

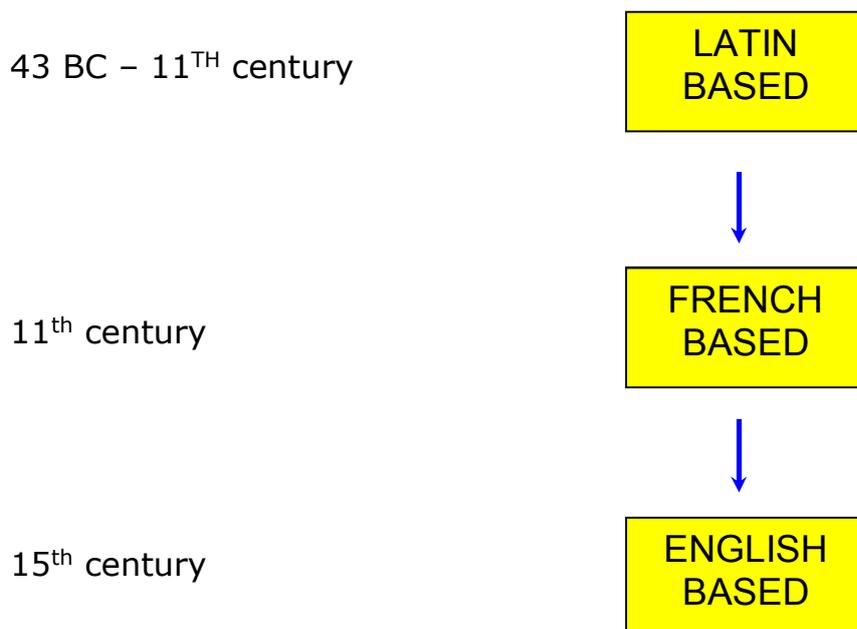
History of Language Teaching

While language learning is just about as old as humanity, the idea of modern language teaching has its roots in the study and learning of Latin.

For centuries this was the language of commerce, politics, religion and education across Europe – even when there were indigenous languages, such as Anglo-Saxon or Frankish, which were spoken by the rural population. In England, the reliance on Latin began to change in the eleventh century, as French became the language of power, and then again in the fifteenth century as English began to re-emerge as the nation's national language. Similar changes occurred around Europe at similar periods, though not all had an equivalent of England's fifteenth century move to a 'third' language.

This led to the need for influential people to learn English for specialised purposes – such as business and travel. Initially it would only have been as a spoken language, but with the development of the printing press from the mid-fifteenth century, the need for reading began to come into play. In a way, the development of modern language learning has mirrored the development of the teaching of English.

Modern Language Learning Route Map



Very little changed over the next four hundred years. Modern languages were taught in the same way as Latin was taught – through what is now referred to as the grammar-translation method – often to a largely adult clientele. There is more on the grammar-translation method on the next page. Even when children were taught a language other than Latin in school – something that didn't become common until the eighteenth century – they were still taught in the same abstract, grammar-based manner they were taught Latin.

Now let's have a look at some of the different methods you would have used if you had been teaching English at different stages over the past hundred years or so.

Grammar/Translation Method

This approach views language as a system of structurally related elements with which to code meaning and doesn't require a huge amount of active engagement with the language itself.

As a student of the Grammar Translation Method, you would be required to translate whole texts word for word, as well as memorise all the relevant grammatical rules and exceptions, along with long lists of vocabulary. To get a feel of what this might be like, think of anyone you know who, having studied a language at school, knows a lot about the **structure** of that language but can't be said to *know* the language.



It was only as Britain developed and grew in international influence from the end of the seventeenth century, and the importance of English began to develop, that the scene in Britain began to change. The method of teaching didn't change much, but the recipients changed. Whilst the student body remained predominantly English, they were an increasing number of economic and religious refugees from Europe into Britain, such as the Huguenots from France and the Flemish from the Low Countries. These groups were driven out by religious persecution (more on this here: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huguenot>) and added to the growth of demand for learning the new 'English'.

However, with the growth of the British Empire, so it became necessary to teach English to the indigenous workforce in colonies such as India and Africa. Suddenly the demand for English teachers began to grow....

Direct or 'Natural' Method

The first real attempt to teach differently was the 'direct' or *natural* method, which effectively bans the use of the learner's mother tongue and uses the target language for all elements of teaching. This was based on work by Maximilian Berlitz (founder of the well-known Berlitz Language Schools) and Elime de Sauzé.

This was a radical shift away from what had gone before and quickly became popular.

The Berlitz Method sought to present language in context of real-life situations, rather than the abstract grammar based language learning approach, with extra targeted practice of grammar and vocabulary. You still see Berlitz schools of English all over the world and the teachers in these schools will use a derivative of this method we have outlined above.

The Functional Approach

With the development of this new thinking, so the approach to language learning had to develop, leading to the **functional** view that sees language as a means of expressing or achieving a particular function of communication....