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Methods in the post-methods era
Report on an international survey on language teaching methods'

JUN LIU*
University of Arizona

ABSTRACT

Do methods still have a place in 21'' century language teaching? To answer this question, an international survey was conducted in the summer of 1999. A sample of 800 language teachers world-wide randomly drawn from 17,800 TESOLers were each given a 2-page survey. The return rate was 58.5% with the actual usable data set of 448, which was analyzed by using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Among the ten commonly recognized teaching methods surveyed, both the Communicative Language Teaching Approach and an eclectic method seem to have the highest rate in familiarity, preference, and use. But when multiple factors, such as teaching contexts, instructional settings, learners' proficiency levels, class size, teaching experience and educational backgrounds of the teachers, and the status of being a native or nonnative English speaking professional were taken into consideration, various patterns and themes emerged. One interesting finding is that Grammar Translation is still used in EFL contexts, in larger classes, and with learners at low proficiency levels, though the ratio between the actual use of this method and teachers' preference does not match. Based on the results of the survey, a new theoretical framework is proposed to conceptualize language teaching methods in the post-methods era.

KEYWORDS: Language teaching, methods, language teaching survey, language teachers, methodology, factors in language teaching, classroom methods, comparison of methods

* ***Address for correspondence;*** Jun Liu, ELIL, English Department, The University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721. E-mail: junliu@u.arizona.edu

INTRODUCTION

The 20th century has witnessed the rise and fall of a variety of language teaching methods and approaches ranging from the Audio-Lingual Method (e.g., Fries, 1945) to Communicative Language Teaching (e.g., Brumfit & Johnson, 1979; Wilkins, 1976), and to the Natural Approach (e.g., Krashen & Terrel 1983). While some have achieved wide recognition and acceptance at different historical times, others faded away soon after they came into existence (Mitchell & Vidal, 2001). Common to each method or approach is the belief that the teaching practices a method oran approach supports are more effective and appealing than the previous ones. But after a century of proliferation of methods and approaches in language teaching, we have what Kumaravadivelu (1994) coined, and later referred to by Brown (1997) and Richards and Rogers (2001) as "the post-methods era" in which discussions on language teaching are engaged in without using the word method or approach. Nevertheless, the method concept in teaching is still a powerful one as evidenced in a number of new editions of publications widely adopted in MA methods survey courses and teacher training programs (e.g., Celce-Murcia, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001), in recent journal articles (e.g., Kumaravadivelu, 2001; Mellow, 2002) and in anumber of recent conference presentations (e.g., Burns *et al.* 2000; Liu & Richards, 2001). In spite of the changing status of methods and approaches in language teaching, the study of past and present teaching methods continues to form a significant component in teacher preparation programs because 1) it provides teachers with a view of how language teaching has evolved as a field; 2) teachers can adapt methods and approaches as sources of well-used practice rather than prescriptions to suit their own teaching contexts and needs; and 3) they can provide teachers (especially novice teachers) with basic teaching skills with which they can expand their own teaching repertoire (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In the second edition of her methods book, Larsen-Freeman (2000) posits that a study of methods is invaluable to teacher education in that "methods serve as a foil for reflection that can aid teachers in bringing to conscious awareness the thinking that underlies their actions. By becoming clear on where they stand, teachers can choose to teach differently from the way they were taught" (p. ix). Larsen-Freeman (2000) further states that a knowledge of methods is a part of the knowledge base of teaching with which teachers expand their repertoire of techniques and join a community of practice that challenges teachers' concepts of how teaching leads to learning.

Admittedly, there lacks consensus in understanding some basic concepts in language teaching over the past few decades (cf. Darian, 1972; Fries, 1945; Honby 1950; Howatt, 1984; Kumaravadivelu, 1994; Lado, 1957, 1977; Prabhu, 1990; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Rivers & Temerley, 1987; Strevens, 1980; Widdowson, 1978). Language researchers tend to move away from the study of methods (e.g., there is a lack of research on methods in the 90's); language teachers tend to downplay the role of their teaching methods (e.g., either avoiding the word "method" or being content with the word "eclectic"), while language learners are also left uncertain as to how they learn or fail to learn a second/foreign language at various stages in their language learning processes (e.g., unable to describe and reflect on their own learning processes). The field of language teaching has faced several pressing issues: How can we conceptualize and interpret methods in language teaching in the post-methods era? Will those historically-evolved designer methods disappear completely or partially from language classrooms, or be transformed into unlabelled teaching strategies in this new century? Can teachers teach English to speakers of other languages without using a method? Shall we claim

