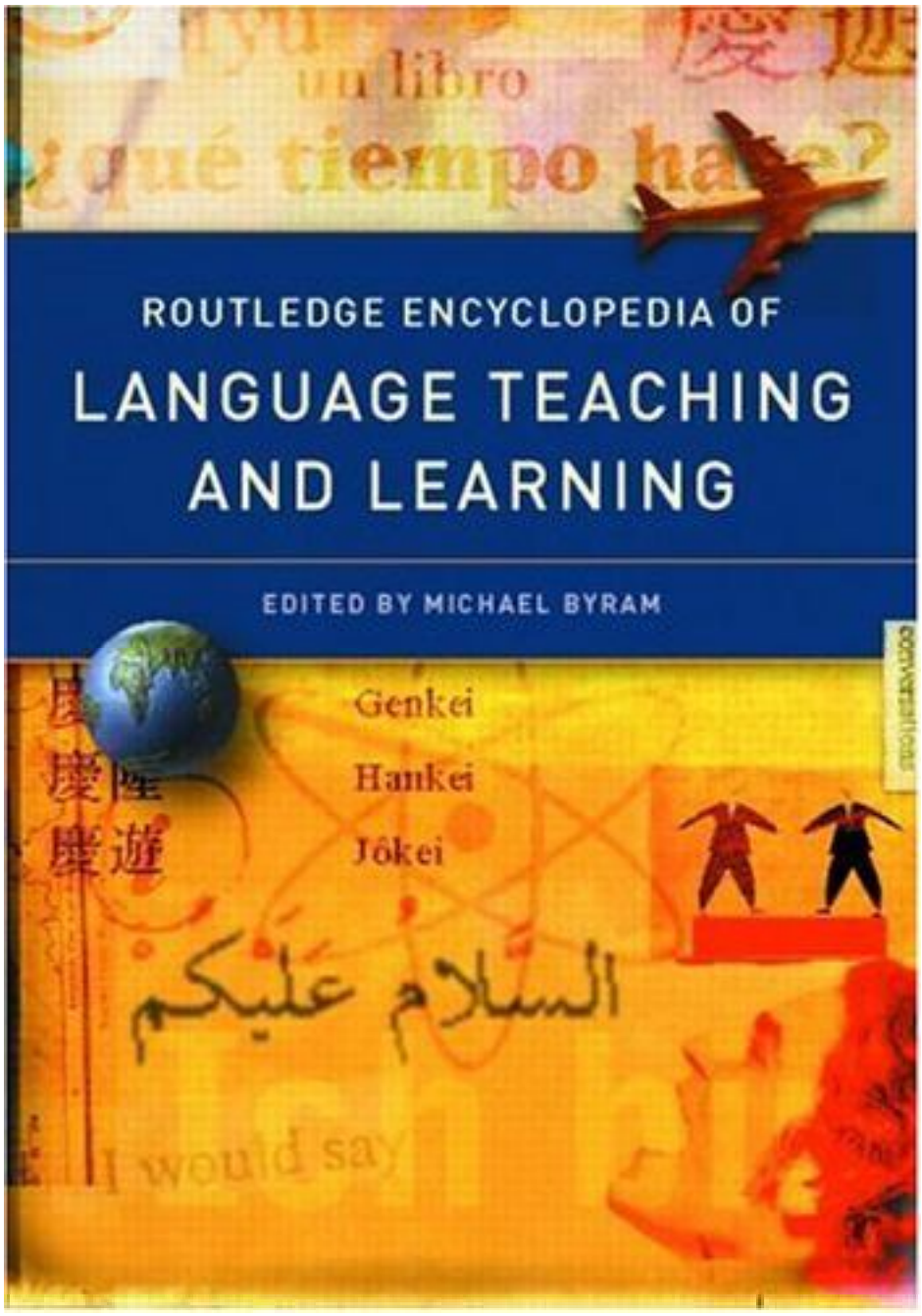
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ROUTLEDGE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
LANGUAGE TEACHING
AND LEARNING
EDITED BY MICHAEL BYRAM
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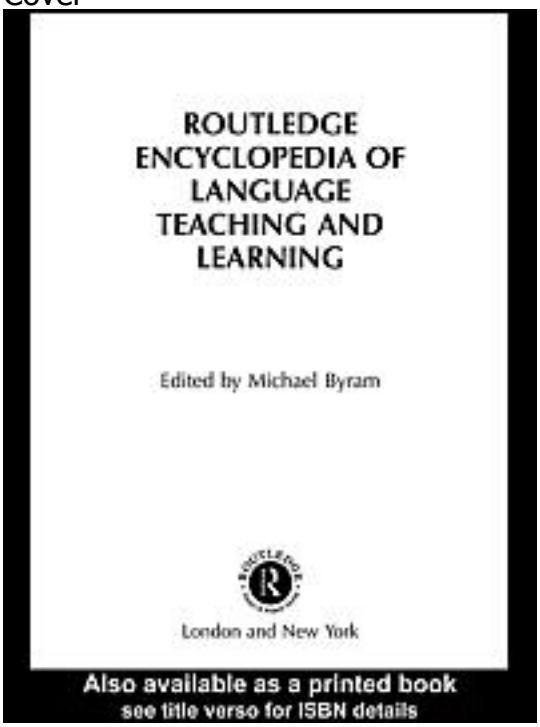

