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## The Differences between Language Teaching and Language Coaching

Rachel Marie Paling

### Abstract

Over the last few years a new trend seems to be developing: language coaching and teachers/trainers calling themselves “language coach”. This article seeks to comprehend what language coaching is and suggests how it should be understood and classified in today’s educational panorama.

Firstly the article will explore the individual definitions behind “teach”, “train” and “coach”. Then it will look at language teaching and training, with a brief look at key points in the history of English Language Teaching. Then the question of language coaching will be addressed to understand what this really is, leading into a next step of examining the differences between language training/teaching and language coaching. Finally the article will suggest how language coaching should now be classified and how certification and accreditation becomes ever more important to recognize which training and skills people actually have. 139 words

**Key words:** Language Coaching, Neurolanguage coaching, Neuroscience of learning

### The Differences between Language Teaching and Language Coaching

It is interesting to start by checking the classical dictionary definitions for the verbs “train”, “teach” and “coach”. According to Oxford Dictionaries online these are the definitions:

#### TEACH:–

- impart knowledge to or instruct (someone) as to how to do something:
- give information about or instruction in (a subject or skill):
- work as a teacher:
- cause (someone) to learn or understand something by example or experience:

#### TRAIN:–

- teach (a person or animal) a particular skill or type of behavior

through sustained practice and instruction:

- be taught through sustained practice and instruction:

#### COACH:–

- train or instruct (a team or player):
- give (someone) extra or private teaching:
- teach (a subject or sport) as a coach:
- prompt or urge (someone) with instructions:

As can be seen by the definitions of teach, train and coach, there is a great deal of overlap from one to the other creating confusion in the practical usage of such terms. However, from such definitions it could be concluded that teaching is the imparting of knowledge, that is to say, the transfer of knowledge from the person who knows the topic (teacher) to the learner,

whereas training is a type of teaching which incorporates sustained practice and instruction. Coaching seems to incorporate both training and teaching, but with the added sensation of extra, focused or specialized teaching, maybe one could even say with a more personalized aspect.

Could it be that teaching is the fundamental element underlying both coaching and training and whereas training is based on sustained practice, coaching is much more individualized, humanized and focused?

### **A brief look at important key developments in the history of English Language Teaching**

Here is a brief synopsis of key developments in the history of English Language teaching to give a backdrop to the topics of language teaching and language coaching. For a deeper history of English Language Teaching, please refer to "A History of English Language Teaching" second edition by APR Howatt with HG Widdowson, Oxford Univ. Press 2004.

In the last century language teaching began to emerge as a discipline and profession. The concept of "methods" of language teaching greatly facilitated this trend. In the issue paper dated September 2001 entitled **Language Teaching Methodology**, Theodore S. Rodgers and Professor Emeritus from the University of Hawaii noted that "The method concept in language teaching—the notion of a systematic set of teaching practices based on a particular theory of language and language learning—is a powerful one, and the quest for better methods was a preoccupation of teachers and applied

linguists throughout the 20th century." They then describe "methods are held to be fixed teaching systems with prescribed techniques and practices, whereas approaches represent language teaching philosophies that can be interpreted and applied in a variety of different ways in the classroom."

In 1946 the British Council decided to sponsor a journal called "English Language Teaching" (ELT) and seemingly this in effect gave the name and acronym to this profession and in this way teacher training and development also began. In 1948 a Chair at the Institute of Education at London University was created and this in turn led to ELT qualifications.

From the 1950s to now, many different methods and approaches have been developed. In 1960 in the UK a formal self-regulatory body was created called the Association of Recognized English Language Schools (ARELS) and later in 1967 a professional association was formed called the ATEFL, which in 1971 was internationalized into the IATEFL. In the US the professional association called TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) was established in 1966.

During the 1960s and 1970s both ELT and applied linguistics flourished. In the 1960s the concept of language in situations was quite influential, whereby language was taught through a situational approach (A.S. Hornby). This was a way of teaching through classroom actions. Other methods also continued developing such as the Natural method and the Direct method followed by Sauveur and Berlitz. However in the 1970s a new approach developed called the "communicative approach"

(Communicative Language Teaching – CLT), which was based upon the notion that language teaching should consider more the way language worked in the real world. This approach was very much directed at adult learners, whereby the content of courses had to have relevance for the individual learner. This in turn provided the necessary shift from general purpose learners to specific needs learning and in 1970 the first seeds of English for Special Purposes (ESP) began to sprout. The demand for ESP soon grew and ESP then branched out into English for Academic purposes (EAP) and Occupational Purposes (EOP), Science and Technology (EST) etc etc. Throughout the 1970s both ELT and ESP continued to develop and in the late 70s the British Council developed the Council's English Language Testing Service (ELTS) which was a new test based on ESP principles. However there was growing concern at the end of the 70s that ELT was "remote from the human concerns of teachers as well as learners". (A History of English Language Teaching - second edition by APR Howatt with HG Widdowson, Oxford University Press 2004 p255). Between 1976 and 1990 Earl W. Stevick published articles and books which seemingly reintroduced approaches that brought back "humanistic methods" into language teaching.