whatever we do in classroom as eclectic without a thorough understanding of what eclecticisrn rneans at conceptual and practica1levels? While there have been a few atternpts to address these issues (e.g., Brown, 1993, 1997, 2000; Kumaravadivelu, 1994, 2001; Prabhu, 1990), none of these attempts has emerged frorn ernpirical data. Their speculations and articulations rernain at the conceptual level. Empirical evidence is needed to prove that language teaching rnethods are indeed dead or still available in the post-methods era. We need data to inform us about what current language teachers' levels of familiarity are with a number of well-recognized teaching methods, their preference for these methods, and actual use of teaching methods to leamers at different proficiency levels and in different skill areas, and complexities that influence their familiarity with, preference for, and actual use of these methods. My concems about these issues resulted in this intemational rnethods survey.

I. THE SURVEY

The purpose of the survey was to understand the familiarity, preferences, and use of methods among language teachers world-wide in order to provide language teachers and teacher educators food for thought when they make pedagogical decisions in their language classrooms. The survey consists of three parts. Part One asks for demographic information of the respondents, including the language teaching contexts, the countries where English is taught, the instructional settings, the English proficiency levels of the students, the class size, years of language teaching, educational levels, and the native/nonnative English speaking status. Pari Two explores the preference of topics in a 21'' century TESOL rnethodology book in order to find out what the respondents want to read, and how the methods book can satisfy the needs of language teachers (this part will not be discussed in this paper). Part Three consists of a grid that lists ten commonly acknowledged language teaching methods, and intends to investigate: 1) the respondents' familiarity with each rnethod, 2) the respondents' use of each rnethod for leamers at different proficiency levels, 3) the respondents' use of each method for training different language skills, and 4) the respondents' preference for each method. To allow input beyond the ten identified methods, a column named ''others'' is also provided across all the categories[2].

To help construct and design the questionnaire in the survey, I discussed the survey with a group of TESOL teachers and teacher-trainees enrolled in a MA TESOL Methods seminar at my institute. The set of structured questions and format of the survey was then field-tested at the 1999 TESOL Convention in New York in order to find out how the data collection protocols and the survey instruments workwith the small sample (n=30) from the target population. The survey was then revised subsequently based on the respondents' feedback regarding the preferred time to complete the survey, the ease of following the sequence to complete the survey, the visual appeal of the survey format, and the clarity of the wording of the survey questions. The further revised survey instrurnent was tested and retested among a group of MA TESOL students (n=24) enrolled in a graduate seminar in spring 1999 with an interval of one month and a half. The reliability coefficients of the instrurnent obtained through test and retest method was .85. The approximate amount of time to complete the revised survey is 5 minutes.

II. DATA COLLECTION

A stratified sample of 800 language teachers were randomly drawn from 17,800 TESOLers

(about 22.25%) in June 1999 with the help of the Mernber Services Departrnent of the TESOL Central Office. As the majority of TESOLers reside in the United States, a sizable portion of participants (212 out of 800 TESOLers, 26.5%) were drawn frorn 61 countries other than the United States to maintain international representation[3]. A cover letter describing the intent of the survey and a postage-paid return envelope together with a 2-page survey form was sent to each of the 588 dornestic participants. To each international participant, a cover letter, a US $1 bill for postage and a return envelope together with a 2-page survey were sent out. Each questionnaire sent out was assigned a number for the purpose of following-up on non-respondents. Two months later (August 1999), 412 questionnaires were returned, for a 51.5% return rate. To follow up with the non-respondents, 100 of the 388 non-respondents (about one-fourth) who had not sent back the rnailed survey were randornly drawn, anda copy of the survey together with a follow-up cover letter was sent to each of the 100 participants. Within the next two rnonths, about 49 out of 100 were returned (about 50%). Therefore, the overall responses were 461 (about 57.6%) with an actual useable data set of 448 (56%). Five were not delivered due to possible job relocation or address error. Among the 8 non-usable data set, 4 were incornplete, and the remaining 4 were returned because the respondents were not teachers (i.e., publishers and adrninistrators).

To facilitate data entry and analysis, acode book for the survey was developed specifying the question nurnber, variable name, position, description, and values of the variable. Based on the established codebook, the 446 valid data sets were entered into the database through Excel with the help of three research assistants. To rnaintain the accuracy of the data entry, the three research assistants rotated data entries so that each data set was entered twice by two people. Whenever there was a dispute, the researcher was brought in to double-check the data accuracy.

