

Donn Byrne

English Teaching Extracts

- How we Learn a Foreign Language I Morris
- Oral Grammar Drills J Derrick
- The Role of Communication F L Billows
- Practice of Correct Language C H R King
- The Need for a Textbook F L Billows
- The Place of Grammar A W Frisby
- The Learning of Language S D Corder
- Speech as a Basic Consideration I Morris
- The Structural-situational Approach J Derrick
- The Importance of Silent Reading P Gurrey
- Applied Linguistics and Generative Grammar S Saporta
- Habit-forming and Habit-adapting H E Palmer
- Talking time and Listening time M West
- The Situation of the Pupil F L Billows
- The Challenge of Oral Drills R Hok
- First Steps in Composition L R H Chapman
- Activity in the English Lesson L R H Chapman
- Structure: Making Automatic the Use of the Devices C C Fries
- Objectives and Processes of Language Teaching C F Hockett
- An Oral Approach to Language Learning E W Stevick
- Applied Linguistics in the Classroom W G Moulton
- Language Learning P Stravinska
- The Basis of Speech in Listening F L Billows
- Pronunciation D Abercrombie
- Reading Aloud W F Mackay
- Interest H E Palmer
- Translation F G French
- Grading W R Lee
- Translation I Morris
- Introductory H E Palmer
- Phonetics D Abercrombie

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Introduction

This collection of extracts from books and articles on English-language teaching is intended to serve two main purposes:

(i) As an introductory study of language-teaching texts for those teachers who are not able to read books on the subject with any ease. Many teachers overseas, both those following courses in training colleges and those studying on their own, experience quite serious difficulties when they first come to read books on English teaching: so much so that many fail to get beyond the first two or three chapters of any book they set out to read. Their difficulties are those of structure, vocabulary and style as well as content. Such teachers have to be convinced that with a little application these difficulties can be overcome. This might be achieved by the careful study of a single text, although this will not serve to accustom the teacher to the variety of styles which may be encountered in discussions on English-language teaching. A number of extracts, each of a few pages in length, is better suited to this purpose because they can be studied intensively, so that the teacher not only assimilates the grammar and vocabulary and becomes used to a variety of styles, but also acquires some familiarity with a topic or some aspect of a topic. On completion of each passage, therefore, he should have some sense of achievement. Difficulties of structure and vocabulary will be gradually overcome by careful study, and to stimulate this, to encourage the teacher to read the passage carefully (and, if necessary, read it again), questions have been set at the end of each extract. These cover the main points of the passage and invite the teacher to appraise what he has been reading and in some instances to compare the views of one author with those of another. In this way, then, the teacher not only strengthens his knowledge of the language, thereby acquiring confidence to read books on English teaching, but he also builds up some knowledge

of the subject as he goes along. It must be emphasized, however, that this book is intended only as an introduction to the study of books on English teaching, and that while it covers many of the important aspects of methodology, it does not aim at completeness. The purpose of the book will be fulfilled only if the teacher goes on to the study of entire texts.

(ii) For use in discussion groups. Combined with demonstration lessons and practice teaching, the discussion period is often a more effective way of teaching methodology than through formal lectures, especially for teachers who have had some practical experience. To yield good results, however, the discussion period needs some preparation, otherwise the participants have little to offer, and some framework for discussion, otherwise there is some risk that the tutor in charge will monopolize much of the talking time, if only in an effort to get the members of the group to talk. It is hoped that these extracts will meet both these needs. After a topic has been selected, the members of the group should be asked to study the relevant extract beforehand and to prepare for oral discussion the questions set on it. At the beginning of the period the tutor may wish to read through the extract, making any explanatory comments of his own, or he may prefer simply to give an outline of the author's views or ask a member of the group to do so. Although the discussion may centre round the questions set on the text, it is hoped that it will not be entirely restricted to these as the trainees acquire a greater knowledge of the subject and as their confidence in their ability to contribute to the discussion grows. Furthermore, although the questions on the text are intended primarily for oral work, the tutor may wish from time to time to set some of them as written exercises, especially those which are more general in scope (marked with an asterisk in the text). This can be useful preparation for an examination, as a preliminary step to the answering of questions which call for longer answers.

The uses to which it is intended that this book should be put are therefore quite restricted. The compiler himself, in his experience of working for a number of years both with teacher-trainers and teachers whose own command of English fell short

of the demands which their instruction imposed on them, found these extracts of use on courses which varied in duration from three months to a full year.

