Key Questions in Language Teaching: An Introduction
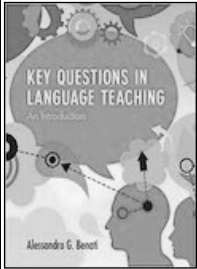
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Second language (L2) teachers incorporate various approaches in their L2 classes, reflecting changes in linguistic theory, second language acquisition research, and emerging technology. In *Key Questions in Language Teaching: An Introduction*, Alessandro G. Benati offers an overview of the most common language teaching practices, a practical guide for developing tasks for L2 classes, and an introduction to the L2 research process.

Key Questions in Language Teaching is organized into seven chapters. The first six chapters focus on what the author identifies as central topics in the field of language teaching (e.g., tasks, methodology), and each chapter title is phrased as a question (e.g., Chapter 2 "How Has Second Language Teaching Methodology Evolved over the Years?"). The last chapter provides a final evaluation and summary on the key questions raised in the previous six chapters. Each chapter begins with an "Overview" section offering a brief background and preview of the chapter's main topics, and each chapter ends with a "Recap" section summarizing the chapter contents. In addition, each chapter has a section titled "Reference and Readings" that provides suggested readings on the topics under discussion, as well as a "Discussion and Questions" section with opportunities to reflect on or apply chapter concepts as in-class activities or homework assignments. Throughout each chapter, there are multiple "Consider this …" sections, which can be useful for class discussions or for assessing content comprehension.

Chapter 1 offers a brief introduction to L2 acquisition and discusses how L2 acquisition theory impacts L2 teaching practices. Benati describes and highlights teaching implications of the following theories in L2 acquisition: Behaviorism, Universal Grammar, Monitor, Interaction, Processability, Input Processing, Skill Acquisition, Emergentism, Complexity, and Sociocultural Theories. For example, the Monitor Theory suggests that L2 acquisition, like L1

acquisition, results from exposure to comprehensible input, so Benati suggests that instructors need to create an L2 classroom environment resembling conditions in L1 learning environments, particularly with the availability of comprehensible input. The chapter also discusses the similarities and differences between L1 and L2 acquisition, the nature of language and language development, the roles of input and output, and the role of instruction.

An overview of L2 teaching methods and approaches is provided in Chapter 2. The author distinguishes between *method* (specific materials and activities) and *approach* (general theory about how language is learned). He describes eight methods and approaches: Grammar Translation Method, Direct Method, Audio-Lingual Method, Total Physical Response Method, Natural Approach, Communicative Language Teaching Approach, Content and Language Integrated Learning, and Task-Based Language Teaching. For each, the associated main principles, as well as pedagogical procedures and examples of activities, are included.

Chapter 3 focuses on the nature and role of communication and interactive tasks in L2 classes, highlighting speaking and writing skills. Benati first defines communication, communication purposes, and tasks, and then offers a variety of speaking tasks L2 teachers can employ (e.g., jigsaw, information-gap). For developing L2 writing skills, he outlines the following steps in composition activities: generating content, defining audience and purpose, planning and organizing, and composing. In addition to these steps for writing activities, the author emphasizes the usefulness of pre-writing and writing phases. He also provides examples of how teachers can easily adapt these in their courses.

In Chapter 4, the author presents a task-based approach to teaching of listening and reading comprehension. The centrality of input for the development of these skills is stressed. Listening is described as an active skill requiring both bottom-up strategies (e.g., listening for specific details, recognizing cognates, recognizing word-order patterns) and top-down strategies (e.g., listening for main ideas, predicting, drawing inferences, summarizing). Benati also distinguishes between collaborative and non-collaborative listening tasks, and provides a task-based approach to listening, which includes pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening phases. Benati's suggested approach for developing reading comprehension also involves several stages: pre-reading, reading, text-interaction, post-reading, and personalization.

Chapter 5 discusses the nature and role of grammar, vocabulary, and corrective feedback. Benati starts by offering facts about language acquisition, as well as examples of grammar-oriented pedagogical tools such as paradigms and mechanical, meaningful, and communicative drills. He argues that these traditional tools are problematic because they do not allow learners to make form-meaning connections. Instead, he advocates for using input-based approaches to grammar teaching (e.g., structured input tasks, input enhancement, input flood); he also advocates for output-based options (e.g., dictogloss, structured output tasks). While most of the chapter focuses on grammar, it also provides a brief section on vocabulary. It concludes with a section on corrective feedback and feedback techniques (e.g., recast, explicit corrective feedback, metalinguistic feedback).

The author provides an L2 research introduction, highlighting main characteristics, research designs, data collection instruments, and research procedures in Chapter 6. The chapter covers action, experimental, observation, and case study research designs. It also introduces various instruments (e.g., observation schemes, questionnaires, self-paced reading/listening, cross-modal priming, eye-tracking). The chapter guides new scholars through the research study

procedure, describing steps from developing the initial idea to analyzing and interpreting data, and writing conclusions. While this chapter is not as directly related to teaching as the previous chapters, it is a good introduction to L2 research.

Finally, Chapter 7 is an overall evaluation on the key questions raised in the titles of the previous chapters. It reviews useful knowledge of L2 acquisition for L2 teachers and evaluates teaching methods for L2 instruction of all four skills. It also summarizes what we know about the role of explicit information, grammar instruction, and error correction. The book concludes with a brief "Epilogue" summarizing the book and offering general directions for future L2 teaching and research.

Overall, *Key Questions in Language Teaching* is a brief but comprehensive introduction to L2 teaching. Chapters 3-5 are especially practical for new L2 instructors, presenting detailed instructions for developing speaking, writing, listening, and reading tasks in a various formats. These chapters could be used as a guide for developing in-class and homework activities. In addition, Chapter 5 provides useful examples of grammar tasks, vocabulary activities, and various types of corrective feedback that instructors could employ. Readers primarily interested in conducting research in L2 teaching will find Chapter 6 especially helpful, since it walks the audience through the research process in a clear step-by-step fashion.

At the same time, much of the content and examples presented are very similar to Lee and VanPatten (2003). Teachers familiar with this resource may not find Benati's description of topics and tasks as completely new. For those who have not read Lee and VanPatten (2003), the examples of these tasks and steps for designing them will be helpful. There are also a few minor issues that could be improved to make the book easier to navigate, such as providing translations for cross-linguistic examples. However, overall, Benati's text is a thorough overview of L2 teaching and research methodology and a practical guide with suggestions and examples for developing task-based L2 classes promoting L2 acquisition. The book can be a helpful reference for new and aspiring L2 teachers, as well as those who may wish to add new strategies to their pedagogical repertoire.

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Reference

Lee, J. F., & VanPatten, B. (2003). *Making communicative language teaching happen*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

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