III. RESULTS[3]

The results of the survey consist of two parts. I will first offer descriptive statistics to report the percentages of the respondents' choices arnong the ten surveyed methods in terms of familiarity, use, skill areas, and preference. I will then report the results of inferential statistics (e.g., chi-square, two-way and three-way ANOVAs) performed on two rnethods, CLT and EM, due to their saliency. As the survey respondents vary in their teaching contexts, institutional settings, educational levels, the English-speaking status, years of teaching, and class sizes they usually teach, numerous possible interactions between these variables and these two recognizable language teaching methods are taken into consideration.

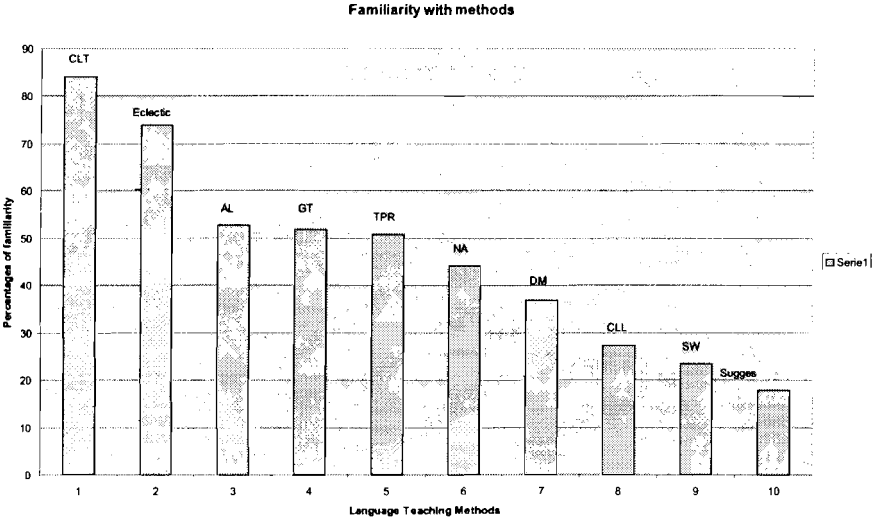
III.1. Descriptive statistics

Among the 448 usable data sets, nearly half (44%) of the teachers had experience teaching in both ESL and EFL contexts. Just under two-thirds of the teachers (65%) who responded taught at university levels, and half (48%) had taught at the middle and high school levels. Surprisingly, the ovenvhelming rnajority (91%) of the teachers had experience in teaching all levels (low, intermediate and advanced). As far as class size is concerned, nearly half of the teachers (44%) normally taught 11-20 students per class, while roughly a quarter of thern (27%) usually taught 21-30 students per class. The teachers who responded to the study had rnany years of teaching experience: About one-fifth (21%) had 6 to 10 years of teaching experience, a little more than one-fourth (28%) had 10-20 years of teaching experience, and alrnost one third (31%) of thern

had 20 years or more of teaching experience. These teachers were also well educated. Among them, almost two-thirds (64%) had masters degrees and one-fifth (20%) had doctorates. Nearly four-fifths of the teachers (79%) were native speakers of English, while only one-fifth (19%) considered themselves as nonnative English speakers.

III.1.a. Familiarity with the methods

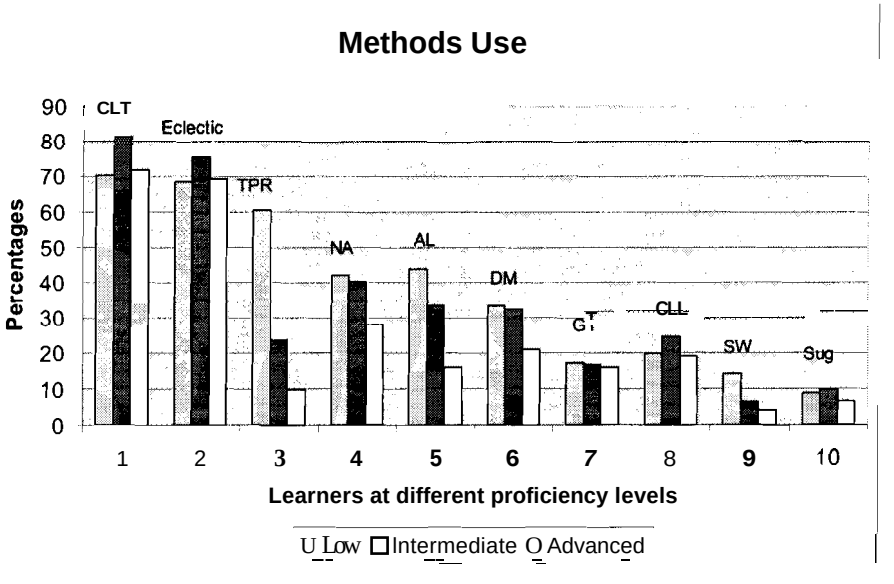
Among the ten language teaching methods included in the survey, an overwhelming majority of the respondents seemed to be most familiar with CLT (84%), and EM (74%). In contrast, only a small percentage of the respondents (30%) were familiar with CLL, or SW (25%), or Sug (18%). The traditional teaching methods, such as GT and AL were familiar to about half of the respondents. Surprisingly, TPR, one of the four designer methods, still enjoys recognition among more than half of the respondents (52%), indicating that not all designer methods have disappeared from use. A point worth noticing is that there are some elements in designer methods, such as TPR, that still capture the attention of language teachers.



