

ELT QUIZ

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The debate regarding 'traditional' and 'modern' (or 'old' and 'new') ideas and practices in ELT seems to be an ongoing one. Whatever your orientation, here is a challenge:

Can you date the following views on ELT?

You don't have to give the exact dates; an approximation will be enough (e.g. the right decade or so).

Extract 1. Methods

"... but none of these methods retain their popularity long - the interest in them soon dies out. There is a constant succession of them ... They have all failed to keep a permanent hold of the public mind because they have all failed to perform what they promised: after promising impossibilities they have all turned out to be on the whole no better than the older methods. The methods I have just mentioned are failures because they are based on an insufficient knowledge of the science of language, and because they are one-sided. ... A good method must, before all, be comprehensive and eclectic. It must be based on a thorough knowledge of the science of language ... In utilizing this knowledge it must be constantly guided by the psychological laws on which memory and the association of ideas depend."

Extract 2. Grammar

"When it comes to foreign language teaching, the generally accepted view is that the same mistaken approach based on the written language, the same kind of school grammars, will be able to work miracles and teach a new language. They never have, and they never will. And even if you actually succeeded in stuffing the pupils' heads with the best grammars ... they still would not know the language! ... Language, moreover, is formed and moulded by the unconscious action of the community as a whole, and like the life of the community is in a constant state of change and development. Consequently, we cannot compress the grammar of a language into a series of rigid rules, which, once laid down by the grammarians, are as unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians. On the contrary, grammar is what the community makes it; what was in vogue yesterday is forgotten today, what is right today will be wrong tomorrow. ... Even if we further know all the rules of the grammarians, we shall find ourselves unable in actual practice to get very far in stringing our words together or in understanding what is said to us in return."

Extract 3. The role of learners

"Every individual [has an] ability to instruct himself. The function of a teacher [is] to respond to the learner, not to direct and control him by explaining things in advance. ... Students should look for similarities and differences, generalize their observations, form and test hypotheses, and discover how the language work[s]."

See next page for the answers

KEY

Extract 1

1899

From: Sweet, H. (1899; reprinted 1964). *The Practical Study of Language*. Oxford University Press.

Extract 2

1886

From: Wilhelm Viëtor (1886) 'Der Sprachunterricht muss umkehren' ('Language teaching must start afresh').

Translation printed in: Howatt, A.P.R. 1984. *A History of Language Teaching*. Oxford University Press. Translated by A.P.R. Howatt & David Abercrombie, with Beat Buchmann, p.p. 340-363 (excerpt from p. 347).

Extract 3

1815-1830

Excerpts from the discussion of the method developed by J. J. Jacotot between 1815-1830.

Reprinted in: Howatt, A.P.R. 1984. *A History of Language Teaching*. Oxford University Press. (pp. 150-152).