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**Teaching English
Using The New Technologies
and
Applying the Second Language
Acquisition Theory**

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*Dedicato ai miei figli
Sebastiano e Angelo Sipione*

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching languages and mainly English as LS/L2¹ has undergone many changes in the past thirty years as we all know, due to the influence of research in this field. It has seen many changes in theories, methods and approaches and in the use of various techniques and strategies.

This paper will deal with second language acquisition, explaining the importance of both the theoretical and the practical part of it.

The first part of this paper focuses on the theoretical part of second language learning and teaching, exploring the various theories, methods and approaches connected to second language acquisition and the new innovation technologies used to teach it.

The second part of this paper deals with the practical part of teaching. The practical importance that arise from the fact that understanding how languages are learnt will bring to better and more effective teaching practises. It will explore Krashen's "comprehensible input hypothesis" using the new technologies, going from an A2 level to B1 level and then to a B2 level of the CEF (Common European Framework) but teaching the same topic.

The final part will give an overview of how this type of teaching had good results when taught in an Italian high school to second, third, fourth and fifth year students, bring them to a full B2 level and in this way proving Krashen's SLAT (Second Language Acquisition Theory).

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¹ English as a second language means the second language (third, or fourth language) of anyone who learns it after their first language (L1) in infancy in the home.

1. Part one: The Theoretical Part

1.1 General Outline of Second Language and Teaching through the years

Teaching Languages as a second language has undergone many changes over the years.

Before I speak about teaching languages as a second language, I'd like to explain what is considered the first language or native language, known also as L1 and the second language also known as L2/LS.

The L1 is a person's mother tongue or the language acquired first, but as we know in many multilingual communities, where a child may shift from the main use of one language to the main use of another one it can be considered the language the child feels more comfortable using.

The L2 in a general sense is any language learned after one has learnt one's native language. However, when compared to foreign languages, the term refers to a language that holds an important role in a certain country or region even though it may not be the first language of many of the people who use it. For example the learning of English by immigrants in the USA, this is an example of a case of a second language and not a foreign language as that language is necessary for those people's survival in that society.

Records of second language learning and teaching go back to the second century B.C when Roman children studied Greek, the study of modern languages did not become part of the curriculum of European schools until the 18th century, but we will only deal with the changes undergone during the nineteenth and twentieth century.

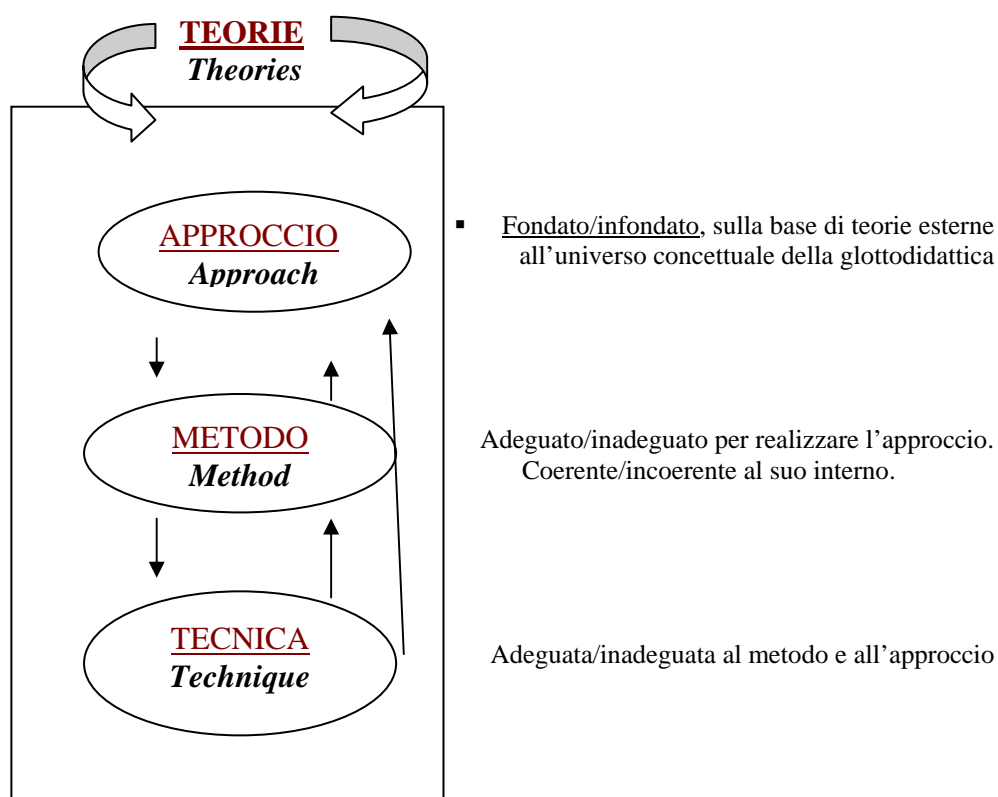
During the last quarter of the nineteenth century a revolution took place that affected foreign and L2 language teaching being used in the twentieth century.

