

LANGUAGE TEACHING

A Guide for Teachers of
Foreign Languages

by

Edwin T. Cornelius, Jr.

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PREFACE

This textbook has been prepared as a guide for teachers and professors of foreign languages. It is based chiefly on recent experiments in English-language teaching in non-English-speaking countries. Although the material included in this manual has been prepared for teachers of English as a foreign language, it is felt that because of the treatment of scientific techniques, the major portion of the text will be useful to teachers and students of other languages as well. The publication of the present work has been prompted by the interest expressed on the part of Near Eastern, European and Latin American educators and teachers of English in private conversations and group discussions with the author.

E. T. C., Jr.

EDITORIAL NOTE

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INTRODUCTION

During recent years the United States of America has witnessed the development of many new techniques in the field of foreign-language teaching. Perhaps the most noteworthy has been the development of teaching techniques based on the analyses provided by scientific investigations of various language systems. The results of the investigations of American linguists are little known outside of scientific circles. Teachers of English as a foreign language both in the United States and in other parts of the world have not had the opportunity of studying the works of the linguistic scientists, although much of what has been done bears directly on teaching problems.

The purpose of this textbook is to suggest teaching techniques that will be of interest to professionally trained teachers, and, at the same time, to provide a basis for understanding the highly technical work being carried on by linguistic scientists. It is not essential that teachers in general be masters in the techniques used by the linguistic scientists. However, it is essential that language teachers be aware of the principles and attitudes that have come as the result of modern studies.

Teachers of foreign languages have begun to think more seriously than ever before about improving the traditional methods of language teaching. Innumerable manuals and guides for teachers have been published, and literally thousands of articles dealing with classroom problems have appeared in language journals and education publications in all parts of the world.

From Buenos Aires to New York and from Cairo to Tokyo, language teachers ask themselves and each other the same kind of questions about language, textbooks, visual aids, methods, grammar, and pronunciation. There is a universa

feature in the questions that are asked continuously. But there is nothing universal about the answers given to those questions. One could observe that there are almost as many different answers given to language questions as there are language teachers in the world. From one point of view this textbook could be regarded as an attempt to provide a set of answers to traditional language-learning problems. However, it is not the objective of this manual to answer the questions of language teachers, for most teachers are qualified enough to answer their own questions, or at least to devise ways of solving their teaching problems. The objective of this manual, rather, is to restate the questions asked and to point out new and different attitudes toward language problems.

The first three chapters of this text deal with questions pertaining to methods and techniques of teaching, textbook and teaching materials, and teacher preparation. The second part of the text, chapters IV, V, and VI, describes the work of linguists and the scope of the field of linguistics. In chapters VII, VIII, and IX suggestions for pedagogical application of linguistic studies are presented. The last part of the text, chapters X, XI, and XII, treats specialized problems of language teaching and suggests lines along which the teaching of modern foreign languages may proceed. Following chapter XII, a bibliography section has been provided which will be of interest to teachers who may desire additional reading in the fields of study outlined in the present manual. The final section provides a glossary of terms used in the field of linguistics.

As mentioned above, one of the objectives of this text is to restate some of the common questions about language teaching asked by language teachers in different parts of the world. Because of this, each chapter begins with a statement of actual questions which have come from teachers of languages. Many of these questions appear in the exact form phrased by teachers in the course of conversations and discussions with the author.

CHAPTER I

METHODS AND TECHNIQUES OF TEACHING

Questions: What is the best method of teaching a foreign language? Does the knowledge of Latin help students learn another foreign language? Should visual aids be used in language classes? How long does it take to learn a foreign language, using good methods? Should a teacher teach from a textbook or use the direct method? How do you interest students in studying a foreign language? How should you teach pronunciation? What method should be used to give students a reading knowledge of a language?

The most immediate problem for the language teacher is to determine the methods and techniques useful in the classroom. The choice of specific teaching techniques depends entirely on the preparation and experience of the teacher, an understanding of the speech habits of the students in their native language, a familiarity with the speech habits of the foreign language to be taught, and immediate factors such as number of students in the class, hours per week of class sessions, age and interests of the students, types of examinations to be used, and other factors.

In practice, the choice of a particular method to be used in the classroom seems to mean nothing more than the choice of a specific textbook. Sometimes, particularly in public and government schools, the textbook to be used has already been designated, and the teacher does not actually choose a method, but, rather, only follows the method outlined in the text. We have become accustomed to the fact that a specific textbook represents a particular method.

One speaks of the "West Method," which is based on texts prepared by Dr. Michael West. In the same way, we refer to "Kugo's Method," represented by the series of books, *Hugo's Simplified French*, simplified German, Russian, Italian, English, etc. When a new language text is published, language teachers usually expect a new method, a modified version of an old method, but at least a "method" of some kind.

It is interesting to observe that the most common complaint of the language teacher is that the particular textbook being used is inadequate for classroom needs. Because of this, teachers are usually interested in new language books on the market because a new book promises the discovery of a method that will be more "practical." On the other hand, the market overflows with language texts, all involving original techniques and classroom methods, and usually representing the commercial enthusiasm of an author-teacher to sell his method or his "new and revolutionary techniques." A specific language text is usually perfectly satisfactory only for the author of the text. This means that in the language field one finds a great variety of methods and techniques available and a continual expression of general dissatisfaction with available materials.

