MODERN METHODS OF TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

A Guide to Modern Materials With Particular Reference to the Far East

by

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EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

Washington 6, D.C., U.S.A.

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FOREWORD

The colleges established abroad by mission boards and other agencies have made their contribution and left their mark in many fields, but rarely more obviously than in the teaching of English. Whatever their achievements in other fields, they have often attracted students largely on the grounds of their reputation in this one. They have generally been able to offer as instructors native speakers of English, many of whom have been trained teachers of language rather than literary scholars reluctantly engaged in providing a tool. Certain of the colleges have pioneered and led in the development and application of modern methods and materials.

The author of this book, Miss Anne Cochran, taught for twenty years in Yenching University, Peking, China, a leader in this field. She started her work under the guidance of Dr. Lawrence Faucett, one of the early authorities on the teaching of English in the Orient; later she worked under Dr. C. C. Fries of the University of Michigan, today's recognized authority on the teaching of English as a foreign language. In Miss Cochran, theory and practice, training and experience, are so combined as to make her unusually well qualified for the task represented by this book.

There was a time, not so long ago, when it was practically impossible for the teacher of English as a foreign language to secure reliable answers to the problems he encountered. Warmly held opinions, yes; scientifically tested data, no. Today, theories are so numerous and and the data supporting them so convincing that one almost longs for the desert which has been replaced by the jungle.

As a former practitioner of the art analyzed by Miss Cochran, I am confident that she has produced, in the present volume, a badly needed guide through a labyrinth of competing theories, methods, and materials. There is help in it for both the experienced but stale practitioner and the confused novice.

The United Board for Christian Colleges in China feels privileged to have helped make possible the leisure and travel which enabled Miss Cochran to collect the materials which make this volume so rich and significant. It is also happy to have been able to print the first limited edition, of which the present is a less cumbersome and more readily available revision.

William P. Fenn
Executive Secretary,
United Board for Christian
Colleges in China

PREFACE

This work was originally undertaken as a project under the United Board for Christian Colleges in China. Many years of experience in teaching as a foreign language have shown us that one of the greatest hardships of the English teacher abroad is the difficulty of keeping in touch with the latest discoveries in the field, and the problems involved, not only in securing the latest materials designed to help him in his task, but even in finding out what these materials are. So, with the generous co-operation of friends among the alumnae of Wellesley College, we decided to publish a survey of the latest materials on teaching English as a foreign language which are to be found not only in this country but also in England. This survey was to be practical in nature, designed to help struggling English teachers. Dr. W. P. Fenn, General Secretary of the United Board, supervised this work and made it possible. He also went over the first manuscript painstakingly and suggested many revisions both in form and content which have greatly added to the clarity and general usefulness of the work. He further suggested that Chapter 8 should be added in order to make the report really practical. The manuscript was prepared for printing by Mrs. Chou, Mrs. Day, and Mrs. Krupp of the UBCCC staff, and Mr. James Cameron, also of the UBCCC, most kindly did all the work connected with the publishing and distributing of the first report.

I wish to thank all the scholars and publishers who so generously gave me their time and suggested the material which makes up this report. I wish I could give a special section to each one, for their kindness demands individual comment, but I have space enough only to mention them together.

Dr. Charles C. Fries, Dr. Robert Lado, Dr. Yao Shen and all the staff of the English Language Institute at the University of Michigan not only entertained me on a particular visit, but have continuously given me their time and aid. Dr. Kenneth Croft and others of the Division of Information Centers of the U.S. Information Agency have been continuously helpful. Dr. George L. Trager and Dr. Henry Lee Smith, Jr. of the Foreign Service Institute, Department of State, gave me a most interesting interview. Dr. Charles Hockett of Cornell entertained me for several days, and not only gave me access to the material they are working on in his office, but also a great deal of advice about other possibilities. Dr. I. A. Richards and Miss Christine M. Gibson of Language Research also were most kind and generous in discussing the whole field. Dr. Aileen Traver Kitchin showed me what was going on at Teachers' College and got me in touch with the English teaching programs in New York. Mrs. Mitchell of Labor Temple was particularly kind. Dr. Freeman Twaddell of Brown University also gave a most interesting interview.