III.1.b. The use of methods to learners at different proficiency levels

The CLT and EM are by far the most frequently used language teaching methods for students at lower language proficiency levels (70% and 68%, respectively), at intermediate levels (81% and 75%, respectively), and at advanced levels (72% and 69%, respectively). While TPR is commonly used (60.52%) for students at lower proficiency levels, about one-third of the teachers

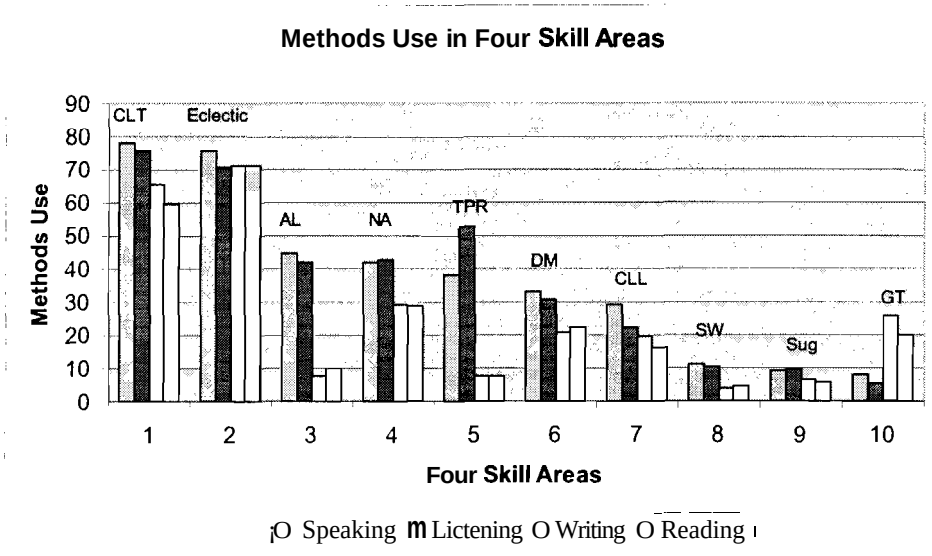
(approximately 35%) responded that they evenly used NA, AL, and DM at both lower and intermediate proficiency levels. Interestingly, there is a general decrease in the use of each method to leamers at advanced proficiency levels. This implies that specific methods matter more to teachers for lower and intermediate level students than those for advanced leamers. This finding validates an earlier assumption that "methods are quite distinctive at the early, beginning stages of a language course, and rather indistinguishable from each other at a later stage" (Brown, 1997, p. 3). Also implied in this assumption is the fact that language teachers for lower-level students need a larger variety of teaching methods in order to meet the needs of younger leamers and entry-level students. Evenly distributed among leamers at all levels is the use of GT although the overall percentage of the use of this method is relatively low among the respondents (less than 20%). A possible interpretation is that the majority of the respondents have taught either in ESL settings only (37.53%), or in both ESL and EFL settings (43.60%), but only less than one-fifth of the teachers in the survey have taught exclusively in EFL settings (18.87%). Given this low percentage of survey respondents teaching in EFL settings, the overall low percentage in the use of GT among the respondents needs to be interpreted with caution as there might be a possibility that the using of GT is correlated with EFL settings.



