

through senses
 and imagination.
 Smell is outside learning.
 Child drops the sound
 of real
 his words
 and haunts books
 of others'
 written words.
 No more does he listen to subtle
 whisperings
 outside
 but only the authoritarian
 which he repeats
 back.
 Adapting,
 he never realizes.

Laurence Foss
 Behavioral Systems, Assoc.
 Southfield, Michigan

Foreign Language Teaching at the University Level

For more than a decade the teaching of foreign languages has been oriented toward the audio - lingual method. At the elementary and junior high school levels, this approach has produced results, especially if sufficient time was assigned to practise transformational skills. At some colleges and universities this method has frequently failed to achieve the desired objectives, because of the limited hours of instruction, the somewhat tiresome and repetitive nature of the exercises, and the inability of an adult "to learn as a child does," however much he may wish to do so.¹ There should be a meaningful relationship between the objectives and the methodology of foreign language instruction. The audio - lingual method did not always attain the objectives of foreign language teaching at particular universities. In addition, the objectives may differ for various age levels or even for individual students. Some students study a language for extrinsic reasons; they may consider the target language as a useful tool in their occupational advancement. Others have intrinsic reasons; they appreciate other cultures and would like to prepare them-

¹William Moulton, *A Linguistic Guide to Language Learning* (New York, 1966), p. 3.

selves for travel abroad. While the first student has limited goals that might be satisfied with a basic speaking vocabulary and a more extensive reading ability, the second student may wish to understand, speak, read and write the target language fluently.

Whatever their reasons and motives to study a foreign language, both students are likely to sense the complexity of the task at hand after a few sessions of instruction. What is worse, an acute awareness of frustration and dissatisfaction may soon become apparent. Very often the distinct skills of hearing, speaking, reading and writing are introduced simultaneously and with equal intensity. The student may be unable to master all of them immediately, even at a very elementary level.

The learning situation may become even more critical, if the teacher has unrealistic and all-inclusive objectives. This subsequently leads to disappointing experiences with his class. He may, for example, view his students as a group of aspiring linguists and assume they would like nothing better than to become specialists like himself. He may not recognize that some cannot attain his desired level of perfection. One can anticipate the outcome: disappointment on both sides.

The problem of teaching towards the students' needs and objectives is accentuated by limited enrolments and conflicts in the timetable, which do not permit streaming. Consequently, most students of a foreign language are instructed at the level of the highest common denominator. They tend to be regarded as foreign language majors while in reality only a minority have this ambition. True, those who wish to specialize in this field should receive the most complete linguistic preparation before they advance to senior courses in the foreign language. This, however, cannot be achieved at once, but rather in ascending levels of language learning.

At this point it might be advisable to restate some objectives as they are related to the linguistic skills that have to be mastered: aural receptivity and oral fluency with a limited vocabulary and a knowledge of simple grammatical structures; reading capacity with a wider range of vocabulary and grammatical structures; facility in writing with a limited vocabulary and simple grammatical structures; finally complete mastery of all skills in understanding, speaking, reading and writing to a high degree of competence. The first objective, oral-aural fluency with a limited vocabulary and limited structural patterns, is usually the aim of second language instruction in the junior high school or the elementary school. Here fluency refers to the level of a 5 to 8 year old native speaker. Oral fluency with a limited vocabulary may also be the objective for such language institutes as the Berlitz School. In this example, the limitations may relate to fluency in restricted segments of the second language. The student may be able to make his hotel reservations, but may not be able to carry on a conversation on an intellectual level. The second objective, reading fluency, is the objective for streamed, special

interest courses, such as "Scientific German," as they are taught in universities. The limitations of these courses may lie in the neglect of the oral language and the tendency to translate too much from the target language to the native language. The third objective, fluency in writing and in translation, is the usual purpose of the traditional Grammar-Translation method of foreign language teaching. It is still prevalent, in a somewhat modified form, in most schools, colleges and universities. The significant drawback lies in the extensive use of the native language. Only one-half of the already limited time is spent on the target language. The final objective, the complete mastery of the foreign language, is probably the ultimate aim of all foreign language instruction. This is often combined with eclectic practices. Each of the four objectives relates to a specific methodology of teaching. The oral orientation, or audiolingual method, stresses behavioristic conditioning through repetition and subsequent transfer. After many correct repetitions of established patterns, the student applies his skills to similar situations. This method aims to imitate the learning processes of a child. Hearing comes first, speaking follows, while the printed word is shunned for an extended period of time. The language laboratory is an asset in the process of establishing conditioned responses to given stimuli. At times, the audio-lingual method is modified to include visual materials which provide a situational setting, so that learning takes place in an audio-visual context. Both, the audio-lingual and the audio-visual method require carefully structured class-room routines, good attendance and technical perfection. The limitations of this method become apparent as soon as the learner moves from the pictorially represented to a more abstract linguistic situation.