The extracts come from both British and American sources and have been selected from books and articles published in most cases over the last ten years. The average length of each is about two pages. Some extracts have been slightly abridged, but none has been simplified since this would defeat the purpose of the book. It is recognized, however, that both the language and content of some of the passages will give more difficulty than others: this is most likely to be the case with the first fifteen extracts, which deal with the theoretical aspects of language learning and teaching. The teacher who is working by himself is advised to leave these until later and to start off with one of the passages further on in the book dealing with some of the more practical aspects of teaching. Where the book is being used as the basis of group discussions, the tutor in charge should select the passages in the order best suited to the ability and needs of his class.

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Introductory

If we asked a hundred different language-teachers to design what each considered an ideal course or textbook, the result at the present day would certainly be a hundred different courses. They would differ in every conceivable way; most of them would differ from the others fundamentally. This would prove that the art in question is in a very early stage; it would prove that few or no fundamental principles are generally recognized. If, however, at some date in the distant future we were to make the same request, restricting our invitation to those who will have made a special study of the subject, to those who will have been striving towards perfection, we should probably find no great degree of diversity in the treatment; we should see the converging tendency at work, and should gather that the fundamental principles were beginning to stand out and to be respected. In the yet more distant future the answer to our request might take the form of a hundred manuscripts, all essentially the same, and differing only in non-essential details: we should then know that the fundamental principles had been established and had been accepted, but by that time none but experts in the subject will ever venture to carry out such highly technical work.

HE Palmer

The Principles of Language Study (p 35). First published in 1921.

1 How a Child Learns its Mother Tongue

What, then, are the ordinary methods by which a child first learns his native language? We may deduce them from observation of very small children, or even older children who are 'picking up' a language in a region where it is spoken.

- 5 (a) The names of objects, actions, and qualities are learnt by close association of name and object, etc. What is worn on the head is a *hat*, quick movement of the feet is *running*, a certain colour is *red*. There is no other word for the child to think of with precisely the same meaning. *Hat* is not a translation. Even if
10 in the early stages it is confused with *cap*, the child is not translating *hat* into *cap*. He is thinking from object to name. Similarly, the child who is becoming bi-lingual does not translate: he merely learns another name for an object. For him, *hat* is not equivalent to *chapeau*, but one object is either *hat*
15 or *chapeau* according to the way in which he is speaking.
- (b) Learning is by the ear, not the eye. The child associates an object, etc., with a combination of sounds, not with a picture of a written word in his brain.
- (c) Although names are at first learnt separately, the child rarely
20 hears them separately, and quickly learns to use them with other words in groups as he hears them – *Put your hat on; take your hat off; here's your green hat*, etc. New sound combinations which are learnt are fitted appropriately into such groups (which we call collocations), – *Put your shoes on; take your*
25 *coat off; here's your straw hat*. The number of these is comparatively small as against the number of separate words known and used.

Thus while different environments may bring about great differences in vocabulary, the collocations are constant. A boy
30 from a farm knows many words which would not be recognized by a boy from a fishing village or a big city, and vice versa, because each has to know the names of objects and actions unfamiliar to the others. Yet each can speak English without hesitation, for he knows, and uses automatically, the various group forms into
35 which all words must go.

- (d) A very large proportion of the names learnt come to be known

- in association with some action. A child looks at a thing, points to it, touches it, pushes it, eats it, runs to it, plays with it, etc.
- 40 There is little that is abstract in the work. There is nothing at all corresponding to the *hat* = *chapeau* process.
- (e) The child makes hundreds of mistakes, but he is being constantly corrected by the people around, and corrects himself through perception of his own faulty imitation. If he learns to
- 45 speak incorrectly, the cause is the incorrectness of what is heard or a foolish imitation of his own mistakes.
- (f) All the time there is a gentle form of compulsion. The child is filled with various desires which, in order to be satisfied, must be expressed in speech.
- 50 (g) When a child first learns to speak he benefits from a large number of teachers. Every person with whom he comes into contact, and everything he sees around, assists in teaching the language. There is no time-limit; the child is learning all the time he is awake, not for a few hours a week only. And
- 55 there are no holidays during which he can forget much of what has been learnt.
- (h) Constant revision goes on of what has been learnt. The same sounds are being associated with the same objects, the same sound-groups are being heard; not a dozen, but hundreds and
- 60 thousands of times. The process is continued until there is no conscious effort of memory, and association of objects and ideas with the appropriate sounds becomes automatic.
- (i) The learning process is full of variety and is never wearisome. It is as interesting as life itself. In fact the child learns as he
- 65 plays, and his playmates are among his teachers.
- (j) The language he is being taught naturally is living speech, the language of everyday conversation. It is not reading or writing, and it is only literary forms to the small extent to which they may be used in speech by educated people. A
- 70 knowledge of written forms is built up on the foundation of speech. One may be able, like bi-lingual children or some foreigners, to speak a language perfectly without being able to read or write a syllable of it.

