EDWARD M. STACK

The Language Laboratory and Modern Language Teaching

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Preface

This book is designed to assist language teachers and students in training to become language teachers. It provides specific descriptions of techniques and procedures for the classroom, language laboratory, and collateral activities. Particular attention is given to the beginning and intermediate stages of instruction. The audiolingual approach, combined with the best features of the "traditional" approach, is the guiding philosophy of the presentation. Practical guidance, rather than philosophical argumentation, is the aim of this text.

The optimum sequence for presentation is carefully observed throughout. The sequence is HEARING-SPEAKING-READING-WRITING on the high school and university level; it is reduced to HEAR-SAY-SEE in elementary school language programs, known as FLES (Foreign Language in the Elementary School).

High school and university programs for the teaching of beginning and intermediate language do not differ appreciably; the introduction of the language is basically the same from the teacher's point of view. However, the earlier a student begins his language study, the better it will be for him. Generally the same procedures apply to all age groups. Elementary school programs will be able to use many of these procedures, except that reading and writing will be deferred, and vocabulary will be kept very concrete and simple.

Notice that there are problems and exercises for each chapter.

These are grouped together at the end of the book. Students preparing for a teaching career, as well as teachers learning laboratory techniques, will profit by applying their ingenuity and imagination to solving the practical problems posed.

This text includes both teaching techniques and administrative and mechanical techniques relating to the operation of a language laboratory. Since the development of special language-teaching machinery, the teacher must be prepared to administer the functioning of a laboratory. Only thus can full advantage be taken of the advances that have been made in the realm of electronic and audiovisual aids specially designed for language teaching.

Much progress has been made in equipment and in methodology during the years that have elapsed since the first edition of this book was written. Practically all publishers scrupulously attend to the duty of providing audiolingual tapes with their elementary and intermediate language texts. A spirit of co-operation pervades the groups of producers of language learning materials. Committees of teachers work on the preparation of drills, visual aids, tests, and texts. Psychologists and artists join in to contribute from their special fields. Electronics engineers strive to design laboratory equipment that will do what the teachers desire. The television and motion picture industries co-operate in the effort.

Some research has been carried on to probe the efficacy of the language laboratory. The results have generally borne out what common sense would lead one to believe: (1) the more one actively practices speaking and hearing the language, the better one becomes at speaking and understanding it; (2) the more one actively practices reading and writing, the better one becomes at *that;* (3) if one spends more time with audiolingual work than with graphic work, one is better at speaking and understanding the spoken language; (4) if one spends more time with graphic skills than with the audiolingual skills, one becomes better at reading and writing; (5) concentration on *one* type of skill leads to lopsided accomplishment. And so on. The traditional methods were (and are) effective in teaching the graphic skills of reading, writing, and translating. It is reasonable to retain these useful and long-developed methods to attain the results for which they are known. The audiolingual method, including the intensive

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practice provided by the laboratory, has been successful in imparting the speaking and hearing skills. The best techniques from each method should be applied at appropriate times with advantage, for they complement and supplement each other.

The function of language is to communicate ideas. When we speak the same language as someone else, that common language is a force for unity and sympathy on every level—from individuals and families to national and ethnic groups. When two businessmen are able to agree readily and completely, we hear one of them say of the other, "Jones talks my language." We are, on the other hand, suspicious, fearful, and hostile when confronted with strangers speaking an unknown language. When surrounded by hundreds of people speaking, let us say, Bantu, we would greet with enthusiasm another English speaker—though we might have little else in common with him. The inability to communicate can be a frightening thing, and until we are placed in a situation where we cannot make our thoughts and wishes known because of a difference in language, we do not realize how much we value this ability.

Even within a language there are social and dialectical differences that arouse fear and distrust. It is a universal human trait to shun the unusual and unfamiliar. It is easy to imagine that the problem is magnified greatly when a totally different language (rather than merely a social or regional dialect of the *same* language) is involved.

Language and culture are inextricably woven together, and a comprehension of one without the other is impossible. The logic of one language is not necessarily that of another, yet both may lead to the same conclusion. The American student who learns that a week in French is referred to as *huit jours* (eight days) thinks that the calendar must have been overhauled, until he learns that the French count from Monday to Monday and *include the day on which the count starts.* Or again, the method of numbering the floors of a building is a part of the culture and logic inherent in the language, and a translation of *troisième étage* as "third floor" would lead to wasted time, unless the hearer knew that this was the fourth floor under the United States system. It would likewise seem ridiculous for a French child to shout, "Hurrah! It's Thursday!" unless the hearer knew that

Thursday is a school holiday in France, and that this exclamation is the equivalent of the American, "Hurrah! It's Saturday!" These are examples of manifestations of culture through language, and without understanding the one, the understanding of the other cannot exist.

Language and culture should be taught together. Through this instruction we gain tolerance and understanding of another point of view, another system of logical reasoning, and another texture of civilization. Even where this insight does not lead to acceptance or agreement, at least it gives us the knowledge necessary for an understanding of the other culture and its members.

