

The Art and Science of Language Teaching

This user-friendly book is designed for language teachers of all levels and languages who seek to inform their classroom practices with current research findings on second language acquisition. Ideal for courses on second language learning and teaching, teacher reading groups, and professional development workshops, each chapter begins with a story of a real teaching scenario and a concise summary of what cutting-edge language teaching research says (and what it does not say) about the topic. Throughout the twenty-one chapters, the authors connect language learning research to the classroom, challenge misunderstandings around language pedagogy, and provide solutions. Each chapter concludes with classroom activities and instructional strategies that can be used immediately in professional development workshops or in the classroom. Additional resources are available online to supplement the activities found in the book. Applicable across all languages and levels, this book is suitable for teachers of diverse backgrounds teaching in diverse contexts.

Lara Bryfonski is an assistant professor of linguistics at Georgetown University. She has published and presented her research on a variety of topics in second language acquisition, including task-based language teaching, corrective feedback, materials development, language learning in study abroad, and methods for second language research. Her publications appear in journals such as *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *Language Teaching Research*, *Modern Language Journal*, and *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* as well as a variety of edited collections. She is a former ESL/EFL teacher and an experienced teacher trainer and has worked with NGOs in Latin America, public and private schools in the United States, governmental and financial organizations, and universities to provide research-based training in language teaching.

Alison Mackey is a tenured full professor and Chair of the Department of Linguistics at Georgetown University (with an additional professorial appointment at Lancaster University in the UK during summers), and an expert in both general second language research and language research methodology. She has published over 100 journal articles and book chapters, and 20 books in total, including the Mildenerger Prizewinning *The Routledge Handbook of Second Language Acquisition* (2012). She is editor-in-chief of *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, a co-founder and developer of the open-access Instruments for Second Language Research database, and, for the last two decades, co-editor of Routledge's Second Language Acquisition Research series. She has received both of Georgetown University's top honors: the President's Award for Distinguished Scholar-Teachers and the Provost's Career Research Achievement Award. She is one of the top-cited scholars internationally in applied linguistics.

“This is a volume that needs to be in every practicing teacher’s library. This book is one of the few that directly connects second language acquisition research to practice in an accessible and comprehensive way for teachers.”

Professor Richard Donato, University of Pittsburgh, USA, author of *Enacting the Work of Language Instruction* (ACTFL, 2016)

“Do you want an SLA book that speaks directly to language teaching? If so, then start with the real issues that teachers face and then see what SLA has to say about them.”

Rod Ellis, University of Auckland, NZ, author of *Exploring Language Pedagogy through Second Language Acquisition Research* (Routledge, 2014)

“The Bryfonski/Mackey text demystifies research in second language acquisition by presenting key findings in an easy-to-read format and connecting them to the realities of classroom practice. Pre-service and in-service professionals alike will find research-based solutions that address the common classroom challenges facing today’s language educators.”

Eileen W. Glisan, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, USA, author of *Enacting the Work of Language Instruction* (ACTFL, 2016)

“Bryfonski and Mackey have done the impossible, demystifying second language acquisition for pedagogical contexts with concrete, ready-to-use applications. By artfully grounding the volume in both research and real-life teaching scenarios and questions, these eminent scholars bring to life the most important questions underlying language teaching for every instructional setting. An immediate must-read!”

Laura Gurzynski-Weiss, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana, USA

“Irony aside, language researchers and teachers have – for *decades* – lacked a shared language. Bryfonski and Mackey provide these yin-yanged audiences with a Rosetta Stone of sorts, a cipher that unlocks the door connecting the worlds of L2 research and practice. This text allows the authors’ world-renowned expertise to shine while speaking with the hearts of trusted mentors.”

Luke Plonsky, Northern Arizona University, USA

“Oriented around questions and answers relevant to any language teacher and language classroom, each engaging chapter is packed with vignettes, visuals, and strategies for teachers to put into practice. Ideal for pre- or in-service teachers alike, this text will answer teachers’ burning questions on everything from pronunciation and feedback to lesson planning and technology.”

Andrea Révész, University College London, UK

“Whether you’re a new language teacher just starting out or a veteran language teacher with many years of experience, you must read this book. With charming graphics throughout, it makes solid connections between the latest research and practice, with concrete examples for the language learning classroom, and even includes links to sample lesson plans, videos, and other helpful materials.”

