Teaching English as a Second Language Techniques and Procedures

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Introduction

Teaching English as a Second Language: Techniques and Procedures is directed primarily to classroom teachers and the trainers of such teachers. It is intended to be a modest and useful book by which we mean that it is not theoretical in its orientation. There may seem to be no need for one more book on the teaching of English as a second language; there are already many (some of them good)[1] but *this* book is different.

In language teaching we distinguish among approach, method, and technique. Approach is the "set of correlative assumptions dealing with the nature of language and the nature of language and learning."[2] Approach is the theoretical foundation upon which any systematic method is based. Many of the assumptions held are

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[1] See C. B. Paulston, "A Biased Bibliography: Comments on Selecting Texts for a Methods Course in TESOL," *Language Learning* 23 (1973) :1.
[2] Edward M. Anthony, "Approach Method and Technique," in H. Allen and R. Campbell, eds., *Teaching English as c Second Language* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972), p. 5.

axiomatic in that they cannot be proved either true or false. As such, the merit of any approach is unarguable in terms of theory, and one must look at the effectiveness of the method which it has generated. Methods refer to the procedures of language teaching, to an "overall plan for the orderly presentation of language material, no part of which contradicts, and all of which is based upon, the selected approach."[3] The lesson plan, the curriculum, the scheduling of classes, and the selection of textbooks, in fact most of the decisions made about language teaching outside the classroom, form part of the method and should of course be in harmony with the basic tenets of the approach. The method is implemented by techniques, by actual classroom behavior of the specific strategies which the teacher selects to achieve his objectives. The selection and sequencing of these strategies as well as the strategies themselves are based on the method and hence are in accord with the theoretical issues of the approach.

Most standard texts on language teaching discuss the approach and method of language teaching; there exist virtually no books on the technique level, on what the teacher is supposed to say and do in his classroom once he has shut the door behind him. Chastain for instance makes very clear that his book is not intended as a "cookbook."[4] This book, on the other hand, is intended to be just such a cookbook, outlining procedures and techniques that the teacher can utilize in his teaching. Most books on language teaching usually ignore two important aspects: the hard work that language teaching constitutes, and the importance of the personal relationship between the teacher and student in effective teaching. The building of personal relationships belongs to the "art" of teaching and cannot be learned from books. This book tries to alleviate somewhat the hard work of teaching by gathering together a number of useful techniques for easy reference, for new ideas, and for facilitating that sense of play and experimentation which is the sustaining foundation of all good teaching.

We don't want to give the impression that we discredit the importance of a solid theoretical foundation in language teaching.

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[3] Ibid, p. 6.

[4] Kenneth Chastain, *The Development of Modern Language Skills: Theory to Practice* (Philadelphia: The Center for Curriculum Development, 1971), p. 1.

We hold it of the utmost importance, and in a teacher training program this book needs to be complemented by a text which deals with theoretical concerns. Our own approach to language teaching is eclectic, that is, the assumptions we hold about language learning are not based solely on one theoretical school of thought. The pure audiolinguist will find as much to disagree with as the strict cognitive codist. But we know that assumptions about language teaching ultimately have to be evaluated by the effectiveness of their techniques, and are convinced that these techniques do work, whatever we may think about language teaching on a theoretical level.

Our own thinking about language teaching is permeated by the practical concerns and contextual constraints in running the English Language Institute at the University of Pittsburgh, an institute that prepares foreign students for academic work at American universities. We know that we must so structure a learning program that in a meager six month's time it allows monolingual students from a multitude of language backgrounds to gain enough proficiency in English to follow successfully an academic program in that language. We simply cannot afford procedures and techniques which are not efficient in language teaching, and we feel somewhat about language teaching as the Irish feel about their horses: Handsome is as handsome does. We use two main criteria in evaluating this efficacy: the first, quite mundanely, is that our students must score well on the standardized proficiency test (like the TOEFL—Test of English as a Foreign Language, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, N.J.) which they are required to take for university admission evaluation, and the second is that they must be able to handle academic work — to follow lectures, read textbooks, write term papers, and give reports. But since the TOEFL is also designed to evaluate these skills, our criteria of evaluation are not really disparate in nature, and it is readily apparent that these skills are merely substitutes for listening, speaking, reading, and writing—the classic breakdown of skills in language teaching. So that even if our techniques for teaching English as a second language have been designed and tested for a specific situation, we are reasonably certain that they will remain effective even in other situations.

Our book, then, is a discussion of what we have found to be efficient techniques and procedures in language learning and teaching from a very beginning level through intermediate to advanced levels,

based on our work in the Institute. Frequently techniques which are useful at one level do not work at another, and we have taken care to identify such techniques. We have long needed such a book for our own teacher training, and the impetus for the book lies exactly in the problems and needs of classroom teachers. We owe a great debt to our own staff who through the years have implemented and experimented with different ways of teaching. This book is the result of our combined attempts to deal with our mutual problems.