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Introduction

Purpose

At the turn of the twenty-first century, it has become a commonplace to remark how the world has become a village where people of many different places and origins encounter each other in real or virtual space, in ways which a generation ago would have seemed impossible. Encounters mean communication, and communication should lead to understanding and harmony, or at the very least a reduction of conflict. Yet communication depends above all on overcoming the barriers which languages can symbolise, especially for those who do not live in societies where a variety of languages are already part of their environment. Language learning has become a necessity for everyone, even those whose first language is English, currently a dominant *lingua franca,* but whose future is unpredictable. Perhaps ironically, this current situation means that this encyclopedia can be published in one language, English, and be accessible to the largest number of readers, although we are acutely conscious that there are still limitations.

When the language(s) that are needed are not readily available in the immediate environment, learning becomes dependent on teaching, for, despite the ease and inevitability of first language(s) acquisition in early childhood, language learning of any other kind turns out to be a complex and difficult task. It is in these circumstances that, for over a century, language teaching has increasingly become a significant profession. At the same time, the complexity of the task of language learning, and therefore of teaching, has become more and more apparent. That complexity has been met with the ingenuity of learners and teachers to devise methods, to create environments, to understand the processes, to simplify and systematise, to find appropriate institutions, all of which is multiplied by the number of traditions which have developed at different times and places more or less independently of each other.

For those who are professionally engaged in language teaching—as teachers, as teacher educators, as inspectors and evaluators, as testers and assessors, as curriculum designers and materials producers—the field has become so complex that it is difficult to know. Like other professions, they need works of reference, those which describe the languages they teach, and those which describe the discipline which they profess. The former include grammars and dictionaries but also the encyclopedias of languages and linguistics which have become commonplace.

This encyclopedia is in the latter category. It provides an authoritative account of the discipline of language teaching in all its complexity. It does so in a way which makes that account readily accessible, whether for quick reference or as a means of gaining an overview and insight in depth of a particular issue. It also enables the language teaching professional to discover the relationship of language teaching to other disciplines. It can thus provide rapid help on a particular problem or be the basis for in-depth and wide-ranging study, as one entry leads to another through the use of cross-references in the text and after each entry, and lists of further reading.

Readership

The encyclopedia has been created for the language teaching profession. Language teaching

professionals—there is unfortunately no generic term to cover the different branches—are like those in other professions which draw upon a range of academic disciplines, pure and applied. They have their own knowledge and skills, and yet they also need to be familiar with other disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, linguistics. This encyclopedia therefore presents accounts both of professional knowledge and skills, and of the supporting or source disciplines.

Because language teaching as a modern profession is relatively young, having grown very quickly and in many different places in parallel, neither an agreed body of knowledge nor a defined and fixed terminology are widely available. Readers in one country may not be familiar with the advances and terminology of another, and the use of different languages for professional purposes makes the situation even more complex. We hope that this encyclopedia will help to bridge some of these inevitable gaps. It has been deliberately produced with as wide an audience as possible in mind, accepting that this itself creates difficulties. It would have been easier to create an encyclopedia of language teaching in a specific tradition—French, Canadian, Indian, Japanese, etc.—but it is precisely one of the aims of language teaching to create the conditions for increased understanding across linguistic and cultural borders, and to produce an encyclopedia which does not attempt to do the same for the profession would be a contradiction in terms. We hope therefore that our readership will be international and will find the account of the discipline itself international. For, although Western traditions are dominant in this as in many other disciplines, compounded by the current dominance of English and English Language Teaching, authors have been deliberately sought as widely as possible, particularly from outside the ELT world, from Asia, from the whole of Europe, as well as from Britain and North America. This means that there are entries with headwords which are not English, because some terms and traditions are not translatable—as linguists are the first to recognise. It also means that the entries about individual people have been chosen to identify those who have been influential in various traditions of language teaching and learning, rather than simply being a 'hall of fame' of great language educators.

Contributors have thus been encouraged to write from their own perspective, with as little editorial direction as possible once the general parameters had been set and agreed by the editorial team. If this means that there is not complete harmony within the text as a whole, that there are different views evident in different but related entries, that is a reflection of the discipline in its international character, not an error in production. Readers will be able to pursue topics and see their significance from these different perspectives.

Contents and organisation

The main body of the encyclopedia contains entries of different lengths, from a few lines to major entries of 3,000 words. These entries are both analyses of the body of knowledge and skills of the language teaching profession, and related issues, and second, sources of information about professional matters, e.g. the meanings of acronyms, the origins and purposes of professional bodies. In the case of the former, authors provide references and suggestions for further reading. Many major entries lead on to other entries which provide further elaboration, and all entries have cross references marked within the text, and further suggested links at the end of texts. In the case of information entries, the dominant criterion has been that the item in question should be of international importance. It is not possible or helpful to include all national associations and institutions, but some exceptions have been made when they also have an international standing.