Objectives of Modern Language Teaching. The objective which may be set for language teaching is to enable students to understand, speak, read, and write the foreign language with native speed; intonation, pronunciation, accent, and fluency of speech should be that of an educated native speaker in normal conversation. This objective is difficult to realize fully. There must be good co-operation among students, parents, and educators, as well as good motivation and a reasonable degree of native ability on the part of the students. When these conditions exist we can achieve considerable success if:

1. Language study is begun at an early age.
2. Continuity of instruction is maintained over a period of years.
3. The student is brought as completely as possible into contact with the language.
4. Structural linguistic methods are used to systematize language patterns and speech, thus shortening the learning process and reducing the haphazard mode of learning characteristic of the way in which one's native language is learned (over a period of time).

The best time for a child to start learning a second language is in elementary school; deferring this study to high school or even college is undesirable. Likewise, a break in instruction—omitting study of the language, once started—of an academic year or even of a semester, will seriously set back the progress of a young student. Lessons must be systematically pursued, and parental encouragement and assistance should be enlisted.

The FLES (Foreign Language in the Elementary School) program is an organized step in the direction of starting children early in the language learning process. The interest of the PTA and the co-operation of educational administrators have enabled language teachers in many communities to set up very successful programs for elementary school children. Los Angeles and San Diego, among many other cities, have extensive FLES programs; many universities conduct FLES workshops to train language teachers of elementary school children.

Teaching Order of Procedure. The order in which the language skills are presented is HEARING-SPEAKING-READING-WRITING. This sequence makes the student concentrate on the essential feature of language—*sound*—and eliminates reliance on printed words until mastery of sound is achieved.

Reading and writing may lag only a lesson or two behind the audiolingual presentation. It is a matter of judging when the students have thoroughly learned to hear and say a word, so that their pronunciation will not be adversely affected by their seeing the word in print.

The procedure for FLES programs would be reduced to the steps HEAR-SAY-SEE, with writing omitted until about the third year of study or even later.

Audiolingual Drills. To meet the needs of the first two steps—hearing and speaking—pattern drills are used. These pattern drills present various features of the language in a systematic way for the beginner. They consist of a series of examples of a *single* grammatical or pronunciation feature that is new, but include material already learned as part of the phrases presented. Since a pattern is established, the student will soon be making his own statements following the established form. Pattern drills can be easily recorded and used in the language laboratory. Some of the techniques for preparing audiolingual pattern drills will be covered in later chapters.

Classroom Procedures. Classroom instruction and language laboratory drills complement each other. The language laboratory relieves the teacher of endless repetition of patterns, and frees class time for flexible applications of the language. Many of the traditional methods are adaptable here.

Monitoring and Testing. Techniques to test a student's compre-

hension of oral language, and of his ability to express himself immediately, accurately, and with native pronunciation, are somewhat different from those traditionally used. Yet traditional methods can be adapted for some of the audiolingual testing systems. Monitoring and testing form the subject matter of a separate chapter.

Language Laboratories. The most important advance in language teaching efficiency is the language laboratory. The teacher must know something about the physical requirements of a laboratory, how to operate it, how to orient and train students to use it, and what preparations must be made for mechanical use of the laboratory. These are matters to be considered in the first six chapters. Various operations and types of laboratories are first described in their general aspects. Problems of administration and student use are then considered. Next are several chapters concerning the all important matter of audiolingual materials—pattern drills—for the laboratory. What is on the tape must be capable of providing the student with effective practice; the machinery merely provides a means for him to hear the tape. The arrangement of the chapters deals first with the mechanical equipment and its administration; second, with the linguistic and methodological problems. The order is one of increasing importance.

I acknowledge with gratitude the assistance in the preparation of the revised edition of Mr. Sofus Simonsen, Dr. George W. Poland, and Mr. Virgil Miller; and in the present edition the valuable technical and editorial advice of Professor Gary J. Ambert and of G. Benjamin Rush III. Permission to use material was graciously granted me by Instructomatic, Inc., the Revox Corporation, AV Electronics, Inc., and Chester Electronic Laboratories, Inc.

The ideas contained in this text are the cumulative results of some years of experience, so I must also thank my many colleagues in the language field whose ideas I may have assimilated and incorporated here. I hope that this text, being a summary of some of the practical aids in modern language teaching, will serve a useful purpose for teachers (and teachers in training) who need a concise overview of language laboratory methodology.

EDWARD M. STACK
March 1971

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The Language Laboratory and Modern Language Teaching

1

The Language Laboratory

The language laboratory owes its existence to the recognition that the spoken form of language is central to effective communication, and that it should have as large a share in instruction as do written forms. In order to implement this new orientation of language teaching, the textbook (which is essentially graphic) was supplemented by sound recordings of native speakers. The coincidental advent of the tape recorder created a fortuitous juncture of technology and pedagogy. It soon became clear, however, that more was needed than just simple conversations. Carefully structured audiolingual exercises in which the student participated in a controlled way were needed. Thus came into being the audio counterpart of the traditional textbook: the recorded laboratory drill.

From the outset it should be understood that the only realistic purpose of the language laboratory is to provide a convenient means of hearing and responding to audiolingual drills. In the terminology of the computer age, the tapes are the "software," the program which actually produces the results. The electronic equipment ("hardware") that conveys the sound to the student is merely an intermediate agent which allows the tapes to be used conveniently.

No matter how simple or complicated this intervening hardware may be, only the sounds on the tape can ultimately result

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