Pittsburgh   C.B.P.
                                                               M.N.B.

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Grammar

TEACHING GRAMMAR

Introduction

In this chapter we will discuss procedures and techniques for teaching grammar. There are as many definitions of grammar as there are linguistic schools of thought, but here we simply mean: the possible forms and arrangements of words in phrases and sentences. We begin with a classification of drills, followed by a typology, and close with a discussion of actual classroom procedures and techniques of teaching grammar.

Grammar permeates all language skills, and the objective of teaching grammar, as we discuss it here, is the oral use of the target language for communicative purposes. Separate references to grammar will also be found in the discussions of listening comprehension, pronunciation, reading and writing, which skills involve distinct aspects of grammar.

The chapter discusses how to teach grammar, not *what* to

teach—i.e., a linguistic analysis of English from a pedagogical view point, which is outside the scope of this book. Normally teachers are supplied with textbooks which determine what they teach. Occasionally, teachers who employ the grammar-translation approach to language teaching only work with reading selections. For their benefit we have included as an appendix a list of grammar patterns in English, sequenced primarily according to (1) a range from simple to complex, (2) saliency for communicative purposes, and (3) the interrelationship of grammatical points, e.g., *already* and *yet* are taught in the same lesson as the present perfect tense.

We believe, however, that the sequencing of patterns is not as important as the use and practice the students put these patterns to, and the list should only be regarded as a guideline and a checklist.

We would like at this point to make a brief detour. Throughout the book, there are references to beginning, intermediate, and advanced students. There is a wide discrepancy in the general definitions of these levels, and the reader should be familiar with the criteria we use in assigning students to particular levels. We use standardized test scores as follows:

Level	TOEFL examination	Michigan examination
Beginning	250-350	0-60
Intermediate	350-450	60-75
Advanced	450-	75-

Very beginning students are just that, monolingual in the mother tongue; beginning students in general correspond roughly with the end of a first year college language class in ability. Intermediate students are perfectly capable of getting around in the target language culture, they can do brief speeches, and they can do extensive reading. They still make many, many mistakes, they have a limited vocabulary, and their pronunciation often leaves much to be desired. Test scores for advanced students are much less indicative than they are for beginning and intermediate students. Students with a TOEFL score of 500 and above may come from a country where English is taught through reading; they will need practice in listening comprehension and speaking skills of the same type as the intermediate students although the homework and assignments may use more sophisticated English. Similarly, they may come from a nonreading culture, and be poor readers although fairly fluent in English. We often use the same basic procedures for intermediate and advanced students and we have no course exclusively in grammar at that level; what grammar they need depends on the skill they need

improvement in and is incorporated in the lessons on speaking, reading, and writing.

A CLASSIFICATION OF STRUCTURAL PATTERN DRILLS

Introduction

The following classification, previously outlined in two articles by Paulston[1], is based on the following assumptions: (1) there are (at least) two levels of language—mechanical skill and thought; (2) these levels correlate with Katona's[2] two methods of learning—a "direct practice" and a "method of understanding," or as Rivers paraphrases "a mechanical level and a level which involves understanding of how one is learning and the essential elements of what is being learned;"[3] and (3) language learning as the formation of language habits is not mutually exclusive with the establishment of rule-governed behavior but rather the two methods are complementary. And finally, what is more an observation than an assumption, in courses whose objective is the oral use of language for communicative purposes, the methods of learning must reflect that objective; students should spend maximum time in the actual production of the target language where the ultimate purpose of every activity ultimately is communication.[4]

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[1] Christina Bratt Paulston, "Structural Pattern Drills: A Classification," *Foreign Language Annals* IV, no. 2 (December 1970): 187-193; and "The Sequencing of Structural Pattern Drills," *TESOL Quarterly* 5, no. 3 (September 1971): 197-208.

[2] G. Katona, *Organizing and Memorizing* (New York: 1940).

[3] Wilga Rivers, *The Psychologist and The Foreign Language Learner* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), p. 50.

[4] The relative merits of these assumptions may be defended either by theoretical speculation (which is outside the scope of this book) or by empirical investigation. The reader is referred to the dissertations of Sandra Savignon, "Study of the Effect of Training in Communicative Skills as Part of a Beginning College French Course on Student Attitude and Achievement in Linguistic and Communicative Competence" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana, Campaign, 1971), Robert A. Morrey, "The Effects of Sequential Oral Drilling with Second Conjugation French Verbs upon Student Performance" (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1970); Elizabeth G. Joiner, "Communicative Versus Noncommunicative Language Practice in the Teaching of Beginning College French: A Comparison of Two Treatments (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1974). All three are experimental investigations and support the view expressed here.

