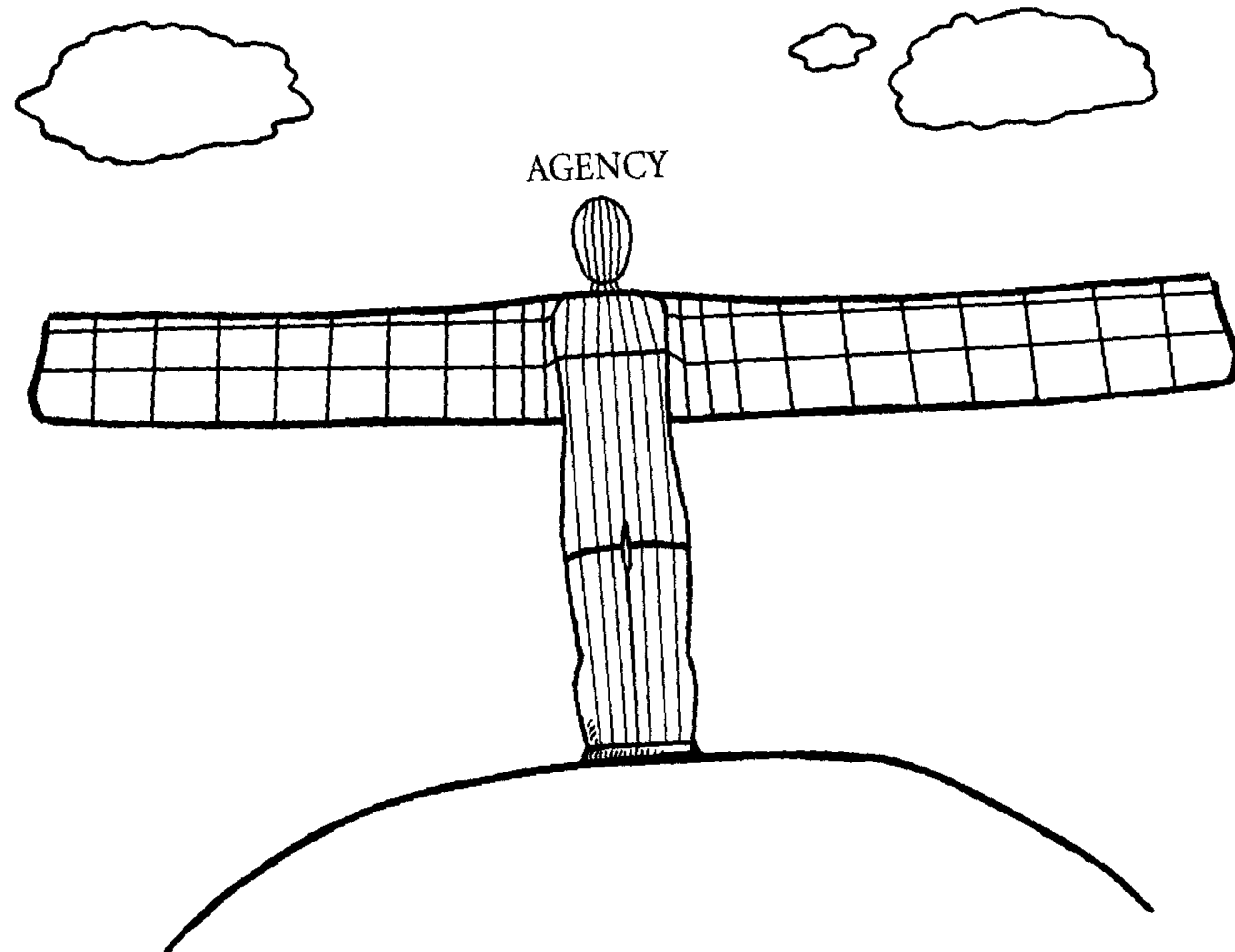
FIGURE 15: The motivation angel

Before we leave the subject of motivation (and indeed of learner description in general), we need to remember that motivation (where it comes from and what teachers can do to sustain it) may not be the same for all students and in all cultures. Judy Chen and her colleagues (based on their study of more than 160 students in Taiwan and China) observe that an assumption that motivation for Chinese students is the same as for EFL students in the USA, is 'apt to be off the mark, as is any assumption that the components of motivation are universal' (Chen *et al* 2005: 624). What their study clearly shows is that throughout Greater China there are numerous learning strategies based entirely on memorisation (2005: 625), and that the greatest motivator is success in exams based on how much students can remember. In such situations (and until and unless the exams change so that they prioritise spoken and written communication rather than memorised vocabulary and grammar), perhaps agency may not be important in the way we have described it; nor is the need for activity variety so pronounced if all students are fixated on this kind of achievement. Indeed in Taiwan many successful ex-students, Chen and her colleagues report, promote an ever-popular 'memorize a dictionary' strategy, and some students get an idiom a day sent to their mobile phones.

