

THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY
AND TEACHING
OF LANGUAGES

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A REVIEW OF THE FACTORS AND PROBLEMS
CONNECTED WITH THE LEARNING AND
TEACHING OF MODERN LANGUAGES WITH
AN ANALYSIS OF THE VARIOUS METHODS
WHICH MAY BE ADOPTED IN ORDER TO
ATTAIN SATISFACTORY RESULTS

By

HAROLD E. PALMER

LATE ASSISTANT IN THE PHONETICS DEPARTMENT
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

LINGUISTIC ADVISER ATTACHED TO THE JAPANESE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

AUTHOR OF "THE PRINCIPLES OF LANGUAGE STUDY"
ETC.



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DEDICATORY PREFACE

LONDON : *January, 1917*

To MONSIEUR EDOUARD MATHIEU

MY DEAR MATHIEU,

There was once a time, in a past now very remote, when you, Georges Bevernage, and I came together in conference. All three attracted by the same subject and moved by the same impulse, we passed our leisure in examining a particular aspect of what we came to call 'the Linguistic Problem.'

During the course of our long walks in the Hertogenwald Forest and of our wanderings on the Great Moor we would talk of many things : of language and its nature, of the dialects spoken around us, of sounds and spellings, of teaching and learning, of teachers and pupils, of methods good, bad, and indifferent.

They were heart-searching talks, for we were terribly in earnest ; we judged and tested many theories, and found them good or found them wanting.

Our association in matters linguistic continued and developed. At the Société Polyglotte or at the Mutuelle we would preach reforms and carry glad tidings of phonetics, of ergonomics, or of semantics.

We would read Sweet, Jespersen, and Bréal, and comment on what we read, we would discuss the latest articles in *Le Maître Phonétique* and *Modern Language Teaching*. So free from prejudice were we and so open were our minds, that we would accept and reject doctrine of the Direct Method at least once a year.

You will remember our search for the one true standard and universal method the goal that ever seemed so near, and yet which ever proved just beyond our grasp. You will also remember the day when we formulated our conclusion : Ce

n'est pas la méthode qui nous manque ; ce qui nous manque c'est la base même de la méthode. Out of this arose the question, *Does the Science of Linguistic Pedagogy exist?* We regretfully concluded that it did not.

You it was who exhorted me to go seriously to work with a view to laying the foundations on which the science of language-teaching might some day repose. You reminded me of the exceptional facilities that I possessed for research work. You pointed out that I had an unlimited number of all sorts and conditions of pupils upon whom to practise and experiment, that my position gave me full scope and liberty to innovate, to amend, to modify, and to reform, and that I enjoyed a special immunity from inspectors, directors, and objectors in general.

Your advice was good ; I started on an organized series of researches, submitting all sorts of methods to all sorts of tests under experimental conditions. The normal 'preventive' course was differentiated from the special 'corrective' course ; the ergonic method gradually developed, although then without a name ; the replacing of the traditional orthography by the phonetic transcription produced the splendid results that we had foreseen ; three distinct methods of 'conversation drill' resulted in fluency with accuracy ; the respective principles of the 'Microcosm,' of 'Catenizing,' and of 'Substitution' began to stand out clearly, and various types of exercises were designed, each one having its appropriate and distinct function to perform.

Eight or nine years have passed since then ; several times I have been on the point of making known the results of these experiments, but on each occasion I have realized that this would have been a premature step. There were, as you know, gaps in the chain of reasoning, there was a lack of co-ordination between the various parts, there were 'previous questions' still unanswered, and my data were voluminous but not well proportioned.

During all this time your new career deprived me to a large extent of your help and collaboration, but you would still at times listen with a patient ear while I outlined the latest

developments of these many systems of teaching and the results of the latest phase of each. Your shrewd comments served to crystallize into concrete form what had hitherto been nebulous, and your suggestions would inspire me to new activities.

More recently I have been successful in isolating the several factors of which the sum constitutes what we used to call *le désespoir du débutant*. This has resulted in the respective principles of 'Segregation,' 'Passive Work,' and 'Subconscious Comprehension.'

In the meantime, however, the tragic events of August 1914, commencing by the sudden and unexpected irruption of the invaders in the streets of our town, put an end to our association, and, incidentally, deprived me of the documents that I had so laboriously collected. Some months passed before I was able to pick up the threads of the work so dramatically interrupted.

When I did so, it was in another place and with another environment. The conditions were not unfavourable, and I was enabled to gain a first-hand knowledge of linguistic methods as practised in England. What struck me most here was to find such abundant signs of a new spirit in the language-teaching world. The whole atmosphere seems charged with new and healthy ideas; these are spreading sporadically from I do not know how many centres; there is an unmistakable movement toward what we have termed *scientific* and what others term *organized* methods. For the first time in my experience I have the satisfaction and relief to find myself in agreement with a large and increasing number of my contemporaries.

A few months ago I had the pleasure of reviewing a book entitled *How to Learn a Language*.¹ In this the author states and explains those principles to which we gave the names of 'Catenizing,' 'Immediate Fluency,' and 'Substitution.'