I wish, too, to thank the friends in England who have been helpful. Mr. H. R. Cheeseman, formerly Director of Education in Malaya, gave me cordial advice and connected me with many interesting people. Mrs. Drinkwater of Longmans Green and Company arranged for interviews with Dr. Michael West and Mr. C. E. Eckersley, and put the work of the company at my disposal. Prof. Bruce Pattison of the University of London showed me what was going on in England in teaching English as a foreign language along linguistic lines. Mr. Jago of the British Council sent me a great deal of material.

Dr. Chou Kuo-ping deserves special thanks for her very great help in collecting the *Bibliography*.

Also, I wish particularly to mention Dr. A. A. Hill of the Georgetown University, who has always been my teacher, who has given a great deal of time to helping me with this report, and has even read the manuscript of some of the chapters. I also wish to thank Mr. Dalton of the Alderman Library of the University of Virginia for allowing me to use the library for some of the research work done.

Without the instigation of Dr. W. P. Fenn of the United Board the work would not have been undertaken or carried through in the first place, and Mr. Cameron and other members of the office staff made the first printing and distributing possible.

INTRODUCTION

This book is a guide to the material that is now available in America and England for teaching English as a foreign language. It is especially written for American and English instructors who go to the Far East to teach English, for the teachers in the schools all over the Orient, not native speakers of English themselves, who are teaching this foreign language to their countrymen, and for those itinerant English speakers who suddenly find themselves seized and forced to teach their language.

Teaching English as a foreign language is a specialty. No one would consider teaching brick-laying or nuclear physics without inquiring into how it should be done. NO ONE HAS THE RIGHT TO WASTE THE STUDENTS' TIME BY TRYING TO TEACH ENGLISH BY INSTINCT. This applies quite as much to the teacher who has had many years' experience teaching "grammar" and English literature in Tooting or Brooklyn as it does to the army wife who has never taught anything, for the army wife is probably humble.

In recent years, particularly since World War II, scientific discoveries about foreign language teaching have saved years of time and effort in learning languages. NO TEACHER HAS A RIGHT TO DISREGARD THESE DISCOVERIES.

How to Use this Book

This book does not tell you how to teach English. It tells you what English teaching material is now available, where to get it, how much it costs, and how it can be used to best advantage.

Part I gives the background that every teacher of English as a foreign language should have. Chapter 1 considers what use the students in the Orient can make of English, because no one knows what or how to teach unless he has already considered why he is teaching. Chapter 2 gives a brief account of the scientific attitude towards language in general which every competent language teacher should have, and which, incidentally, is the exact opposite of the general opinion on the subject.

Part II describes the various methods of language teaching in use. Most language teachers today are still stuck, twenty years back, in the popular idea of the "Direct Method." Why should they thus linger about in their thinking, and pay no attention to anything that has happened since 1940?

Part III deals with the materials now available. Chapter 7 is really a critical bibliography of the books that will be most helpful. It begins with the books that every teacher *must* read, and goes on to

discuss the beginning texts and the more advanced books needed in special fields. The last part of the chapter describes the scientific and theoretical books which are needed to conduct a Teacher Training Program, but that are not a necessity for ordinary teaching.

For a while I toyed with the idea of putting the last chapter first, because it is in some ways the most practical, and certainly is the most popular in tone. Then, perhaps, mysterious and attractive references to unknown persons, books, or theories, and erudite bandyings of incomprehensible but fascinating words might have enticed the reader to go on with the rest, just to find out what it was all about. Such a topsy-turvy performance, however, was repulsive to my pedantic mind, so I decided, like Alice-in-Wonderland, to start at the beginning, go on to the end, and then stop. But there is no law against reading the book any way you like.