We have already discussed the need for context-sensitive methodology (see Chapter 4B). The study which Judy Chen and her colleagues have undertaken reminds us again that in discussions of teaching and learning strategies we need to look carefully at who the students are, where they are learning and what their aspirations are.

Chapter notes and further reading

- **Young children**

  M Williams and R Burden (1997: Chapters 1 and 2) offer a clear account of differing theories of child development.

  On teaching children at and before primary level, see V Reilly and S Ward (1997), A Case (2007), L Cameron (2001), W Scott and L Ytreborg (1990), J Moon (2005), M Slattery and J Willis (2001) and A Pinter (2006).

  G Ellis and J Brewster (2002a) offer a storytelling handbook. M Fletcher (2005) discusses how children's emotions affect their ability to learn. M Williams (2001) discusses Reuven Feuerstein's concept of mediation and offers 12 principles for effective teaching. M Hebden and J Mason (2003) suggest different ways of organising young learner classrooms. C Linse (2004) discusses good learner behaviour. C Read (2005) writes about class management with young learners and C Bradshaw (2005) discusses giving 'great instructions'. J Bourke (2006) promotes the benefits of a topic-based syllabus for young learners.

- **Adolescents**

  On the young person's search for identity, see the work of E H Erikson reported in M Williams and R Burden (1997).

  The idea that adolescents present an ideal teaching and learning age is put forward in P Ur (1996: 286) and R Ellis (1994: 484–494). See also C Damim et al (2002).

  S Lindstromberg (2004) has edited a book of language activities for teenagers.

  A Leiguarda (2004) discusses the teenage brain. See also P Prowse and J Garton-Sprenger (2005) on 'teen power'. C Fowle (2002) advances the learning benefits of vocabulary notebooks for adolescents.

- **Adult learners**

  On teaching adults, see H McKay and A Tom (1999) and A Rogers (1996).

- **Individual differences in language learning**

  For a clear account of many of the issues raised in this chapter, see P Lightbown and N Spada (2006: Chapter 3) and P Skehan (1998: Chapter 10).

- **Aptitude**

  The best discussion on aptitude I know is in P Skehan (1998: Chapters 8 and 9). See also H D Brown (1994: 258–261).

  The two most widely quoted aptitude test instruments from the 1950s and 1960s were The Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) designed by J Carroll and S Sapon (Carroll and Sapon 1959) and the Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery (Pimsleur 1966).

- **Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)**

  On NLP, two books well worth reading are J Revell and S Norman (1997 and 1999). However, founded/developed as it was by R Bandler and J Grinder, see also R Bandler and J Grinder (1979). J Baker and M Rinvolucri (2005a) have written a book of NLP activities, but see also articles by J Baker and M Rinvolucri (2005b), J Baker (2005) and a kind of 'for and against' account by M Rinvolucri (2005).

- **Multiple Intelligences**

  For more on Multiple Intelligences theory, read H Gardner (1983, 1993), M Zülküf Altan (2001) and R Christison's book of theory and activities (2005). H Puchta (2005, 2006a and b) discusses MI theory and H Puchta and M Rinvolucri (2005) have written a book of activities based on MI theory.

  C Green and R Tanner (2005) write interestingly about MI theory applied to online training.

- **Motivation**

  For motivation in general, see Z Dörnyei (2001) and M Williams and R Burden (1997: Chapter 6). A Littlejohn (2001) is a short helpful article on the subject and K Nicholls (2000) suggests a short questionnaire to raise students' awareness of the topic.

- **Sustaining motivation**

  L Taylor (2005) thinks the teacher's language can determine (or modify) the students' affect.

  J De Sonneville (2005) wants students to be empowered by taking some learning decisions in a 'participatory methodology'. J Harmer (2006a) discusses steps towards student agency, and J J Wilson (2005) recommends teachers 'letting go'.