Heather Sweetser, The University of New Mexico, USA, 2022 ACTFL National Language Teacher of the Year

The Art and Science of Language Teaching

LARA BRYFONSKI

Georgetown University, Washington DC

ALISON MACKEY

Georgetown University, Washington DC





Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of
education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/highereducation/isbn/9781108837798

DOI: 10.1017/9781108943048

© Lara Bryfonski and Alison Mackey 2024

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions
of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take
place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2024

Printed in the United Kingdom by CPI Group Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY, 2024

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Bryfonski, Lara, 1989– author. | Mackey, Alison, author.

Title: The art and science of language teaching / Lara Bryfonski, Alison Mackey.

Description: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY : Cambridge
University Press, 2023. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2023025084 | ISBN 9781108837798 (hardback) | ISBN
9781108932011 (paperback) | ISBN 9781108943048 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Language and languages – Study and teaching.

Classification: LCC P51 .B786 2023 | DDC 407.1–dc23/eng/20230725

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2023025084>

ISBN 978-1-108-83779-8 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-108-93201-1 Paperback

Additional resources for this publication at www.cambridge.org/BryfonskiMackey.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence
or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this
publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will
remain, accurate or appropriate.

We dedicate this book to our mothers, whose belief in us has always been unwavering.

CONTENTS

Preface page ix
Acknowledgments xi
Note on Terminology xii
Pre-Reading Self-Assessment xv

PART I TEACHER AND STUDENT TALK

- 1 How do I get my learners to start and stay talking in the second language? 3
- 2 How do I maximize input in the second language? 22
- 3 Why, when, and how (much) should I correct my learners? 34
- 4 How do I promote peer interaction in the classroom? 48
- 5 What kinds of learning strategies can I teach my learners? 63

PART II DIFFERENTIATION

- 6 How does language learner identity influence the language learning experience? 77
- 7 How do I best support neurodiverse language learners? 93
- 8 How do learners' motivation and anxiety levels impact their language learning experience? 107
- 9 How can aptitude be leveraged for language learning? 123
- 10 It's much harder to learn (and teach) my language compared to other languages, and it takes much longer. How can I compensate for these difficulties with my learners? 136

PART III TEACHING THE SKILLS

- 11 How or when should I teach grammar? 153
- 12 Is there a “best” way to teach pronunciation? 167
- 13 How can I incorporate literacy skills in the target language? 182
- 14 When or how should I teach vocabulary? 199
- 15 What are some strategies for teaching learners about politeness, register, or other pragmatic skills in the second language? 217

PART IV LESSON AND UNIT PLANNING

- 16 What are some of the most popular language teaching methods? 233
- 17 Content, form, and activities: How do I select activities, tasks, and projects? 249
- 18 Menus and maps: How can I make my classroom more authentic in terms of materials and practices? 266
- 19 How could/should I best use technology in the language classroom? 283
- 20 How do I assess language learning? 297
- 21 How can I make the most of professional development opportunities for language teachers? 318

Glossary 331

References and Resources 337

Index 355

PREFACE

This book was inspired by our desire to answer the many questions we receive from language teachers, administrators, teacher trainers, and parents in relation to the learning and teaching languages. Year after year, we hear the same questions, along with comments and criticisms of the differences between academic research and the experiences and practices of language teachers or learners. We wrote this book with language teachers in mind. As such, we've aimed to provide practical classroom solutions, tips, tricks, and suggestions, all grounded in empirical research into how languages are learned. We've included readable, helpful summaries of what the research says about the questions we are most often asked. We also point out places where the research is still ongoing or does not provide a clear answer, so it makes the most sense for teachers to (continue to) use their best judgment. We use vignettes and other examples from authentic language classrooms and language teachers' experiences interwoven with research findings to bring each topic and its research to life. We finish each chapter with a list of practical resources for further reading as well as discussion questions, either for self-reflection or for a teacher trainer to use as guidance during professional development sessions.

There's an increasing number of books on the market today that provide tips for language teaching or tout the latest best practices. Such books are often presented as consumable products that will produce instant, uniform results for *all* students in *all* contexts. This sort of approach, however, can mask the many nuances involved in second language research findings. So, what's unique about our book? Well, we don't attempt to sell teachers on any one particular method, product, or on "quick-fix" solutions. Instead, we've done our best to offer research-based practices that are the result of decades of studies into how languages are learned. We also don't shy away from pointing out where the research is lacking, unclear, or where there are still unknowns. Instead, we point out these areas in each chapter (in sections titled "The Science: What's Missing?") so that teachers know where there might not yet be enough research to provide a definite answer. We hope

our approach will give language teachers (and those who support them) research-based tools to make informed decisions about how to best align the art of language teaching with the science of language learning.