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PART I

Theories

CHAPTER 1

WHY WE TEACH

POSSIBLE OBJECTIVES FOR LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

This chapter discusses why, in teaching a foreign language, we would study the objectives of our students, and what the different reasons for learning English might be. Mark Twain's remark about the weather - that everybody talks about it, but nobody does very much - might be applied to foreign language teaching. As Dr. Dunkel points out in *Second-Language Learning,*[1] although the "learning and teaching of foreign languages has been talked about for at least two thousand years,"[2] still the styles in language teaching change almost as rapidly as the styles in ladies' skirts. Dr. Dunkel goes on to say that the actual teaching of foreign languages has made little progress throughout all these years, especially if compared with the progress made in other fields of education. He does admit, however, that in the period from 1920 to 1935 advancement was made towards a scientific approach to language teaching. There was some agreement among experts as to such things as "vocabulary selection or the relative emphasis to be given to various objectives."[3]

In World-War II the U.S. Government decided to train a large number of men in different languages so that they could act in various countries. What these men wanted was to learn to speak the language as quickly and effectively as possible because they had to do all their work in foreign countries.

Linguists (i.e. scientists in language) were called in, and they produced the materials and methods for the A.S.T.P. (The Armed Services Training Program courses in languages)[4] A great deal of

[1] H. B. Dunkel, *Second-Language Learning,* (New York: Ginn and Co., 1948) Chapter I, *passim.*

[2] *ibid,* p. 2

[3] *ibid,* p. 12. This period is described under THE DIRECT METHOD below.

[4] For reports of the language work in the American army see: R. J. Mathew, *Language and Area Studies in the Armed Services,* (Washington: American Council on Education, 1947) and P. A. Angiollo, *Armed Forces Language Teaching,* (New York: S. Vanni, 1947)

publicity grew up around these courses, and the popular imagination, was fired with the idea that a miraculous gadget for learning foreign languages had at last been discovered. Since this was true, why should these remarkable inventions for language teaching not be used all over the country? Spurred by this thought, a good many schools straightway incorporated language programs based on the "new methods" into their curricula.

The Rockefeller Foundation gave a grant to the University of Chicago for Dr. Frederick B. Agard of Cornell and Dr. Harold B. Dunkel of Chicago to carry out an investigation of the various methods of foreign language teaching used in the schools, and to compare the results of the "new methods" with those of the "old." This report covered the years from 1944-1947. In 1948 it was published in two volumes: Agard and Dunkel, *An Investigation of Second-Language Teaching* (New York or Chicago: Ginn and Co., 1948), and Dunkel, *Second-Language Learning*.

The results of this investigation were not encouraging to those who felt that the problems of language teaching had now been solved once and for all. In fact, often the tests used by Agard and Dunkel showed that the students learning by the "old" methods had quite as good, and in some fields a better, grasp of the language than those in the "new" methods classes.

Some of the advocates for the "new methods" claim that one of the reasons for the discouraging results was that the test used by Agard and Dunkel did not really measure language ability. Agard and Dunkel are the first to admit that this may be true. Their tests were certainly prepared on as thoroughly scientific principles as they could manage.[1] But when considering measuring language ability, the question immediately arises: "What do we mean by ability in a foreign language?" Drs. Agard and Dunkel found that we can not measure language achievement unless we know what the student is trying to achieve.

The question of objectives was simple in the armed services. The men wished to learn how to speak a language so that they could get about in a foreign country. But students in the different schools in America have many purposes for learning foreign languages: going abroad, acquiring a background of foreign culture, reading technical journals, writing articles, *etc.* Might it not be a waste of time to teach a student to pronounce like a native speaker when all he wishes is to be able to read technical books? And if this is all he wants, might he not feel that his time is wasted and resent it? Therefore, before we decide *what* to teach in a course or *how* to teach it, we should consider *why* the student wants to learn. As Dr. Dunkel says: "If objectives may be taken as dominant directives of course organization (as they should be), they indicate what the student is going to get out of the course."[2]

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[1] For a discussion of the preparation of these tests, see Agard and Dunkel, *An Investigation of Second-Language Learning*, (New York or Chicago: Ginn and Co., 1948) Chapters III and IV.

[2] Dunkel, *Second-Language Learning*, 107

Why Learn English? Possible Aims for Learning English.[1]

The reasons why a foreigner living in England or America should want to learn English are clear: he wishes to carry on the business of living in the language of the country, so he wants to know as much English as possible.[2]

In the Orient English is a foreign language. However, in most Asian countries English is next in importance to the national languages and, in several of these countries, its study is required of students commencing at the elementary school level.