The entries are in alphabetical order in the main body of the text in order to facilitate access. There are also two other routes of access: a list of contents with all the main entries grouped by theme, and an index of key words, including those appearing either as headwords for entries or others within the texts of entries. In both cases, terminology is included which is not English for the reasons stated earlier.

There are entries on the teaching of specific languages and on the teaching of languages in specific countries. It is obviously not possible to be

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board drawing
*communicative language teaching
dictionaries
direct method
exercise types and grading
flashcard
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history: the nineteenth century

exhaustive in this any more than in other issues, and there will no doubt be readers who regret the absence of a particular language or country. The intention is as much to remind readers of the multiplicity of approaches to language teaching and learning as to portray the history of a particular language or country, and the choice was, though not arbitrary, largely a personal one. This reflects the nature of the endeavour: to include traditions other than the Anglo-American, important though this clearly is.

It is also a symptom of what an encyclopedia can be at the beginning of the twenty-first century. We have become aware that languages need to be understood in their cultural contexts, and this applies no less to teaching and learning processes. On the other hand we have also become aware that any attempt to be not only comprehensive but also exhaustive is doomed to fail. Development and change is constant and ever more rapid, and no publication, even in the new electronic media, can keep up with every change. Third, there can be no pretence that an encyclopedia is 'objective', neither in the sense of being the ultimate arbiter nor in the sense of being separated from the authorial and editorial presence of contributors and editor. The encyclopedia doubtless reflects to a large extent my own view of what is important in language teaching and learning, moderated by the advice and guidance of the editorial team. One result of this is the presence of entries on the cultural dimension of language teaching, on language education policy and on anthropology. On the other hand, I have not attempted to be comprehensive with respect to teaching methods, techniques and aids. There have been almost too many methods and certainly too many panaceas in the history of language teaching. Methods have been included which have been 'successful', in that they have become well known, but there is no attempt to provide a handbook of methods here.

There is therefore a tightrope to be negotiated stretching from 'comprehensive' to 'interpretative', and this is made all the more difficult in that the encyclopedia has to strike a balance between being an in-depth analysis of the field and a quick reference work, providing the services of a dictionary of terms. I have tended not to provide the latter, since dictionaries already exist.

A similar issue arises with respect to the multi-disciplinarity of language teaching. The sources on which language teachers draw are numerous, and the disciplines from which they come in their own education may be multifarious. Those teachers who were educated and trained specifically for the profession, acquiring knowledge of relevant disciplines as part of this, are probably still a minority. Yet it cannot be the task of an encyclopedia of language teaching and learning simultaneously to be an encyclopedia of linguistics, psychology, cultural anthropology, to mention only a few. We have tried none the less to provide those teachers unfamiliar with such disciplines with the necessary overview and further reading if they wish.

In short, there are many entries which are expected and, I hope, many which are not. I hope readers will find the encyclopedia useful, not only for quick reference but also to browse from one entry to another, via the cross-references in the text and the further references and readings at the end of each text.

How to use

The organisation of the encyclopedia thus allows for different types of use. Readers who wish to know about a particular issue may look first in the thematic list of contents for the headword they have in mind. They may also go straight to the main body of the text and find the headword in alphabetic order. If the issue is not represented as a headword, they should turn to the index.

Readers who wish to pursue a particular topic or area of interest should use the thematic list of contents. They may wish to start with one of the major overview entries or go immediately to a more specific entry. In either case they will find further cross-references to other parts of the encyclopedia and suggestions for further reading. They will also find that there is some overlap between entries. This is deliberate and allows readers to gain different perspectives on the same topic from different writers.

Endnote—on writing encyclopedias

There have appeared in recent years a number of encyclopedias on language, linguistics, educational

linguistics and now on language teaching and learning. This is probably an indication that, after a century of teaching 'modern' languages, following the Reform Movement, we have reached a point where a degree of certainty exists about what is worth knowing about languages and language teaching and learning. The coincidence of the term 'modern' foreign languages—avoided in French *langues vivantes* and German *Fremdsprachen*—with 'modernism' is not entirely by chance, of course. On the other hand, we do not yet speak of 'post-modern' language teaching, despite the widespread critique of modernism.

None the less, it might appear as though we are out of step with the times to be offering an encyclopedia in a post-modern period, and it is important to acknowledge that what is contained in these pages is the state of an art which is constantly changing. On the one hand we must be aware of Umberto Eco's reminder that 'After all, the cultivated person's first duty is to be always prepared to re-write the encyclopedia' (*Serendipities. Language and Lunacy,* 1999:21), and encyclopedia writing is never complete. On the other hand, as pedagogues know, there has to be laid down a foundation of knowledge, even if it is later to be challenged. This encyclopedia offers a contribution to that foundation for teachers and learners alike.

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That was one time of absence and there were many more, when I was isolated at my desk. My wife, Marie Thérèse, and my children, Alice and Ian, have always been long-suffering and indulgent towards my belief that being an academic is not a job but just a way of life. This encyclopedia is dedicated to them.

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Michael Byram
Cossé en Champagne
December 1999

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