Another way that ELT has developed over recent years is towards a more reduced language that then fulfills the needs and immediate use of the language by the learner. However the greatest impact on ELT has come from the technical use of computers and of English as the main language of computers across the world.

Globalization and computerization have and are greatly influencing ELT and there is more and more a tacit agreement that English is becoming the international language on a global scale. "This clearly has implications for how we design our pedagogy for the teaching of the language, including what course objectives we set for our students to achieve." (A History of English Language Teaching - second edition by APR Howatt with HG Widdowson, Oxford University Press 2004 p362).

### **Teaching and Language Coaching in the broadest sense**

If we now look at the broader picture behind teaching we have a teacher transmitting language knowledge, fully portrayed as the active player who is responsible for all the transmission and then the learner receiving this knowledge, portrayed as the passive player when listening and taking in all the information, becoming active when he/she speaks or writes. In this respect, the teacher is the key, the central focus and the controller. Through directional and instructive means, he/she guides the learner through the learning material. This is sometimes hampered by the fact that even though the teacher transfers his/her knowledge, the learner knows the language but is unable to actually put it into practical use, so the gap from passive intake of the knowledge to the actual active usage may often be extremely wide.

Normally the teaching process revolves around particular books or a certain set of materials, which are followed in a strict order of building block process; the style is, as already mentioned directive,

demonstrative, instructive and often mandatory. It can also involve quite a formal or formalized approach, where the relationship between teacher and learner can be distant and impersonal, with the teacher portraying the superior status and may totally ignore the socio-cultural character of the learner; therefore the learner may sometimes find it hard to relate to the learning. Finally the question of cost-effectiveness is often never raised.

Having explored language teaching, it is now a question of asking what language coaching is. Firstly, looking at “coaching”, we see a phenomenal development of this profession over the last ten years, progressing from the sports arena into the business arena of corporates and enterprises. In this day and age we can find coaching for almost anything ranging from “life coaching” to “business coaching” even to “health coaching”. The attempts of non-profit federations and organizations, (like the International Coaching Federation) to bring professional standards and ethics into this growing business area are justified in the fact that clients and customers need to know that the people who declare themselves to be a “coach” are in fact developed, trained and certified by recognized training organizations.

So why should this be any different for the world of language?

Perhaps the real problem at present is the lack of understanding and the confusion about what language coaching really is. Certainly language coaching must start from the basis of a sound transmission of language knowledge, thus the person imparting the knowledge should have a background in the grammatical, theoretical

side of the target language to be learnt. However then in addition, the traditional principles of “coaching” are incorporated into the knowledge transfer process. So, in theory, language coaching in the broad sense, is a blend of language teaching/training background together with principles and ethics of “traditional coaching practices”.

Then, what are the traditional principles of coaching that pervade the language transmission process? Firstly the goal setting process is key: the ability of the coach and coachee to set goals and targets which are then worked on over a set period of time, in which the coachee commits him/herself to reach those goals. A language coach must have the experience of going through a goal setting process with the coachee to fully comprehend what it is the coachee wants and/or rather needs to learn and in what time period. After the goals are set, both coach and coachee go through the necessary strategies and actions which will facilitate the coachee to best achieve these desired and set goals.

The art of having coaching style conversations is also a requirement and art belonging to “coaching” as well as the understanding regarding the motivation and commitment of the coachee. Coaching sessions are then structured towards the accomplishment of the goals and when the time period matures, the coach and coachee then check in together to see whether the goals really have been achieved; if not, what would be needed for the full accomplishment of the existing goals is further explored, but if so, then a new set of goals are then established.

Coaching acronyms and models are sometimes used at various stages of the coaching process, either to bring awareness to the coachee or to bring emotional recognition or insights. Also the coaching contract itself, ethical guidelines such as confidentiality and coaching principles such as those laid down by the International Coaching Federation in the USA like “trust and intimacy” or “coaching presence” all become integral parts to “Language coaching” in its broadest sense.

Let us now look at “language coaching” with regard to its inherent characteristics. The coaching style already signifies a more active role for the coachee and more active learning. The empathy of the coach towards the coachee is essential, as well as the ability of the coach to adapt to the coachee and the coachee’s way of learning, tailor-making and suiting everything to the coachee. Continuous feedback and acknowledgement create an excellent learning environment and keeping the coachee motivated and committed also falls on the coach. Normally no books are needed and information is transmitted via free and open coaching conversations, which are stimulative and arouse reflexion. Sometimes specific material can be selected carefully and used by the coach to focus on the goals to be achieved. The coach and coachee both have equal status, but in this case the coachee really assumes ownership of his/her learning and the learning process, as well as taking the responsibility to learn. Finally often cost-effectiveness is essential in language coaching as goals have to be achieved within a particular timeframe and this then

gives a real cost awareness to the entire learning process.