III.1 . . Methods use in four skill areas

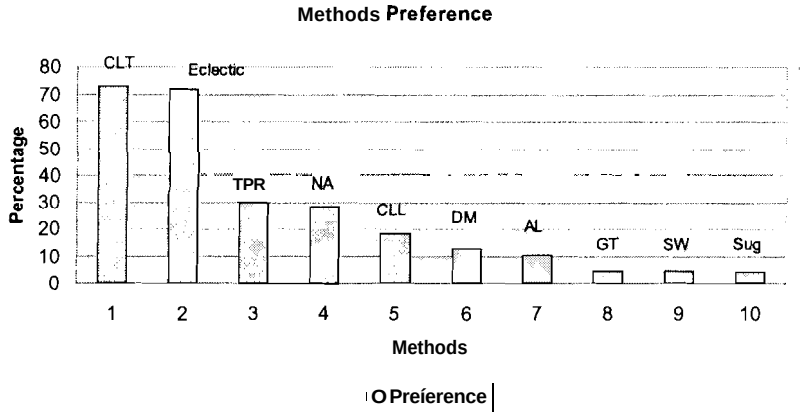
Both CLT and EM seem to have been frequently used by the majority of the respondents (approximately 70%) in teaching all four language skill areas. Relatively speaking, TPR, AL, NA, DM, and CLL are more widely used in teaching oral skills (listening and speaking) than

written skills (reading and writing). The reverse is true with GT, which is used more in teaching written skills (reading and writing) than oral skills (listening and speaking), although it is one of the least used methods overall. It was obvious that the methods that are widely used and equally distributed in teaching all four skills are EM and CLT. The above chart also shows a strong contrast between TPR and GM in that the former is used exclusively for teaching oral skills while the latter for written skills.



111.1.d. Preference for methods

Consistent with the above findings, both CLT and EM are the most popular among the language teachers surveyed, followed by TPR, NA, CLL, DM, and AL in descending order. GT, SW, and Sug seem the least favorite among the respondents. It should be pointed out that since the majority of the teachers (79%) who responded to the survey are native English speakers, the lower preference of GT should be interpreted with caution. Among the one-fifth (19%) self-identified nonnative English-speaking teachers (n = 85), the majority of them (75%) actually checked the use of GT for teaching reading and writing although only less than half of this group (35%) surveyed showed their preference for GT. The discrepancy between their low preference for GT and their high use of this method in EFL contexts indicates that not all English teachers in EFL settings can actually do what they prefer to do as there exists a number of factors, such as the examination system and the class size, that might influence the use of certain methods. On the other hand, some possible reasons that SW and Sug are the least favorable could be the high demands of technological equipment and complication in implementing them as they both require extra materials, special classroom environment, reduced number of students, and above all, special teacher training.



111.2. Inferential statistics

A number of ANOVAs were conducted to observe the correlation among various variables in the above questions. In several three-way and two-way ANOVAs performed to observe the correlation between familiarity with each of the two teaching methods and years of teaching experience, educational level, and the teaching context, statistic significance was found [F (1, 430) =11.74, p = .0007] between the teachers' educational level and their familiarity with an eclectic method. It is found that more years of teaching experience is positively correlated with a higher degree of familiarity with EM. This indicates that the higher the educational level, the more knowledge one is supposed to have about language learning and teaching, which will enable language teachers to choose from a variety of resources to meet the learners' needs through an eclectic approach. It could also be interpreted as the more one knows about language learning and teaching through education, the less likely one is to rigidly adhere to one particular method in teaching. Implied in this assumption is the fact that in order to enable novice teachers to be resourceful and knowledgeable in using EM in teaching, solid training in understanding different teaching methods that historically evolved in our field is essential. This implication, however, seems to be contradictory to another finding of the study that the majority of the respondents do not seem to be interested in the historical perspectives of language teaching. A possible interpretation of this contradiction lies in the fact that the majority of the respondents in the survey are experienced teachers, and their prior educational backgrounds and teaching experiences have already prepared them to look for issues beyond the historical horizon. Nevertheless, incoming MA students or pre-service teachers who aspire to be good language teachers. for instance, need to know what has or has not worked for whom in what context before they can have their own sense of plausibility (Prabhu, 1990) to meet the teaching demands and the needs of their learners.

While one's knowledge contributes to the resources from which to choose what is feasible and suitable for the students, one's teaching context also plays an important role in

providing contextual knowledge for EM to take place. The analysis of the data reveals that a correlation between the teachers' familiarity with EM and their educational level together with the teaching context was statistically significant [F (2,430) = 4.80, p = .0086]. This implies that the more education a teacher receives, the more at ease the teacher feels in choosing and implementing different techniques to meet the teaching objectives in relation to the learners' needs. which vary according to different teaching contexts. In other words, the teacher might be better facilitated in making context-dependent decisions to inform their own teaching practice that can be characterized as eclectic. In investigating some possible correlation between and arnong some variables regarding CLT, statistic significance was obtained [F (2,430) = 3.70, p = .0256] between familiarity with CLT and the teaching context in that the higher levels of familiarity with CLT were positively correlated with ESL contexts. Such a correlation implies that teachers working in ESL environments are better assisted in using CLT, while those working in an EFL context rnight feel less familiar with CLT because of the lack of language exposure and natural resourccs or authentic materials.