Many Asians are finding a knowledge of written English indispensable in their quest for knowledge of Western scientific, technical, educational, cultural, governmental, and other developments, particularly those developments which took place during the war in the Pacific when Asia was largely cut off from the West. Very few of even the basic materials in these fields have been translated into Asian languages. Therefore, if the people and governments of this great area of the world are to have access to Western knowledge, it must be through the medium of the printed English word.

Today a knowledge of spoken English is much more important to the Asian than ever before. Modern developments in the fields of transportation and communication have brought the East and the West much closer together. In the conduct of their diplomatic commercial, and educational relations with the West the people of Asia are finding a knowledge of spoken English essential.

A good many students, however, are not interested in producing English themselves, either in the spoken or written forms. But even such students realize that in technical fields a reading knowledge of English is very useful and sometimes almost a necessity. Although such students, wish to acquire the reading ability as quickly as possible, they do not wish to take the time required to learn to speak or write.[3] A few scholars also might conceivably wish to be able not only to read English but also to write it so as to be able to communicate with Western scholars. Such people might not be interested in the oral side of the language. Still others wish only to translate. This emphasis has become very strong in the Far East, and may also be growing in other countries. The idea is for some experts to translate as much technical material from English as possible so that other students may get on with their work in their own language without bothering to learn

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[1] For another good discussion of this point see: H.R. Huse, *Reading and Speaking Foreign Languages,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1945), *Preface,* and Part I, Chapter III

[2] For a possible suggestion as to what a minimal useful "oralaural knowledge" of English might cover, see C. C. Fries, *The Teaching and Learning of English as a Foreign Language* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1946) p. 3

[3] Whether learning to speak is a waste of time for those who want only to read is a debatable point, for many advocates to the "oral approach" to foreign language learning maintain that the quickest way to learn to read is by first mastering the fundamentals of speech. See Charles F. Hockett, "Learning Pronunciation" (*The Modern Language Journal,* Vol. XXXIV, No. 4, April, 1950, pp. 261-269) pp. 263-264 *passim* – quoted below under *Linguistic Method.* As opposed to Hockett's theory, see Agard-Dunkel, pp. 290-294, 296-298 *passim.*

English. Also, many people believe that good translations of the writings of other countries, particularly those of the Far East, will help to interpret these cultures to the English speaking world.

Conclusion

Therefore, in planning a program for English teaching, we should first find out what the objectives of the students are, and then decide what material we should use and how it should be taught. If the students realize that the teacher is striving to give them what they really want as quickly as possible, their eagerness to learn will certainly be increased. Many of the objections to learning English in the past grew from the fact that the teachers seemed to disregard the students' objectives and taught merely what was advocated by some preconceived educational theories imported from abroad. Under *Suggestions* (Part III) I have endeavored to point out various guides as to how the different skills may be taught in an efficient way.

CHAPTER 2

WHAT WE TEACH

THE MATERIALS OF ENGLISH TEACHING: THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

This section is an attempt to give a brief summary of the ideas of modern American linguists[1] which are useful in language teaching.[2]

These linguists claim to study language by the methods which natural scientists use in studying the phenomena of nature. Disabusing their minds of all preconceived notions about language, they collect thousands of instances of utterances, analyze these instances, and formulate hypotheses from their analyses. They used this method first for the study of unusual tongues such as Eskimo or the American Indian languages. Since then they have applied these same methods to the study of the better known languages.[3]

The traditional approach to language study is philosophical rather than scientific. The student of a language considers the meaning first, and then makes statements about the forms in terms of the meaning. Often, when talking about their own language or languages related to theirs, those using the traditional approach do not notice differences in form at all.

An example of this may be seen in our traditional English grammar. We have a term THE PRESENT TENSE ACTIVE INDICATIVE which is supposed to be the name of a form of the verb which expresses action in the present time. But in English we have many forms which express this meaning: HE GOES: HE IS GOING: HE KEEPS GOING: HE DOES GO. Although all of us know how to use these different forms and understand the difference in meaning signaled by each, we scarcely realize that they are different. The average teacher, when asked by a foreign student to describe how we use the forms, will say that they are "highly idiomatic."