### **The differences between language teaching and language coaching**

Having exposed the elements of both language teaching and language coaching, we can now clearly see the differences when juxtaposed.

Whereas language teaching classically places the learner in a passive role, in language coaching the learner becomes much more active and takes much more responsibility for his/her own learning process. The notion of “ownership” becomes key; and the learner then finds him/herself empowered as his/her owner of the process. This creates much more motivation and commitment to the whole process, as in the end it means the learner takes responsibility for the learning and the learning process.

Whereas language teaching is much more directional, instructive and mandatory, language coaching assumes a more flexible, adaptable process, which is absolutely non-directive, but flows more through equal status conversations and dialogues, allowing the coachee to assimilate and then put the knowledge into practical use immediately.

Language Teaching traditionally is book related, however language coaching veers more to the free style of no books and no order of book topics, but more suited to the requirements of the coachee and the best possible way for the coachee to learn such requirements quickly and easily through whatever conversations/ actions are best suited to that coachee. It may be that some specific material can be utilized or parts of

a book may be referred to, for consolidation or demonstration; this again depends on the specific needs and preference of the coachee or coach to enable the established goals to be reached.

The teacher is very much in the role of expert within the language teaching process, often denoting a superior status, whereas the language coach acts as an absolute equal, who is also fully aware of limitations and is not afraid to voice these if necessary. The language coach in addition is conscious of ethics and confidentiality and creates a trustful environment for the coachee to be able to approach sensitive topics and areas with the knowledge that all information remains within the session. This is extremely important for corporate clients and professionals, who are maybe taking language coaching sessions to improve their professional vocabulary and language in practice.

Language Coaching also creates the environment for an experiential, realistic and personalized approach whereas teaching often does not take into account the social context or cultural aspects of the coachee or how the coachee potentially interacts in these socio-cultural contexts. As already mentioned language coaching is geared towards tailor-making and adapting to the coachee him/herself and definitely veers towards a much more individualized and personalized process.

Finally language coaching also brings a code of ethics and principles which are well suited to the corporate and business world, bringing trust, intimacy and confidentiality into sessions.

### **“Neurolanguage Coaching” - Language Coaching through neuroscience**

The new method/approach of “Neurolanguage coaching” has been introduced by Rachel Marie Paling, the writer of this article. This is a hybrid of both method and approach, whereby it not only encompasses the traditional principles of coaching within the language knowledge transmission process, but it also incorporates aspects of neuroscience and the ideal learning state according to neuroscience, in which this ideal learning state of the brain is explored through knowledge of the limbic system and how the brain works. By fully understanding and acknowledging that no two brains are alike, the language coach then is able to adapt to the individual coachee in front of him/her and is able to recognize how that coachee can relate to, learn and commit to long term memory the information that the language coach is transmitting. Perhaps this is the first time in the pedagogy of language that the learning process really focuses on the individual learner’s capacity for learning, recognizing that all brains are different and the neuroscientific principles underlying this process. As well as the new approach of coaching principles incorporated into the learning process, there are a set of systematic brain based materials which can be used as a method of step by step learning. Evidently the whole process can also be enhanced with the combination and addition of all existing language teaching methods and approaches.

Neurolanguage coaching also explores parts of the language learning process by systematically grouping and chunking

material in a brain friendly way, which provides for a more efficient and effective learning process with sustainable effects and this in turn becomes more cost-efficient.

Neurolanguage coaching has nothing to do with psychotherapy, neurolinguistic programming or any other psychological process. Underlying neurolanguage coaching has to be and is the transmission of language knowledge – “the teaching process” which is reinforced, focused, invigorated and personalized through the coaching aspects, then fortified and consolidated with the neuroscientific aspects.

### **Classification and certification of Language Coaching**

Interestingly, the market seems to be developing in such a way that now many language teachers/trainers are calling themselves “language coaches” without having any formal coaching qualifications” or coaching training.

This raises the question of whether clients/companies can then really tell the difference between a person who really does possess coaching qualifications and training which then he/she incorporates into the language learning process or not.

This is one of the main reasons and the rationale behind the creation of the language coaching certification.

In this regard the title of “language coach” can then be seen as an additional step for a language teacher or trainer, as there are additionally learnt coaching skills which then enhance the language learning process. This distinction in turn then gives more clarity to the meaning and significance of being a language coach and distances itself from the, for example, sports usage of the word “coach”. Ironically in the sports world, sport coaches aspire to their next step up which is to be a qualified sports “teacher”, whereas in the field of language, the progression goes the opposite way from “teacher” to “coach”.

Certainly language coaching is bringing a new dynamic into the field of language teaching. We are at the birth of this dynamic and hopefully this article brings clarity and delineation to language coaching, Neurolanguage coaching and being a language coach. As the world becomes smaller and as we globalize faster, we need different dynamics to enable us all to learn languages faster and to normalize speaking foreign language into being a way of life for all.

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