On the contrary, the teachers' familiarity with GT could be correlated with the EFL teaching contexts, and possibly the nonnative status of the language teachers teaching in those contexts. The three-way ANOVA arnong teachers' preference for using GT, the teaching context, and the class size was found to have statistical significance [F(2, 430) = 3.16, p < . 0434]. Larger class sizes (e.g., more than 30 students per class) in an EFL context are positively correlated with use of GT. This indicates that GT still has a place in EFL contexts, especially in courses focusing on literacy development. Also statistically significant [F (2, 430) = 3.35, p <.0303)] is the correlation between the preference for GT and the years of teaching in that the more years of teaching experience (i.e., more than ten years) one has, the higher the preference for GT. A possible interpretation could be that those teachers who might have used different methods over many years with learners at different proficiency levels in various contexts have come to an understanding that grammar is indeed essential in language leaming regardless of how it is taught. Another interpretation, which has a negative connotation, could be that those who started using GT tend to be resistant to more innovative language teaching methods as constrained by a number of other factors, such as the teaching context, the class size, their own communicative competence, the centralized exaniination system, and above all, their heavy teaching load. Finally, due to the fact that GT has long been severely criticized as a traditional, non-comrnunicative, and out-of-fashion method, the lower percentage this method received across familiarity, use, skill areas, and learners' proficiency levels could be implied by the higher percentage EM received across all categories as EM contains more than one method, with GT, in whatever format or extent, being one of them.

A number of ANOVAs were also performed between preference for teaching rnethods and class size, years of teaching experience, and teaching context. However, no statistical significance was found among these variables. The chi-square test of independence was conducted between the variables of teaching context and class size. The test result is significant at alpha level 0.5 (X2 = 31.0136, p < .0001), indicating that the teaching context is related to the class size (i.e., an EFL context is positively correlated with larger class size). This implies that in EFL contexts, there are usually bigger classes than in ESL contexts, a finding confirming a common-sense observation. While the attempt to provide statistical support for the correlation existing among a number of variables and knowing and using certain methods of language teaching is less than satisfactory due to the small cell size. We can speculate, however, that there

are indeed many variables that constantly interact with one another. By taking into consideration many variables in language teaching, and by observing the interaction among these variables, we have come to understand that language teaching is very complex, and perhaps there is no single model that will be considered the best method (Prabhu, 1990). But is there still a place for language teaching methods in the 21" century?

IV. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

As seen, this survey has generated some very interesting findings, though some are not surprising. However, there are several limitations to this survey. First of all, as the sampling of TESOL educators came from within the TESOL membership, it precludes those English teachers who were not TESOL members at the time of the survey. Therefore, the results of this survey are not intended to be generalizable to those outside the sample frame. Secondly, because there is no definition accompanying the labels (to allow maximum flexibility), the choices made by the respondents are subject to individual interpretation. Thirdly, the methods reported being used could be different from those the respondents actually use in their classrooms, which can only be verified through observation. Fourth, the term eclectic method (EM) might not be the best descriptor used in the survey as eclecticism or even principled eclecticism could imply that teachers adopt a varied set of practices based on flexibility and variety of the content. Therefore, the loose meaning of this term might be understood differently by the respondents of the survey. Last but not least, there is no qualitative data that would help interpret the data.

Nevertheless, the findings from the survey are still very revealing. A consistent pattern emerging from the data indicates that the respondents are most familiar with CLT and EM. They seem to have heavily used them to teach English as a second or foreign language to learners at all proficiency levels in almost all four skill areas. However, some constraints of CLT in EFL settings and interpretations of the inclusiveness of the term eclecticism need our attention.

The findings of the survey suggest that there is still a place for methods in language teaching in the post-methods era. The concept of a method in the post-methods era, as argued by many prominent scholars in the field, has been referred to as a set of teaching principles (Brown, 1994), a coherent set of links between principles and certain techniques and procedures (Larsen-Freeman, 2000), pedagogical parameters over particularity, practicality, and possibility (Kumaravadivelu, 2001), and principled eclecticism: coherent and pluralistic language teaching (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Mellow, 2002). While recent theoretical proposals for postmethod pedagogy have each informed our profession in a unique way, I propose a conceptual framework inspired by, if not directly emerging from, the survey results.