Teachers often ask questions that are specific to the language they teach (e.g., English as a Second Language vs. Mandarin as a Foreign Language) or specific to their context (e.g., public vs. independent schools, language institutes). While some questions require the careful consideration of a particular context or situation, there is also quite a bit of research into how languages are learned that can be generally applied to all languages and contexts. The research we draw upon in this book has mostly investigated the *general processes* of language learning, not how language is learned or taught for one language or proficiency level in particular. So, this book aims to be a resource that is not language- or context-dependent. Rather, it applies to learners of various ages, proficiency levels, and backgrounds. For topics where the research findings have uncovered differences between learners' ages, proficiency levels, or languages, we point out how best practices can be adapted based on these learner differences. And, again, we also point to areas and issues where teachers themselves are best placed to make the decisions.

As part of our background work for this book, we surveyed language teachers based on our contacts around the world from a variety of backgrounds teaching a variety of different languages. We talked with teachers and administrators in Australia, Brazil, China, Honduras, Iran, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Taiwan, the United States, and the United Kingdom, from public and private schools teaching second languages such as Arabic, English, French, Greek, Mandarin, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, and Spanish at all levels and ages. We asked them what their top questions were and what gaps they saw between language learning research and practice. What they told us formed the anonymized and de-identified vignettes we've published, which are based on the experiences of real language instructors. We limited our discussions of specific types of schools/resources because our observations suggest that regardless of how resource-scarce or -rich a given school may be, teachers tend to have the same questions about teaching.

To summarize then, we based this book on our interests and knowledge as second language acquisition researchers and as teachers and teacher-trainers, in order to bring together insights from both pedagogy (the art) and research (the science) into a book that provides helpful information about both of these areas. We hope that both novice and seasoned teachers and teacher-trainers alike will utilize it as a standalone read or a supplemental guide to a larger professional development initiative.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our appreciation to a number of people who helped make this book possible.

First, a huge thank you to our research and editorial assistants: Caitlyn Pineault, Erin Fell, Yuta Ito, Kris Cook, Lynn Nakazawa, Negar Siyari, and Alexandra Gehrke for all their help surveying teachers, and helping us with researching and editing.

Second, we are very grateful to Elizabeth Zonarich for her fabulous and fun illustrations that brought our concepts to life.

Third, this book benefited greatly from feedback from anonymous reviewers who provided valuable input at several stages of this project, as well as from the many teachers who reviewed the table of contents and key questions.

Next, and very importantly, we would also like to express our sincere gratitude to the many, many language teachers, educators, administrators, and learners whom we have worked with over the years, from whom we drew inspiration to write the book as well as to follow the style of answering key questions and providing vignettes and practical activities. Indeed, the art and science of language learning and teaching is derived from them. Finally, our publishers at Cambridge University Press have provided us with unwavering help and support with the perfect levels of patience and – when we needed it – pushes. Their belief in the book has been inspirational.

NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Because this book is meant to bridge the gap between second language acquisition (SLA) research and practice, we've also tried to incorporate the terms and framing that both researchers and teachers bring to conversations around language teaching. A number of factors lead our communities to develop differing shared "languages" to talk about language learning, and we present a short guide here not to advocate for one set of terms over another, but rather to show how teachers and researchers might be using terms differently. The table below shows how these terms relate to each other and serves as a primer for how they'll show up in the book. This is by no means an exhaustive list. We encourage readers to engage with us via the companion website with additional terms you'd like to discuss. The terms here are presented in alphabetical order by those frequently used by teachers.

Frequently used by teachers	Frequently used by researchers	Commentary
Comprehensible input (CI)	Input	<p>One of the most discussed topics in teaching circles is comprehensible input (CI), with many teachers, districts, products, trainers, etc. labeling themselves as "CI."</p> <p>SLA research has come to a consensus in recent decades that CI is one essential type of input for language learning. However, research has also found that learners should be exposed to a variety of input, including CI, but also including input that is slightly above learners' current proficiency level, as well as input that is from authentic "real-world" sources, even if it is not 100% comprehensible. We discuss the issue of authenticity as it relates to input in Chapter 18. When we refer to input in this book, we are referring to all types of input, including, but not limited to, CI.</p>
Heritage speaker	Heritage Language Learner (HLL)	In both teaching and research circles, someone's "heritage language" (HL) refers to a language an individual speaks due to family ties that is not the commonly used language in the surrounding environment.