The implications for the classroom are simple: a grammar lesson should consist of grammatical rules which explain the particularities of the structural pattern to be learned plus a series of drills from a mechanical level to a communicative in order to give the students optimum practice in language production.

Paulston argues that there are three classes of drills: mechanical, meaningful, and communicative, and that these can be distinguished from each other if they are analyzed in terms of (1) expected terminal behavior, (2) degree of response control, (3) type of learning process involved and (4) criteria for the selection of utterance response.

Mechanical Drills

A mechanical drill is defined as a drill where there is complete control of the response, where there is only one correct way of responding. Because of the *complete* control, students need not even understand the drill although they respond correctly, as in the first Spanish drill below. Repetition drills are the most extreme example of this class of drill. Substitution drills also lend themselves particularly well to this.

There are two kinds of mechanical drills, mechanical memorizing drills and mechanical testing drills.

The concord of person and noun in Spanish serves as a good example of a memorizing drill:

```
Model:  andar (tú)        R:    andas
        cantar (tú)             cantas
Continue the drill:
Cue:    trabajar (tú)     R:
        pasar (tú)
        hablar (tú)
```

The purpose of this drill is primarily to help students memorize the pattern with virtually no possibility for mistakes, and even the reader who does not know Spanish can complete the drill above correctly.

But as soon as we change the cues to include all persons, that is, to change the cues so as to require an answer of more than minimal items; we require that students know all the verb endings for the *ar* verbs, present tense, and by their responses we know whether they

do or not. The response depends on the conscious choices of the students:

```
Model:  andar (tú)      R: andas
        cantar (Vd.)    R: canta
Continue the drill:
Cue:    trabajar (él)   R:
```

Only those students who have previously memorized these patterns can complete the drill successfully.

Mechanical testing drills not only provide feedback for the teacher, but they also help students organize the information they have learned into wholes or contrasts. Students who have only drilled "I am" separate from "He is" may never realize they belong to the same structure. Similarly, without a testing drill, students might never realize that "I'm walking" and "I'm going to walk" are different structures.

The difference between a mechanical memorizing drill and a mechanical testing drill lies in the ability of the students to respond, again depending on how well they have memorized certain patterns; but understanding what they are saying is not a necessary requisite. It is perfectly possible to supply a verb with a correct ending, for example, in Spanish, without necessarily knowing what the verb means. Given the cue: *gratar* (*nosotros*), any docile student will respond with *gratamos*; yet the student, no more than we, will know the meaning of that nonsense word. The ability to practice mechanical drills without necessarily understanding them is an important criterion in distinguishing them from meaningful drills.

Transformation drills may be mechanical:

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John kicked the door.
The door was kicked by John.
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All students need memorize is the structural change, and they can complete such a drill without understanding exactly what they are saying. Response drills, which so frequently masquerade as communication, can be some of the easiest mechanical drills for students:

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Which would you prefer, tea or coffee?
                        wine or beer?
                        nectar or ambrosia?
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The student will answer *ambrosia* without the foggiest notion of what it is.

The expected terminal behavior of such drills is the automatic use of manipulative patterns and is commensurate with the assumption that language learning is habit formation. It involves the classical Skinnerian method of learning through instrumental conditioning by immediate reinforcement of the right response. Learning takes place through analogy and allows transfer of identical patterns. This is clearly the mechanical level of learning, and this class of drills provides practice in mechanical associations such as adjective-noun agreement, verb endings, question forms, and the like. This is a very necessary step in language learning; and as long as the student is learning, he won't mind the mechanical nature of the drill. The teacher needs to remember that students can drill without understanding and *to make sure that in fact they do understand*. Because of the response control, it is eminently suited for choral drills.

The student knows how to select the utterance response on the basis of the teacher's cue, be it oral or pictorial; but the teacher is the sole criterion for supplying the correct response. This becomes an important distinction between meaningful and communicative drills.

Meaningful Drills

If the teacher is unsure of whether a drill is mechanical or meaningful (the borders are not completely clear), it can be tested with a nonsense word.

Example:

			I walk to school every day.
Cue:	run	Response:	I run to school every day.
Teacher:	skip	Student:	I skip to school every day.
Teacher:	somersault	Student:	I somersault to school every day.
Teacher:	boing	Student:	I boing to school every day.

Complexity of pattern is not an issue.

Example: John kicked the door.
The door was kicked by John.

Cue	Response
The dog bit the woman.	The woman was bitten by the dog.
The boing boinged the boing.	The boing was boinged by the boing.