The proposed theoretical framework intends to equip language teaches with new ways of thinking about their teaching, and also to inform language researchers of the possibilities and opportunities for collaborating with language teachers and conducting more classroom-oriented research. This theoretical framework, as a multidimensional model, consists of historical, architectural, developmental, contextual, and reflexive dimensions:

A multidimensional model for conceptualizing language teaching methods	
Dimensions	**Major issues for consideration**
Historical	What is the origin of the method and how did the method evolve? What is the theory of language learning governing the operation of the method? What are the goals and objectives of your teaching and how is the method supposed to accomplish them? What is its stance towards grammar versus communication? What research studies have been conducted about the method?
Architectural	What are the roles of the teacher and the students, respectively? What are some of the basic characteristics of the teaching/learning process of the method? What is the nature of classroom interaction (e.g., student-teacher, or student-student interaction)? What teaching materials are needed to accomplish the goals and objectives?
Developmental	What areas of language (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, etc.) need to be emphasized? What language skills (e.g., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) need to be emphasized in class? How should learner errors be treated? How should students be evaluated through this method? What impact does the method have on learners' affect (e.g., motivation, attitude, anxiety, and risk-taking)?
Contextual	What is your teaching context (ESL, EFL, ESP, EAP, etc.)? What is the feasibility of the method across cultural and linguistic contexts? How much class time is there for teaching English per week? What is the role of the students' native language? How is the target culture viewed in the teaching context ? Are learners' personality, learner strategies, and learning styles taken into consideration while implementing the method?
Reflexive	Why is this teaching method chosen? How familiar are you with the method? What is your previous expenence with this method (teaching and learning if applicable)? Do you feel you need some training before you use this method? Do you have a realistic assessment of yourself as a language teacher and how is your potential maximized by using this method?

Driven by the motive to endorse "principledeclecticism"(Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 183) to meet the diverse demands of multilingual leamers, there is a fundamental need for language teachers to be abreast of the language teaching history of the 20" century. The histoncal dimension provides a chronological account of methods evolving from the Grammar-Translation Method at the tum of the 20th century to the Communicative Language Teaching Approach, which is still popular up to present as indicated by the survey results. This dimension has been documented by scholars and accepted in teacher education in various MA TESOL programs around the world (e.g., a teaching methods courses are offered in almost all the degree programs for language teacher education). Among all the methods theoretically proposed, empirically tested, and pedagogically practiced, the key issue debated over the century is how to balance the role of grammar with that of communication on the language teaching continuum. At one end

of this continuum, some language teaching methods (e.g., GT, DM, AL etc.) tend to focus on a series of isolated target linguistic features, structural pattems, translation, error correction, and memorization. On the other end of the continuum, some language teaching methods are shaped in favor of natural leaming experiences, meaningful communication, and incidental language leaming (e.g., NA, CLT etc.). The continuous debate marked by the rise and fall of various teaching methods has given rise to an ideological compromise. That is, language teachers are gradually led to believe that we should teach communication without ignoring grammar instruction, and teach grammar without stifling communication (Larsen Freeman, ***personal communication,*** 1995). But this compromising solution to language teaching, though theoretically sound, does not help teachers become ready help in finding the resonance between theory and practice in their daily classrooms in dealing with such issues as when and how grammar should be taught to students so that their communicative competence will be maximized. The central issue here is the design of a language class as reflected in the architectural dimension.

As language teaching is so complex, language teachers often have to make informed decisions about the roles of teachers and leamers, the role of instructional materials, and so forth. To take into consideration multiple issues relevant to language teaching, Richards and Rodgers (2001) propose and elaborate their conceptual framework of methods in terms of approach, design, and procedure. Their framework, which I describe as the architectural dimension, features categorical elements and sub-elements that constitute a method. Unlike the hierarchical order among approach, method, and technique in Anthony's classification (1963), this dimension allows us to observe each method as a whole by investigating multiple elements at the same time. Another advantage of viewing methods through this dimension is to optimize the role of design in connecting theories with practice. The issue of design lies in the center of teaching. It enables teachers to understand the strengths and weaknesses of methods before they choose to use them in a given situation, and it helps teachers keep abreast of their goals and objectives of teaching, the syllabus models, the types of leaming and teaching activities, and the roles of teachers, leamers, and materials. In a word, it helps teachers harmonize their intentions with their classroom actions (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Parallel to the architectural dimension that oversees multiple factors in choosing a language teaching method, the developmental dimension reminds language teachers of what to teach to whom in terms of students' different developmental stages in language leaming, e.g., beginning, intermediate, and advanced. There is now general acceptance in formal language instruction that the effectiveness of teaching methods is dependent on the proficiency levels of language leamers. As shown in the survey, many recognized language teaching methods were designed for beginning-level leamers (e.g., DM, SW, TPR, and CLL), and thus are distinctive at beginning or lower-intermediate developmental stages. An obvious fact is that methods become less discrete and indistinguishable when we deal with leamers at intermediate to advanced levels. Understanding language teaching through this dimension also enables teachers to consider the affect of our leamers at different stages of their language development. Learners' motivation, attitude, anxiety, and risk-taking, for instance, are some of the constructs teachers should be sensitive towards in teaching.