The problems of choosing textbooks and other teaching materials has been made the subject of chapter II of this manual, and it should be pointed out that the present discussion of methods and techniques is limited to pedagogical problems not involving textbook considerations.

It is highly important that the methods and techniques used for teaching foreign languages not be confused with those which are used in mother-language teaching. The American who teaches English in the public schools of the United States, or the Englishman who teaches English in Great Britain, must not be regarded as a foreign-language teacher. In the same way, the Frenchman who teaches

French in the schools of France, or the Egyptian who teaches Arabic in the schools of Egypt, is usually a mother-language teacher and not a foreign-language teacher. Normally, professors of French, English, Arabic, Turkish, Greek, and other languages have not had experience in their own countries in the teaching of their language as a foreign language. In general, one can observe that most so-called language-teaching methods used in schools throughout the world are mother-language teaching methods and not foreign-language teaching methods.

Of course, there are many language teachers who are using foreign-language techniques, and there are many schools in the world specifically oriented in foreign language teaching methods. In recent years, a great many teachers have been concerned with differentiating language techniques, and innumerable texts have been prepared which attempt to set forth principles of teaching English, French, Arabic, German, Italian, Russian, and other languages as foreign languages.

Let us consider the basic differences which exist between the mother-language teacher and the foreign-language teacher. In order to illustrate these differences, it will be helpful to describe the basic objectives of the two types of language teaching. We will take as an example the comparison between English-language courses in the secondary schools of the United States, and English-language courses in the secondary schools of Egypt. The English teacher in the American secondary school may be called a mother-language teacher, since his students are native speakers of American English. The English teacher in the Egyptian school should be called a foreign-language teacher, since his students are native speakers of Arabic.

English as a subject in the American secondary school includes the following activities: reading, writing, public speaking, speech correction, literature, short story and essay composition, and grammar study. The objectives of

the English teacher in this situation are to encourage accuracy in expression, to develop in his students correct habits of speech, which means choice of words, pronunciation and clarity, correct use of grammar, and an appreciation for literature written in English. Teaching techniques involve spelling drill, evaluation of the students' compositions for originality in style and quality of expression, and the presentation and discussion of grammar, works of literature, and historical narrative of the lives of men of letters. The student who is given a "high grade" is usually the student who has expressed originality in his composition, has become familiar enough with assigned readings in literature to answer examination questions, and who, in general, "knows" grammar and expresses himself well.

In contrast, English as a subject in the Egyptian secondary school will include the following activities: imitation of the forms of the foreign language as uttered by the teacher, spoken and written drill in the forms of the language as presented by the teacher and as represented in the prepared textbook materials, and drills and tests which will evaluate and determine the progress of the student in acquiring the strange new idiom of English. The objectives of the English teacher in this situation are to encourage students to learn to reproduce the sounds and forms of English, both spoken and written, in the way in which they are produced by native speakers of English. At a given time in the learning process, arbitrarily established traditionally, the student is exposed to readings in the body of literature which has come from English-speaking communities. The teaching techniques involve spelling drill, discussion of the relationship between forms and constructions in the foreign language with those of the native language, and the presentation of models of spoken and written English which are to be imitated, repeated, learned, memorized, or followed by the students in their efforts to acquire the language.

The student who is given a "high grade" or who is regarded as an excellent student is never the student who expresses originality in spoken and written forms of the foreign language, but, rather, the student who reproduces the models of the language which have been given. The student may be expected to explain the usage of certain forms and constructions in preference to others, that is, he may be expected to know grammar rules.

In foreign-language learning, originality of expression is not desired, for this is nothing more than a foreign accent in the new language, whether in the pronunciation of sounds or in the construction of phrases and sentences. If a student, for example, says "We has taken books ours on table the," he is expressing "originality" in English, for he has not expressed himself according to the conventional and expected forms of one who speaks the language. In the same way, the student may arrange forms in the language in accordance with the expected sequence of a speaker of English, but he may express "originality" in the vowels or consonant sounds of the phrase and in this way vary from the sounds uttered by any speaker of English.

In devising methods and techniques of teaching English as a foreign language, therefore, the teacher of English is determining effective ways of causing the students to learn to imitate accurately the speech habits of the native speaker of English. As indicated above, the teacher may at the same time concern himself with devising methods of causing the students to imitate as well the "writing" habits of native speakers. In the classroom the teacher of a foreign language must overcome the natural tendencies of the students to fail to imitate native forms. These tendencies to be overcome may be described as follows:

- 1) The student will tend to use the sounds of his native language instead of reproducing the new sounds of English.

- 2) The student will tend to use the word sequence, sentence structure, and all speech habits of his native language instead of the new speech habits of English.
- 3) The student will tend to carry into English the cultural concepts of his own native language which will determine his reactions to other speakers of English, the sense of humor peculiar to his own speech community, social habits, including frequency of hand shaking, exclamations, and the like.
- 4) The student will have the tendency to "expect" the very familiar features of his language to be found in the new language, English. He will want to know "how to say" the words of his own language in English words. In this way he will presume that "his way of saying things" must also be "the way of saying things in English."