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[1] "A linguist is a scientist whose subject matter is language and his task is to analyze and classify the facts of speech as he hears them uttered by native speakers or as he finds them recorded in writing." Bernard Bloch and George L. Trager, *Outline of Linguistic Analysis* (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1942,) p. 8

[2] See Bloch and Trager, *ibid*, also Leonard Bloomfield: *Language* (New York: Henry Holt, 1933), and *Outline Guide for the Practical Study of Foreign Language* (Baltimore: Waverly Press, 1942) George L. Trager, *The Field of Linguistics*, (Norman, Okla.: Battenburg Press, 1950) For further useful books on this subject, see *Suggestions*, (Part III) and the *Bibliography*, (Part IV).

[3] Trager, *The Field of Linguistics*, p. 1, *passim*

On the other hand, as has been seen before, linguists apply the same methods to studying familiar languages that they use in studying the little known ones. They study the forms of their own language, and then approach the meaning through the form rather than the other way around. They collect instances from books, letters, and all written material; they make records of conversations on wire or tape recorders; and they analyze each different form to see if it signals a meaning difference. Therefore they are able to describe to a foreigner what meanings we signal by our different forms. The linguists used some of their conclusions in organizing the A.S.T.P. programs. These conclusions ought still to be very useful when applied to teaching foreign languages. I have attempted to give a summary below of the helpful conclusions.

What is Language? Language is a systematic arrangement of speech-sounds by which meaning is signaled from one human being to another.[1] "The particular speech sounds which people utter under particular stimuli differ among different groups of men."[2] One system of speech sounds used in a given community is called a language. What are the characteristics of a language? "A language is a *system* of *arbitrary vocal symbols* by means of which a *social group cooperates*."[3] The important points to notice are: A social group cooperates. Language is primarily a form of communication. A language must convey meaning from one human being to another in a "speech community." All language is originally speech. Writing is a visual representation of what was originally spoken, although the written language may develop differently from the spoken.

There is no reason why certain arrangements of sounds should convey certain menaing. There is no reasonable explanation of why *das Pferd* or *the horse* should mean that particular animal.

But in the same language there must be agreement as to what meaning shall be conveyed by the same pattern of sounds. No one can call that flower a *rose* today and a *turnip* tomorrow and expect to be understood.

Therefore, since a language is systematic, it may be analyzed. That is, we can find the simplest units of sound that make a *distinctive* meaning difference to the hearer, then we can study how these sound units are arranged to give menaing, and we can find the patterns by which these meaningful forms are combined to convey larger meanings.

Some of the conclusions drawn from this approach to the study of the English language are listed below.

Each language has a limited number of sound units which can make a meaning difference between sound patterns which are otherwise alike. For instance, since PAT and BAT have different meanings in English, the (p) and (b) are different sound units in English. These *units of sound* which make a *distinctive difference* between the meanings of words in a given *language* are called *phonemes*. The core of

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[1] " * * language is the link between otherwise unconnected nervous systems." Bloch and Trager, p. 5.

[2] Bloomfield, *Language*, p. 29.

[3] Bloch and Trager, p. 8.

the idea lies in the words (1) *distinctive difference* in a (2) *given language*. What does a *distinctive difference* mean? Everyone does not pronounce sounds the same way. We all recognize that people speaking different dialects of our own language pronounce the sounds very differently, and we also notice that individuals speaking the same dialect do not all pronounce what we consider the same sound in the same way. How, then do we understand each other? This is because although each speech sound has many different features, only a few of these features distinguish two words in a given language. Therefore, in order to be understood, the speaker *must* pronounce the distinguishing features in a speech sound in any language. Let us consider the example given above. The sounds (p) and (b) as they are pronounced in PAT and BAT in English have many different features. They are both pronounced by putting the lips together and then letting the air escape with an explosive sound. But when pronouncing (p) in English the vocal cords do not vibrate, and when pronouncing (b) they do. This is the distinguishing feature between these two sounds in English. But these sounds have other features. The (p) in PAT is highly aspirated. (*i.e.* a lot of breath escapes when pronouncing it), whereas the (b) in BAT may have very little aspiration. But in English this is not a distinctive feature between the two sounds. The (p) in PAT is highly aspirated, the (p) in TAP much less so, while the (p) in SPAT is not aspirated at all, but we consider them all the same phoneme in English.