The contextual dimension calls for the consideration of the language leaming contexts and sub-contexts, e.g., ESL, EFL, when the feasibility and constraints of methods in language classrooms are considered. For instance, teaching in an ESL setting could be different than

teaching in an EFL setting. Likewise, teaching in one EFL setting (e.g., Italy) might be different from another EFL setting (e.g., China). Therefore, what proves efficient and effective in one setting might be totally inefficient and ineffective in another. Multiple factors (e.g., societal, educational, instructional, and individual factors) will affect the choice of the teaching methods in any given context. While societal factors directly affect the need for English in particular kinds of educational and occupational settings, such as ESL, and EFL, educational factors have great impact on setting up the goals and objectives of a language program, making curriculum decisions, and designing syllabi. Both societal and educational factors will largely influence instructional decision-making dealing with the amount of time needed for language instruction, the implementation of teaching materials, the testing procedures, and the training of teachers. Given a particular teaching context, language instructors will also have to consider many individual factors such as learning styles and learner strategies, and individual differences in cognitive, affective, and psychological domains of language learning. The contextual dimension, which takes into consideration all these factors, will make a big difference in the planning and implementation of classroom activities at the methods level in order to be consistent with any chosen theoretical approach to language teaching.

Finally, in order to allow the above dimensions to interact among one another, we need a reflective dimension, which introduces a multi-directional way of thinking by putting all the factors affecting the choice, implementation, and evaluation of methods into perspective. As language teachers, we should not only understand the theoretical backgrounds and the general principles of our teaching methods, but also know when to use what for what purposes with whom. Being dogmatic to one method is not a good idea, nor is it acceptable to totally abandon well-established methods. Dynamic language teaching occurs when theories and practice interact through the constant reflection and adjustments of methods. Equipped with theories, and informed by tasks and activities, language teachers gain insights from their teaching through the use of methods, and this forms a reflective dimension to understanding methods.

CONCLUSION

The multidimensional theoretical framework provides us with a new and dynamic perspective towards methods in language teaching in the 21" century. Whatever we use to teach is not determined by any single factor, nor is it constrained by any individual teacher. It is always an adjustable decision that is shaped and reshaped through teaching, and through the learning of teaching (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). To substantiate the multidimensional theoretical framework for language teaching methods as proposed above, we need to know about the currently practiced methods by language teachers for learners at various developmental stages of language learning in both ESL and EFL contexts, and to assess and explain the differential effects of various teaching methods on language learning fordifferent learners in various contexts. We need to find out: i) What methods do language teachers currently use in both ESL and EFL contexts? ii) What are the factors that support or constrain their choices of teaching methods? iii) How do language teachers conceptualize and envision language teaching methods in the 21" century with the rapid advancement of technology, the increasing demands of societal needs, and the diverse backgrounds of learners in various learning contexts? We also need to understand in retrospect the effects of various English language teaching methods on our learners as we tend to look at

the effectiveness of teaching methods only from teachers' viewpoints without considering the cognitive, affective, as well as socio-cultural aspects of language leaming from learners' perspectives. It will also be helpful for us to secure prominent language teaching experts' assessment of the past and future methods they have espoused. The survey reported and analyzed in this paper is only one such attempt. We need more research studies at the method level to enhance our understanding of the essence of language teaching, and we also need a more comprehensive data analysis framework to synthesize research on the effectiveness of language instruction (cf. Noms & Ortega, 2000). Methods could be prescriptive (Brown, 2000), quasi-political or mercenary (Pennycook, 1989), and non-transferable (Nunan, 1991), but it all depends on how we look at them. It is the conceptualization of methods that matters.

NOTES:

1. The survey was supported by an HRI (Humanities Research Initiatives) Grant by College of Humanities at xxxx. The survey results were presented at the 35th TESOL Convention at St. Louis in March 2001.

2. Due to limited input in the "others" columns, the data analysis of this part is omitted from the report.

3. These countries are: Albania, Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, P. R. China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, England, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Haiti, Hong Kong, India, Iran, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mali, Mexico, Morocco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Romania, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Scotland, Singapore, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, UAE, Ukraine, United Kingdom, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, and Venezuela.

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