EV Gatenby

English as a Foreign Language (pp 14-16)(1944)

1. The author summarizes his ten points as follows:

- (a) Association of name with object.
- (b) Learning by sound, not sight.

- (c) Learning common groups of sounds.
 - (d) Learning through action.
 - (e) Constant correction.
 - (f) Compulsion.
 - (g) Maximum number of teachers, amount of time and equipment.
 - (h) Constant revision.
 - (i) Variety and interest.
 - (j) Learning speech only.
- (i) Expand these headings, as far as possible without reference to the text.
- (ii) Discuss any points which you think can be further expanded or with which you do not agree.
2. Discuss the relevance of these ideas for teaching at the beginning stage.
 3. Give further examples of the points mentioned in (a), (c) and (d).
 4. Compare these observations with *Objectives and Processes of Language Teaching* (pp 19–23). List the points which both writers make.

2 The Learning of Language

When someone learns a language, he is not, properly speaking, gaining a knowledge of his environment. Language is not knowledge, but a set of skills. The teaching of it, therefore, must be different from the teaching of a 'content' subject like science. . . .

- 5 Of course, it is possible to study language or languages in the way we study history or geography or a science—as a 'content' subject, a set of concepts of varying degrees of abstraction. This is the way a linguist studies a language, so that he can analyze and describe it. This, too, requires skill, but it is the sort of skill a
10 scientist needs rather than the language learner; there is many an academic linguist who is capable of giving an excellent description of a language in which he is only a mediocre performer.

The skills of performance and those of description are different, and the most intensive descriptive study of a language does not
15 necessarily lead to an ability to communicate in or understand that language. It may, in certain circumstances, particularly with highly educated adult learners, help to do so, but it is not a necessary or intrinsic part of learning a language. This is shown by the fact that all people without exception learn to communicate
20 by means of their mother tongue with no, or, at the best, very little teaching *about* their own language.

Most aspects of everyday behaviour, including language, are learnt to a high degree of skill without any formal teaching. We have all learned, for example, to eat, walk and sleep without
25 having been instructed in the physiological, psychological or anatomical aspects of those activities. We were taught them as skills, as behaviour, but not as a body of knowledge.

Languages, then, can be learnt without the learner being given a linguistic description of the language, and learning a language
30 is learning a set of skills. This much is now becoming generally accepted, though not yet always acted upon.

There was once a 'method' of teaching languages which got the name 'The Natural Method'. The theory underlying it was that
35 if we could learn a second language in the way we learned our mother tongue, all our problems would be at an end. This notion has been largely abandoned, not because it was untrue, but because the method was impossible. Even if we could succeed in

recreating, in the case of a second language, the emotional environment and developmental conditions in which an infant learns
40 its first language, we should be dealing with merely *another* first language, or second mother tongue, not a foreign or second language. Millions of people in the world do learn a second mother tongue in this way; bi-linguals are common in many societies.

It is precisely because we cannot reproduce the situation of
45 mother-tongue learning in all or even most of its aspects when teaching languages to older children or adults that we have a second language problem at all.

But when this has been said, it must not thereafter be assumed that we cannot learn anything useful for second language teaching
50 from a study of the way a child learns its mother tongue. Indeed it is from the increased interest on the part of linguists and psychologists in this aspect of child development that a clearer understanding of what the linguistic skills are has developed.

S Pit Corder

The Visual Element in Language Teaching (pp 5-7) (1966)

1. The teaching of language must be different from the teaching of a 'content' subject.
 - (i) What reason is given for this?
 - (ii) Discuss some of the ways in which the teaching of a language will differ from the teaching of a 'content' subject.
2. '*The most intensive descriptive study of a language does not necessarily lead to an ability to communicate in or understand that language.*' (lines 14-16)
In the light of this statement, estimate the value of teaching grammar to the language learner.
3. Compare the last four paragraphs of this extract with the passage *How a Child Learns its Mother Tongue* (pp 9-10). Which of the observations made in the latter passage can be usefully applied to second language teaching?

3 Language Learning

What do we know about language learning in humans? We know that all normal human infants are born with the potentiality of acquiring language. Grossly subnormal intelligence or defective hearing can prevent an individual child from realizing this potentiality, but in the typical case a human child acquires the ability to perform in the two basic language skills of understanding speech and speaking understandably, and the language in which he so performs depends on his experience during the first two or three years of his life.