In Chinese these two lip sounds are distinguished, not by voicing, but by aspiration. Therefore, when I wrote SPIT on the blackboard in phonemic script in this way: (spit) one of my Chinese students said: "Shouldn't that be a (b)?" Now, no English speaking person would think that the sound in (spit) might be a (b) because it certainly is not voiced. But neither is it aspirated. Therefore, whereas in English the sound in (spit) belongs to the (p) phoneme family because it is not voiced, to a Chinese it sounds as if it belonged to the (b) phoneme family because it is not aspirated. So, one of the most important tasks in teaching pronunciation to a foreigh speaker is teaching him to recognize the features of sound which are distinctive in English (and, therefore, can make a meaning difference between two English words) but which are *not* distinctive in his own language. Similarly, any English speaking person learning Chinese must learn that the sound feature of *pitch* makes a meaning difference between words, or a difference in *lexical* meaning, which it does not do in English. For an interesting discussion of this point, see D. Jones *The Phoneme,* Chapters II, IV, and IX.

For discussions of the phoneme in language learning see: Fries, *Teaching and Learning of English as a Foreign Language,* Chap. II; Eugene A. Nida, *Learning a Foreign Language,* (New York: Foreign Missions Conference, 156 5th Ave., (1950), Chap. IV. For explanations of the phonemic theory see: Bloch and Trager, *Outline of Linguistic Analysis,* Chap. III; Bloomfield, *Language,* Chap. V; and Daniel Jones, *The Phoneme: Its Nature and Use,* (Cambridge: Heffer and Sons, *Ltd,* 1950), Chap. I-XII, XXX, XXXI. For a highly technical discussion see K. Pike, *Phonetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1943) and *Phonemics* (Same, 1947).

Phonemes convey no meaning in isolation. The theory of the phoneme is one of the modern linguists' most useful contributions to the study of foreign languages. Therefore, all teachers should understand it before undertaking to teach pronunciation.

Phonemes are combined to form larger units which convey a limited meaning. Sometimes we call these *words:* e.g.: *black, leg, mail, not, sea, sick, stand, with.* But the division into words is very arbitrary in English, seeming to follow no particular pattern. Notice that *blackmail, blackleg, notwithstanding,* and *seasickness* are all written as words, whereas the *take care of* in "Please take care of him." is written as three words. But we can define a *vocabulary item* as a pattern of phonemes which conveys a limited meaning like the meanings given in the dictionary.

This type of meaning we may call *lexical meaning.*

Before any very useful meaning can be conveyed by language these vocabulary items must be further combined into *structural patterns.*

The words *bear, big, black, kill, man,* have no particular message until we combine them into such patterns as:

A big bear killed a black man, or
The big man killed the black bear.

These structural patterns are called grammar, and the meaning conveyed by the relationship between the words shown by these patterns is called *grammatical meaning.* That is, the relationship shown by putting the word *big* before the word *man* is that *big* modifies *man,* and by putting *man* or *bear* before or after the word *killed* shows which did the acting and which was the goal of the action.

In other words, modifying, subject, or object relationships indicate grammatical meaning, while such a definition as "destitute of light, or incapable of reflecting it" indicates the lexical meaning of "black" in this sentence.

Notice that in the examples given above, important grammatical meanings are conveyed by the *order* of the vocabulary items.

Function words may be defined as words that have little or no lexical meaning, but are used chiefly to show grammatical meaning. *A* and *the* above are function words. They show that the words *man* and *bear* belong to a certain grammatical category, the category of words which may act as subject or object and require a certain class of function words before them. These words may be called *bounded nouns.*[1]

The shows, further, that the *man* and *bear* have probably been mentioned before.

Inflection may be defined as changing the form of a word to show grammatical meaning.

In the sentences above, note the addition of *-ed* to the word *kill* which shows: that *kill* is a word belonging to that grammatical category (a verb) which may have a subject before it or an object after it, and that it is in a statement that tells a story or about something that has happened. This is often called the *past tense,* but it should not be confused with past *time.*

[1] Bloch and Trager, p. 78.