But, before we explore these changes I'd like to give some definitions of some very important language teaching terms that we will encounter in this paper.

Language teaching is sometimes discussed in terms of three related aspects as we can see in figure 1.1., in which the epistemological levels of language teaching have been elaborated by some Italian authors (Freddi in Porcelli and Balboni) having combined their thoughts to Krashen's and Antony's²

Le scienze teoriche o altre scienze pratiche forniscono delle <<teorie>> di riferimento. Come si vede nella Figura 1.1, esse sono esterne all'universo della glottodidattica, che vi ricorre per trarne le informazioni utili per espletare la sua funzione – teorizzare e realizzare i percorsi dell'acquisizione linguistica e dell'educazione linguistica.

Figure 1.1



² The epistemological model created by Freddi in Porcelli-Balboni, 1991
Balboni P.E., *Didattica dell'Italiano a Stranieri*, Bonacci Editore, 1994

Theory:

- 1) is a statement of a general principle or set of propositions, based upon reasoned arguments and supposed by evidence, that is intended to explain a particular fact, event, or phenomenon. One view of the difference between a theory and a hypothesis is that a theory is more strongly supported by evidence than an hypothesis. Another view is that the distinction is related to the breadth of coverage, a theory being broader than a hypothesis.
- 2) The part of a science or art that deals with principles and methods as opposed to practice: a set of rules or principles of the study of the subject.³ [Figure 1.1](#)

Approach:

in language teaching is the theory, philosophy and the principles underlying a particular set of teaching practices.

[Figure 1.1](#)

According to P. Balboni⁴:

Sulla base della scienza del linguaggio e della cultura, delle scienze psicologiche e quelle dell'educazione, un <<approccio>> costituisce la filosofia di fondo di ogni proposta glottodidattica;

- Individua le finalità dell'educazione linguistica;
- Indica gli obiettivi glottodidattici;
- Definisce le coordinate scientifiche per proporre dei <<metodi>> per raggiungere le finalità e gli obiettivi.

Method:

is a way teaching a language which is based on systematic principals and procedures.

[Figure 1.1](#)

Balboni states:

Un <<metodo>> è un insieme di principi metodologico-didattici che traducono un approccio in modelli operativi, materiali didattici, in modalità d'uso delle tecnologie didattiche.

³ **Richards, J. C.; Schmidt, R.** Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics, Longman, 2002.

⁴ **Balboni P.E.**, *Le Sfide di Babele. Insegnare le lingue nelle società complesse*, Torino, UTET Libreria, 2002 e

Balboni P.E., *Dizionario di Glottodidattica*, Guerra Soleil, 1999.

Techniques:

Are the various classroom activities used in particular methods such as *drill*, *dialogues*, *clozes*, *role-playing*, etc.

Figure 1.1

Balboni

Una <<tecnica glottodidattica>> è una *attività* (creativa, basata su problemi da risolvere usando la lingua straniera) o un *esercizio* (manipolativo, mirato alla fissazione più che all'uso della lingua) che realizza in classe le indicazioni del <<metodo>> e le finalità dell'<<approccio>>.

Balboni also says:

la glottodidattica dunque si configura come una scienza pratica ed interdisciplinare al cui interno si individuano una componente teorica (mirante a conoscere il meccanismo dell'acquisizione linguistica, al fine di derivarne degli approcci) ed una componente operativa, spesso detta "glottodidassi", che porta alla definizione di metodi e alla selezione delle tecniche e delle tecnologie adeguate.⁵