The methodology to attain reading fluency is oriented toward recognition. It relies heavily on translations from the target language to the native tongue. It produces results very quickly and gives almost immediate "rewards" to the student. There is, however, the danger that it may deteriorate into a game of solving puzzles.

The traditional Grammar-Translation method of foreign language instruction stresses translations from the native language to the target language. The translations are oriented towards grammatical problems and only seldom towards a communicative frame of reference. This fragmentary approach may deteriorate into grammatical calisthenics.

If the various methods are related to the college and university students, the following observations become apparent: The audio-lingual and audio-visual methods tend to be more suitable for younger pupils. Students of college age are no longer in the mainstream of rote learning, mere memorization of lists of vocabulary and paradigms. Whenever rote memorization constitutes the core of foreign language learning, the approach will be in distinct contrast to other university courses which train students to gain insight into complex relationships. Thus, the

foreign language instruction at a university is often a methodologically regressive step to the high school situation. The audio-lingual method is in distinct contrast to the "black letter" world of other university courses. The Grammar-Translation method, on the other hand, is frequently too rule-oriented and often neglects the target language as a means of communication.

Additional restrictions are imposed on foreign language courses at the university by the limited number of contact hours, which makes it impossible to offer a total language environment. Research suggests that six hundred hours of class-room activity are required to achieve functional mastery of French, German, Italian or Spanish. Russian requires eleven hundred hours.² Many universities are able to offer only three hundred hours of class-room activities in two academic years, that is to say, only one-half of the required number of hours. In view of these figures it is apparent for obvious reasons, why foreign language teaching at universities is not very successful. It is indeed a marvel that some exceptional students do succeed in spite of such adverse conditions. If the university instructor realizes the restrictions and limitations placed upon his work, he must adjust his objectives in order to achieve at least some satisfactory results with partial goals.

When we consider the previously mentioned skill objectives, viz. the understanding, speaking, reading and writing of a foreign language, it seems that the ability to read a foreign language would bring the student the quickest rewards. These achievements could in turn be applied to texts, written in the target language, within the student's own field of interest.

This limited and "first-step" approach to foreign language instruction is supported by the following observations: Firstly, the student already has a predominant orientation toward the printed word. Secondly, the learning of a foreign language may become an exciting adventure of discovery in a meaningful context and with useful applications in outside readings. Thirdly, "recognition" precedes "recall" in any learning process. The proposed method of limited speaking and extensive reading as a first step in foreign language learning, would teach a foreign language in this psychological order. This principle is in fact incorporated into the audio-lingual method, which begins with the development of listening skills. The audio-lingual approach does not, however, utilize visual recognition to any large extent. It avoids visual stimuli at first, in order to avoid negative phonological transfer from the native to the target language. But, even the audio-lingual method cannot avoid negative transfer in structural patterns. In order to minimize negative transfer in the proposed method, one would have to start a beginners' course with the phonology of the target language, as is customarily done. It would therefore be the aim of this method to teach firstly correct pronunciation

²Frank M. Grittner, *Teaching Foreign Languages* (New York, 1968), p. 72.

and secondly, vocabulary and linguistic structures in a meaningful context for recognition. The stress should be on the communicative function of the text. Translation of the text into the native language could be attempted, if the need arises, although it would be more desirable to remain within the target language. It would be far more beneficial to ask simple questions in the target language in order to practise limited recall.

To sum up, it would be advisable to change the emphasis and the sequence of the various skill objectives, as long as foreign language instruction is subject to the restrictions of time and of heterogeneous grouping. It may be doubted that in a university environment language is still primarily a spoken medium abstracted into a written form. The proposal to make reading the first objective does not negate the value of the oral approach. Indeed, the reading approach should accompany oral practice but the two should not be equated. Reading skills would be more fully developed, because they are at the level of recognition, while the oral capabilities would be limited, since they rely on complete recall. Furthermore, there would be no intention to do away with writing altogether at the university level. Because writing relies on recall, it should initially be restricted to a simple level, to be perfected at a later stage of foreign language instruction.

Only after all important grammatical elements and a basic vocabulary have been recognized in context, should one advance to the next level. The teaching for active recall, in a new context and with an extended vocabulary would, of course, be mandatory for this second stage of instruction.

Those students who do not wish, or are unable, to master all linguistic skills in the target language would only proceed through stage one and would still reap some useful benefits from their instruction, such as the ability to read texts in the target language, relating to their field of interest. Only if the goals are limited and related to suitable methods, is there hope for satisfying results in foreign language teaching. The progression from recognition to recall, from hearing to speaking, and from reading to writing, offers an opportunity to cope with heterogeneous classes that represent a wide range of dissimilar objectives. The proposed approach would also provide some satisfying rewards for those students who are now considered failures or drop-outs.

Juergen Jahn

The University of Calgary