



# Language learning

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# Today: Approaches and methods in language learning and teaching



# "Army method" (FSI) and "Pimsleur" compared

Common features:

- based on audio material; focus on spoken language
- skills: listening and speaking
- starts with examples, explanations later
- focus on the target language

Differences:

- FSI: from bits to larger units, Pimsleur: first presenting the whole dialog
- FSI: step-by-step, progress controlled

aural learners

inductive learning

particular; synthesizing

global; analytic


concrete-sequential

What kind of **learning styles** can you associate with these features?  
Strategies? Motivation?

## Another similar method: Assimil

*ASSIMIL Polski bez trudu.*

(author Barbara Kuzmider; German version by Brigitte Nenzel)

- Listen to the first lesson. 
- What characterizes the method?
- How does it differ from the Army method and/or Pimsleur?

For comparison: Pimsleur Japanese



# Some features that distinguish ASSIMIL from Pimsleur

- all audio material is in the target language; metalanguage (here: German) used in the textbook, but minimally;
- vocabulary: many internationalisms (*profesor, telefon, egzamin*) => "**comprehensible input**" (also with respect to grammar)
- dialogs are interesting, funny => **motivation**; each book has different dialogues with culture specific details in later lessons
- focusses first on listening, while Pimsleur focuses on listening and speaking

## Common features:

- short lessons
- rigid structure for all lessons, starts with full dialogue (global, inductive); Assimil: dialog – phrases – guided translation into Polish

# Approaches and methods

”**Approach** refers to theories about the nature of language and language learning that serve as the source of practices and principles in language teaching.”

*(Richards and Rodgers 2001, cited after Scott Thornbury at <http://scottthornbury.wordpress.com/2012/01/22/a-is-for-approach/>)*

«A **method** is a teaching-learning model that emphasizes a core concept as the key solution to successful language learning.

It can be viewed on **three levels**:

- **normal level**: *a specific method as a descriptive framework with its own name, such as Suggestopedia, Community Language Learning or Total Physical Response, [ASSIMIL, Pimsleur, Army method]*
- **smaller level**: *a specific textbook of such a method, which is more concrete as application, but may deviate more or less from the method it claims to follow;»*

(Decoo 2001)

## «Method» used in the meaning of «approach»

- avoid this use!

- *«broader level: a grouping of specific methods that have a common emphasis or core idea [...]. The so-called communicative approach of the past 25 years is also a conglomerate of various specific methods. In that sense the word "approach" is better suited as it suggests a broader front in which specific methods can exist. Sometimes the term "methodology" is suggested as a grouping of similar methods.»*

(Decoo 2001)



# Three main **approaches** to language learning and teaching in the 20th century

- Formal approach
- Direct (or: Natural) approach
- Communicative approach

As different approaches, they differ in their «theories about the nature of language and language learning».

# The direct (or "natural") approach

## History: the 19th century

### **Germany and France:**

Gottlieb (Theophilus) Heness (1866 *Leitfaden für den Unterricht der Deutschen Sprache*)

Claude Marcel (1867 *L'art de penser dans une langue étrangère*)

François Gouin (1880 *Exposé d'une nouvelle méthode linguistique*)

Wilhelm Viëtor (1882 *Der Sprachunterricht muss umkehren!*)

### **USA:**

Maximilian Berlitz (1878 Berlitz Schools founded)

Example of an  
old and still  
quite  
successful  
method within  
the natural  
approach

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# Later methods within the direct/natural approach

- USA (1940s) "Army method"; audio-lingual method
- France: Direct method; audio-visual methods
- France: Assimil (teach-yourself-books)
- USA: Natural method based on Krashen's model
- (USA: Pimsleur – not entirely within this approach)
- ...

# The direct (natural) approach: **assumptions**

- first and second language acquisition use the same mechanism; teaching has to **imitate natural language acquisition** ("learn like a child!");
- the **goal** of language learning = understanding and speaking a language (like a native speaker); focus on spoken language
- **no metalinguistic knowledge** is needed («grammar taught without rules»); mastering a language is achieved **directly** through practice and imitation;
- **imitation** (of a competent speaker) is the essential process in language learning.

# The opposite: the **formal approach** (Grammar-translation method)

## Basic assumptions

- Language learning = learning a linguistic **system**. Knowing a language = knowing vocabulary and grammar
- goal of language learning: being able to **translate** (especially written texts)
- **metalinguistic knowledge** is essential (you have to know the **rules** in order to understand and use the language)
- second language **learning** is different from first language acquisition

## Example of a textbook using the **grammar-translation method** within the formal approach

Trevor G. Fennell & Henry Gelsen. 1980.

**A Grammar of Modern Latvian**  
(see PDF)

What characterizes the method of this book?

How do you evaluate it?

## Fennell & Gelsen “A Grammar of Modern Latvian”

- a lot of explanations in English (**metalanguage**)
- first explanations, then examples and practice (= **deductive**)
- only way of practice is **translation**
- everything through **written** language
- there are only single sentences, no texts, no thematic coherence
- the starting point for the organization of the course is the **language system**



# Read or hear more about methods

- Wilfried Decoo. 2001. On the mortality of language learning methods. (online)
- <http://www.languageteachingideas.com/page5.htm>
- Wikipedia entry "Language pedagogy" (uses a bit different classification) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language\\_pedagogy](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_pedagogy) and entries about individual methods
- Scott Thornbury's website (M is for method") <http://scottthornbury.wordpress.com/>
- Diane Larsen-Freeman on Techniques & Principles in Language Teaching (5 minutes): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cNSmrbkYKx8>
- Three language teaching methods demonstrated by SUPSI (10 minutes) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sMZrN5TKSHM>
- Or just browse YouTube for «language learning methods»