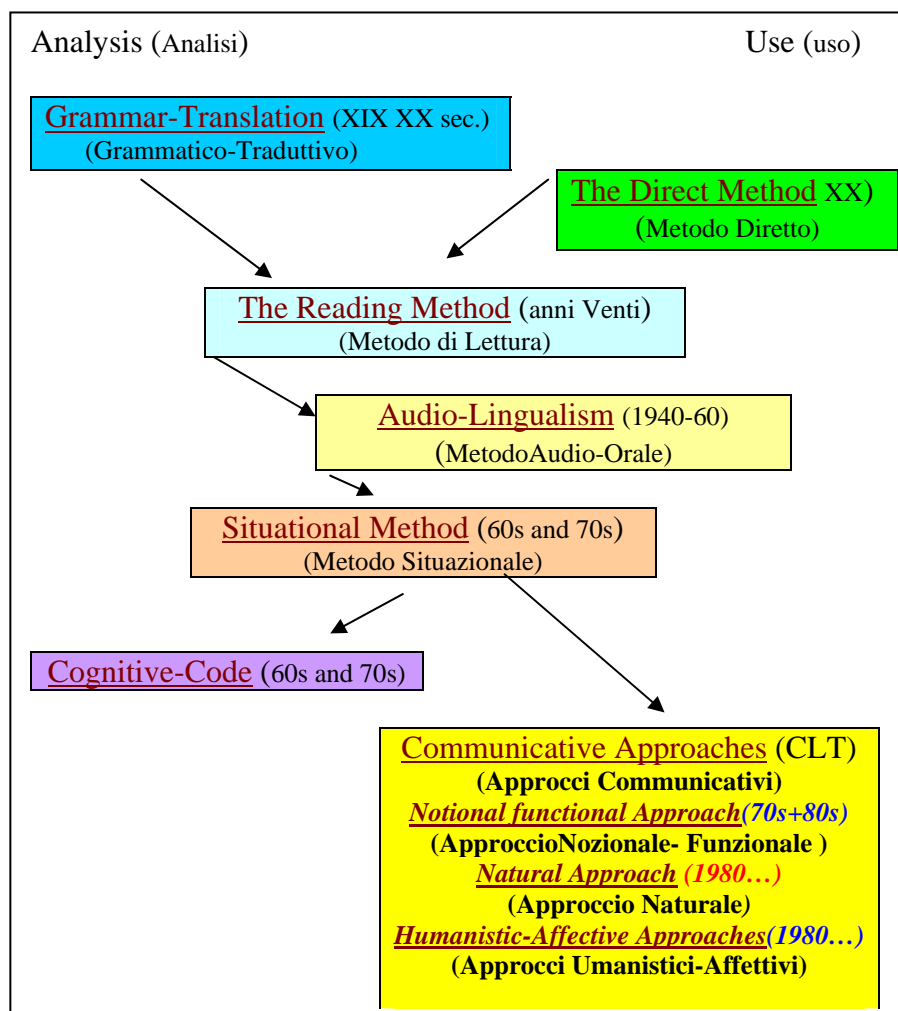
Once having defined these very important words to the right language teaching definition we can start explaining the various changes in methods and approaches through the years.

As stated previously the revolt in language teaching was due to the fact that L2 language teaching was based on the purely academic study of Latin, students of modern languages did much of the same exercises, studying grammatical rules and translating abstract sentences. Oral work was a minimum with focus on memorization of grammatical rules and possibly the ability to read in the target language.

⁵ **Balboni P.E.**, Dizionario di Glottodidattica, Guerra Soleil, 1999

So, as we can see in figure 1.2, we can say that the main language teaching methodology from the beginning of nineteenth century was *Grammar-Translation* but

Figure 1.2⁶



so as the method became increasingly pedantic, a new pedagogical direction was needed. One of the main problems with *Grammar-Translation* was that it focused on the ability to *analyze* language, and not

⁶ Modified from **Balboni P.E.**, *Le Sfide di Babele. Insegnare le lingue nelle società complesse*, Torino, UTET Libreria, 2002. and **Coonan, C.M.**, *La Lingua Straniera Veicolare*, Torino, UTET Libreria, 2002.

to *use* it and the emphasis on reading and writing did little to promote an ability to communicate orally in the target language. By the end of the nineteenth century, new use-based ideas had been formed into what became known as the *Direct Method*. It emphasized exposure to the oral language with listening as the primary skill. Meaning was related directly to the target language without the step of translation, and explicit grammar teaching was downplayed. It imitated how a native language is naturally learned, with listening first, then speaking and only later reading and writing. The focus was evidently on the second language, by banning the employment of the L1 in the classroom. It was thought that vocabulary would be acquired naturally through interaction during the lesson. Vocabulary was explained with pictures or through physical demonstrations, with initial vocabulary being kept simple and familiar to the students, such as: the classroom objects or home, etc. Like all the other approaches, the Direct Method had its problems as it required teachers to be proficient in the target language, which was not always the case. It imitated the L1 learning but didn't take into account the differences between L1 and L2 acquisition. The main difference was the amount of correct exposure to the language as learners of L2 usually have very little exposure weekly. So as, in Britain, Michael West was stressing the need to improve reading skills by improving vocabulary learning, the result was an approach called the *Reading Method*, (along with the Grammar-Translation method and the Direct Method), which lasted till World War II. During the war the weakness of all the above mentioned approaches became obvious and as the American military found itself short of people who were conversationally fluent, so they needed a means to quickly train the soldiers in oral/aural skills. So the American structural linguists developed a program that borrowed from the Direct Method, mainly for its emphasis on listening and speaking and they drew its rationale from behaviorism, which basically said that language learning was a result of habit formation. Thus the method included activities that were believed to