Note on Terminology

Frequently used by teachers	Frequently used by researchers	Commentary
		Speakers of HLs can be more or less proficient, depending on how much the HL is used in their lifetime. Some HLLs have only minimal contact with their HL as children and decide to learn their HL as an adult. This is especially common with individuals for whom their HL is an indigenous language but can also occur in families where speaking the HL is associated with trauma (e.g., persecution, discrimination).
Language acquisition Language learning	Language acquisition Language learning	Both teachers and researchers alike talk about the difference between learning and acquisition. This might be one of the defining differences in the parlance of <i>language teachers</i> compared to teachers of other subjects: Language teachers are aware of the difference between the conscious processes involved in <i>learning</i> and the unconscious processes underpinning <i>acquisition</i> . An interesting development (and way in which usage differs between teachers and researchers) has been the way conscious learning has become unfashionable in some teaching circles. As we discuss in the book, learners need a judicious combination of both processes to be able to become proficient L2 users (more on this term below). In some cases, total abandonment of conscious, explicit learning instruction can even become an access issue, especially for L2 learners with learning difficulties, or older language learners (see especially Chapters 7 and 9).
Native language, Native [<i>English</i>] speaker	L1 L1 [<i>English</i>] speaker	Both language teachers and researchers alike use the term “native speaker” to refer to someone who grew up speaking a given language (referred to as the “native language”). SLA research is moving away from this “native” framing, however, and adopting “L1” in its place. Not only does L1 align nicely with its counterpart, L2, it also avoids essentializing or equating a person and a language, which is sometimes tied up in stereotyping or discrimination. This stereotyping is sometimes referred to as “native speaker ideology.” Oftentimes, though, a person does not grow up with only <i>one</i> L1. In cases where an individual has two L1s, for example, researchers will sometimes refer to their languages as language “A” and language “Alpha” or (the Greek letter “α”) or talk about a learners’ “L1s.” Referring to a bilingual’s two L1s in this way allows SLA researchers to differentiate between their L1s, but <i>both are acknowledged as being first</i> .
Shared language	Shared language	SLA research has only recently begun to mainstream the term “shared language,” thanks in large part to vocal members of the teaching and research community calling attention to the fact that not all learners in a given classroom have the same L1. Seems obvious, right? It is (or should be), but it’s important to keep in mind <i>where</i> most initial SLA research was conducted: on university campuses with individuals who could afford higher education in the 1970s and 1980s and who were overwhelmingly white L1 English speakers.

Note on Terminology

Frequently used by teachers	Frequently used by researchers	Commentary
		As a result, many of the first SLA studies and publications didn't take account of multiple L1s in a classroom (unless they looked at alternative education programs or immigrant language classes).
Target language (TL)	L2 (literally "second language," but recently understood as "additional language")	Teaching circles often use the term "target language" (TL) to describe the language being taught because that is the aim, or "target," of the course. Researchers usually use the term "second language" or "L2" instead of TL to emphasize the fact that the language being studied is being learned after their native or first language ("L1"). Researchers sometimes also study individuals learning a third, fourth, fifth, etc. language. When referring to someone's third language, a researcher would call it their "L3." If a researcher wanted to lump someone's second, third, and fourth languages together, they might refer to someone's "L2s."
World language (WL)	Foreign language (FL) Second language (usually combined with the language being studied; e.g., ESL = English as a second language)	Teaching circles have moved away from referring to the languages they teach as "foreign languages" to deemphasize framing of speakers of the languages as "others." Using the term "world language" instead centers the common humanity of all language speakers. Researchers use the terms "foreign" and "second" languages to refer to how much access learners have to the language they're studying. "Foreign" language classes are those where learners don't have much access to the language when they leave the classroom, whereas "second" language classes are those where language being taught is the commonly used language outside the classroom (consider how "English as a Second Language" is a course for children learning English in the United States).

To reiterate, in presenting the terms above and relating them to each other, we do not advocate for one term of language learning over another. Instead, we hope that by presenting them together and showing the nuances in how we use the terms in both teaching and researching circles, we can help build a greater understanding and work toward more robust collaboration between teachers and researchers. We encourage readers to share any new terminology in their communities, again reiterating that one way of talking about language learning is not inherently better than another, and it's best to always try to ensure we're able to understand each other's "language" about learning and teaching.

PRE-READING SELF-ASSESSMENT



Before beginning to work through this book, we recommend taking a few minutes to assess your own ideas, beliefs, or preconceptions in relation to some of the topics you will read about. In the self-assessment below, there are several questions that correspond with each chapter. Some of the statements are aligned with the research you will read about in the chapters that follow, and some are not. You should decide how much you agree or disagree with each statement by placing a “✓” or “✗” in the corresponding column. After you read that chapter or part, we suggest that you come back to this assessment and ask yourself the following questions: *Has my response to this statement changed or stayed the same? Why did my response change (or why not)? Were there particular aspects of the chapter or part that affected my response in relation to this topic? What does this topic mean for my/my school's/my team's teaching practices?*

Further discussion of the statements in light of the content of each chapter is available on our companion website.