The teacher of English as a foreign language must be aware of these tendencies on the part of his students, and the teaching techniques used in the classroom must be designed in such a way as to expose the students to the new language so that the native speech habits of the students do not influence the formation of the new speech habits which must be learned. Just as "originality" is undesirable in the students, so "originality" is undesirable in the teacher.

The teacher may sometimes, unknowingly, vary from "native speech forms" of English in the classroom presentation, despite the fact that he is a native speaker of English, or speaks as a native speaker would speak. In other words, the teacher may have the tendency to speak a special dialect of English, known in most school systems throughout the world, which can be called "classroom English." The tendency of the teacher of a foreign language to use a "classroom dialect" instead of the natural forms of the language, may be analyzed as follows:

- 1) The teacher may have the tendency to present some forms of the spoken language in only their isolated form. For example, the teacher may speak of the "correct pronunciation" of *you, her, what*, etc., and thus cause the student to expect this isolated form at every occurrence of the form in the language.
- 2) The teacher sometimes uses oral and written drills in the classroom which introduce "theoretical" constructions in the language. For example, the teacher, particularly in elementary schools, drills students in forms such as "I throw the ball," "I go to the door," "I sit down." This type of drill is planned so that the students may act out the "action" of the verb, but in so doing, the teacher teaches a "theoretical" form "I throw," "I go," "I sit," instead of the expected forms, "I am throwing," "I am going toward the door," "I am sitting down."
- 3) The teacher selects certain forms of the language for presentation on the basis of his arbitrary opinions of difficult and easy forms for the students. For example, the reason teachers use drills such as the one cited above, "I throw the ball," instead of "I am throwing the ball," is that the teacher decides, arbitrarily, that "I am throwing the ball" is a more complicated form, or more difficult for the beginner than the "I throw" construction. Because of the predominance among language teachers of this idea, one finds fairly rigid pedagogical procedures developed in language teaching which dictate that students study the present tense first, then after mastery of these forms, the past tense, and the future tense. Traditionally, the student who begins studying the subjunctive is a very advanced student indeed who has completed a year or two of language study.
- 4) The teacher may have the tendency to test instead of teach during classroom recitation. For example, in-

stead of drilling students in imitation and repetition of spoken and written forms, the teacher will begin drilling the students in question-answer form before the student has learned the answers well enough.

- 5) The teacher will have the tendency to choose the "best" forms of the language for the students to learn in the classroom. The "best" forms usually are taken from grammar books and other texts prepared for teaching the language as a mother language. Dictionaries are used to furnish teachers and students with an "authority" on the pronunciation of individual words and the "meaning" of forms in the language.

In any discussion of methods and techniques of foreign-language teaching, it must be pointed out that any one method or technique is valid or acceptable only insofar as that method or technique involves exposing the students to the language as it is spoken and/or written by native speakers. This means, then, that the method which mutilates or changes the language as it is found in a native speech community, despite the fact that the method may be popular or easy or pedagogically accepted, must be viewed as not acceptable. The question which is commonly phrased by language teachers in such terms as, "What is the best method...?" "What is your method for teaching English to speakers of Turkish...?" or even, "What method is best for teaching English in secondary schools?" must be restated. We may ask, instead, "What methods are useful?" "What methods and techniques are acceptable?" if the objective of our teaching is to help students acquire English, French, Arabic, Persian, or whatever the language may be.

Many teachers of foreign languages have become specialists in a "method" or in certain "techniques" and have ignored all other factors that enter into the learning and teaching processes. These teachers will orient their

language teaching on the firm conviction that there is a relationship which can be expressed: good method equals good results; poor methods equal poor results. Methods and techniques, instead of being regarded as means to a given end in language teaching, have come to be regarded by many teachers as the end in itself. This is readily observable in the “emotional” and “personal” attachment of the teacher with his methods or with someone else’s specific teaching methods. Whoever stands before a group of professional language teachers must understand that in leading language teachers into a discussion of teaching techniques, he is treading on very sacred ground.

Obviously, the teacher of a foreign language must not only know how to teach, but he must know what to teach. He must know his subject matter—in this case the language he is to teach—and he must achieve his teaching objectives within a given time period. The next chapter deals with the equipment used by the teacher, textbooks, teaching aids, and special materials. This is a discussion, in part, of how to teach. Chapter III deals with the preparation of the teacher, and succeeding chapters deal with features of language systems. These are all discussions of what to teach. Before we begin these discussions, it will be well to list a number of principles of foreign language teaching which will in part restate some of the popular questions about language learning and teaching and will provide a framework for the balance of discussions on classroom procedures.

- 1) The objective of the teacher of a foreign language is to expose students to the language as it is spoken.
- 2) The ability to read and write a language may come as a by-product of the process of learning the spoken language.
- 3) The terms “correct” and “incorrect” are not helpful in language learning and teaching. It is important to