- 10 Heredity and race are irrelevant to the infant, except where physical characteristics affect such features as voice quality. The child of Finnish-speaking parents inherits no inborn facility for learning to understand and speak Finnish rather than some other language; he will learn the language that is being used around
15 him, no matter what that language is. Of course, it is usual for the child to hear the language of its parents, which accounts for the term 'mother tongue'; but it is by no means necessary or universal that it should be the parents he hears.

It is useful to remember that the notion of language is irrelevant
20 to the baby. He is assailed from birth by a kaleidoscopic variety of sensations, some of them visual, some auditory, some tactile. The process of growing older provides him with a store of memories, memories of the sequence in which some of these sensations were perceived, and memories of which sensations habitually go
25 with others. The baby early discovers that some of the sounds it hears are made by itself; there is a stage of development in which the baby rehearses the process of noticing that it has stopped making a noise, then starting to make it again, then stopping once more. Later, the noticing, like the sound produc-
30 tion, becomes steadily more sophisticated. Instead of somewhat random babbling with a repertoire that is supposed to include all the sounds found in all the languages of the world and some that are to be found in no language, the child selects out some of the sounds and sound-sequences that it has noticed in its own
35 vicinity and imitates those, practising and repeating, and imitating his own efforts until a semi-deliberate control of speech production gradually becomes more and more automatic. These

habits are largely *phonetic*, but as the child grows older he begins to organize his speech into patterns of grammar, to acquire a
 40 stock of items, lexical and grammatical, to operate in these patterns, and to fit his speech to the appropriate situations. He makes many mistakes, and it takes a long time before his command of the whole apparatus of language is sure and acceptable, but the process of habit-making is similar for all children, in all societies.
 45 This process of acquiring linguistic habits is familiar to most people, and there is little we could add which is not either common knowledge, or accessible to everyday observation. It is worth making one point, nevertheless: namely that the young child knows, and needs to know, no linguistics or phonetics. When we
 50 acquire our primary language, we do so by learning how to behave in situations, not by learning rules about what to say. Whatever the place of phonetics or linguistics may be in language *teaching*, the formulation of linguistic statements is by no means essential to language learning.

MAK Halliday, A McIntosh and P Stevens
The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching (pp 178–179) (1964)

1. 'The notion of language is irrelevant to the baby.' (lines 19–20)
 - (i) Summarize the stages which can be identified in the learning of one's mother tongue.
 - (ii) Why do the authors say that the notion of language is irrelevant to the baby?
2. 'When we acquire our primary language, we do so by learning how to behave in situations.' (lines 49–51)
 What is the significance of this observation for learning a second language?

For further reference:

1. W F Mackey *Language Teaching Analysis* (Longman). Ch. 4 Section 1 Learning the First Language (pp 100–107).
2. P Stevens *Spoken Language* (Longman). Ch. 3 Learning a Language (pp 43–50).

4 How we Learn a Foreign Language

Although we have made considerable progress in the linguistic understanding of problems in learning a foreign language, we know very little of the psychology (emotional, memory, process, order) of learning. Teaching methods have been largely the collected practice and teaching habits of particular teachers who reacted to the memory of their own experience in learning, the example of their own teachers, and the fashion which seemed prevalent or attractive in the history of language teaching. It would be interesting and profitable to analyze the psychology of language learning underlying each of the more widely known methods, regardless of whether or not its author ever consciously worked out the psychology of language learning underlying his views.

In the grammar-translation method, for example, the assumption is that the student learns by memorizing rules of correct grammar and by translating from one language to the other. This learning assumption is woefully incomplete; that is, it says nothing specifically about how the student learns anything in particular.

Regardless of method, we need to know the elements to be learned, the order in which they are learned, and other matters of importance.

1. Elements. Among the general elements to be learned there is the linguistic form to be produced and heard, to be remembered, and to be established as a habit at the speed of speech for production and recognition in whatever environments it fits and in which it is permitted. There is also the meaning to be grasped, limited, remembered and established as a habit at normal speaking delivery and/or effective reading speed.

2. Order of learning. Sometimes a student learns a form—a word or a construction—before learning its meaning. Later, coming in contact with the same form in a situation which makes sense to him or completes the partial sense which he could not accept previously, he discovers that finally he knows what this form means. In general this is a case in which the student already knows the meaning as part of his experience, and the final clarification is only a matter of associating this form with the meaning he