Part I: Teacher and Student Talk						
Chapters 1–5						
		Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
1	Learners primarily acquire new languages through imitation.					
2	The more interaction learners experience, the better their language learning.					
3	If learners' errors are not corrected immediately, learners will internalize incorrect rules about the target language.					

Pre-Reading Self-Assessment

Part I: Teacher and Student Talk						
<i>Chapters 1–5</i>						
		Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
4	Using the first language always hinders progress in the second language.					
5	Learners pick up each other's mistakes.					
6	Learners are naturally equipped to succeed in a world language classroom.					
7	Training language learners to take responsibility for their own development is not effective.					
8	Language learners learn more by cooperating with each other in group activities than they do by themselves.					
9	Producing language helps the acquisition process.					
10	Language acquisition is better than language learning.					
11	It is important for learners of all levels and ages to have the opportunity to produce written and spoken language.					
12	Instructor–class interactions are more valuable than peer–peer interactions to the language learning process.					
13	Translation is not beneficial for language learning.					

Pre-Reading Self-Assessment

Part II: Differentiation						
<i>Chapters 6–10</i>						
		Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
1	All learners pick up languages in a similar way.					
2	Success in tasks/ activities in a language classroom looks different for every learner.					
3	Learners who score well on intelligence and aptitude tests will pick up a new language more easily.					
4	Language learners will get confused if you introduce them to different varieties of the target language.					
5	Learners with diagnosed specific learning needs/ difficulties will struggle more in language classes than their peers.					
6	Learning another language will confuse learners who have difficulties in their first language.					
7	Some languages are easier to learn than others.					
8	All languages should be taught the same way.					
9	Only high-achieving, high-performing learners should be allowed to add a language course to their schedules.					

Pre-Reading Self-Assessment

Part II: Differentiation						
<i>Chapters 6–10</i>						
		Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
11	A good language class is structured around the needs of the learners.					
12	Learners who begin their language study at an earlier age have a greater chance of success than their peers who begin at a later age.					
13	Heritage language learners have an advantage over their peers in language classrooms.					
14	When pairing learners, it is most beneficial for language learning to pair learners who are at a similar level.					
15	Teaching strategies that are beneficial for neurodivergent learners are beneficial for all learners.					
16	Language-related anxiety is detrimental to language learning.					
17	Never correct learners who are anxious.					
18	Motivation is the greatest predictor of a learner's ability to learn a new language.					
19	Learners can become better language learners over time.					

Pre-Reading Self-Assessment

Part III: Teaching the Skills						
<i>Chapters 11–15</i>						
		Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
1	TV shows, DVDs, and apps are the best way to pick up languages outside of the classroom.					
2	Explicit grammar instruction should be limited in language classrooms.					
3	Teaching pronunciation is less important than teaching the other language skills.					
4	Grammar exercises/drills are necessary for developing communicative language ability.					
5	Explicit knowledge about grammatical forms and rules is essential in learning a second language.					
6	Repeating targeted linguistic structures over and over helps learners acquire language naturally.					
7	Reading speeds up acquisition.					
8	Learners must be able to read in their first language before they can begin to learn to read in their second language.					
9	Learners must have a large vocabulary before they can begin to read or write.					

Pre-Reading Self-Assessment

Part IV: Lesson and Unit Planning						
<i>Chapters 16–21</i>						
		Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
1	It is important for learners to master simple grammatical structures before instructors introduce more complex structures.					
2	Immersion education produces second language users with native-like abilities.					
3	Explicit grammar instruction should be the focus of a language program.					
4	Tasks/activities should be adapted to suit the learners' needs.					
5	The primary role of a language instructor is to create an environment conducive to interaction in the target language.					
6	The primary focus of a language program should be learners' accuracy in the language.					
7	Language courses should be organized around progressively more difficult tasks/activities.					
8	Language is acquired best when it is used as a vehicle for doing a task/activity rather than studied in an explicit manner.					

Pre-Reading Self-Assessment

Part IV: Lesson and Unit Planning						
<i>Chapters 16–21</i>						
		Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
9	The primary role of the language instructor is teaching proper grammar and pronunciation.					
10	Language courses should be organized around progressively more difficult grammar.					
11	A good language class mainly follows the order presented in a textbook.					
12	Grammatical correctness is the most important criterion by which language performance should be judged.					
13	Comprehensible input means using vocabulary words that learners already know.					

These statements are based on Spada and Lightbown (2006), King and Mackey (2007), Ogilvie and Dunn (2010), and Bryfonski (2019).