In the current number of *Modern Language Teaching*² appears the review of a recent publication. In this most inspiring article (every word of which I enthusiastically endorse) the writer sets forth some of my most cherished ideas. The book ✓

¹ By Thomas F. Cummings, D.D., New York.

² December, 1916. By S. A. Richards.

which is the object of his review¹ enunciates principles in favour of which I have long striven, and exposes some of the identical fallacies which it has been my joy to pillory.

In short, I am confident that we are not far from the day when our aspirations will be realized, and when we shall see, not the one universal-standard method of our earlier dreams, but one universal set of principles from which will be derived a number of methods, each perfectly adapted to the particular end which it is designed to serve.

In a recent letter you ask me for the latest news concerning the work in which you were so interested. You ask whether I have succeeded in correlating the various aspects of the problem in one homogeneous system of linguistic pedagogy. My answer takes the form of the present book. I have been able to reconstruct the body of it from memory, and to augment the original documents by a large quantity of new material, and have finally ventured to submit it as my contribution to the literature of linguistic pedagogy.

I have not been entirely without assistance during this last stage; two friends of mine, Mr A. B. Winnifrith, M.A. (Principal of Clapham Grammar School), and Mr Thomas Beach (Kilburn Grammar School), to whom my most cordial thanks are due for their timely help, have given me some valuable hints and have helped me in many ways. Mr J. E. Mansion (Educational Adviser to the publishers of this book) and others have very kindly helped me considerably in what is to me the intolerable burden of the revision and reading of proofs.

In conclusion, my dear Mathieu, I dedicate to you this volume, in remembrance of the happy period of our first collaboration, as a token of our common interest in an engrossing subject, and as a mark of that sympathy which has always subsisted between us.

HAROLD E. PALMER

¹ *The Teaching of Modern Foreign Languages by the Organised Method*, by Hardress O'Grady.

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SYNOPSIS

In order to facilitate reference, the consecutive numbered paragraphs of this synopsis serve as headings to the consecutive thirty-nine Sections of this book.

PART I: INTRODUCTORY

Section 1.—Does the science of language-study exist? (P. 19.)

Section 2.—Evidence of various kinds shows that this subject has not yet attained the scientific stage, but is so far in the experimental or empirical stage. (P. 19.)

Section 3.—It is time that language-study should be placed on a scientific foundation, and to that effect it would be well to institute a general inquiry into the whole question. (P. 21.)

Section 4.—The results of our inquiry must necessarily be of interest to method-writers, to teachers, and to students. (P. 24.)

PART II: THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE

Section 5.—Language is a series of natural phenomena. (P. 29.)

Section 6.—Language is distinct from the art of literature. (P. 30.)

Section 7.—Language consists essentially of lexicological units popularly supposed to be *words*, but the term *word* is vague and impossible of definition. (P. 32.)

Section 8.—What is called a word generally proves to be but an accident of graphic continuity. (P. 37.)

Section 9.—Let us rather speak of Lexicological Units, and

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note that they may be Monologs, Polylogs, Miologs, or Algoisms. (P. 89.)

Section 10.—Let us classify these units according to the respective principles of Morphology (with its subdivisions), Semantics, and Ergonics. (P. 42.)

PART III: PRELIMINARY FACTORS OF LINGUISTIC PEDAGOGY

Section 11.—A complete and ideal language method has a fourfold object, and this is to enable the student, in the shortest possible time and with the least effort, so to assimilate the materials of which the foreign language is composed that he is thereby enabled to understand what he hears and reads, and also to express himself correctly both by the oral and written mediums. (P. 47.)

Section 12.—In order to determine the best programme for a given student, we must take into consideration four subjective factors: (a) The student; (b) his previous study of the language; (c) his preliminary equipment; (d) his incentive. (P. 48.)

Section 13.—We must also take into consideration five objective factors: (a) The language to be studied; (b) the orientation of the study; (c) the extent of the study; (d) the degree of the study; (e) the manner of the study. (P. 58.)

PART IV: THE PRINCIPLES OF LINGUISTIC PEDAGOGY

When we are in possession of full information concerning the student and his aim we may prescribe for him an appropriate programme of study. This programme will be drawn up more or less in accordance with a series of principles which we may term *the Principles of Linguistic Pedagogy*. (P. 71.)

Section 14.—*The Fourfold Aim of the Student.* In all but special cases the ultimate aim of the student is presumed to be fourfold—namely,

- (a) The understanding of the language as spoken by natives.

- (b) The understanding of the language as written by natives.
- (c) The speaking of the language as spoken by natives.
- (d) The writing of the language as written by natives. (P. 71.)

Section 15.—Segregation. In order to exclude confusion and misunderstanding, during the initial period of conscious study the phonetic, orthographic, etymological, semantic, and ergonic aspects of language must be segregated from each other and taught independently. In the process of subconscious study, and in the later periods of conscious study, such segregation is neither possible nor desirable. (P. 72.)

Section 16.—Active v. Passive Work. Study may be active or passive. The young child only comes to speak his native language after an 'incubation period,' during which he has passively received and stored up in his mind a considerable quantity of linguistic material. The same process may profitably be employed by the adult person in the study of foreign languages. (P. 75.)

Section 17.—Semanticizing (i.e. the conveying of meanings). There are four different manners or modes of conveying to the pupil the meaning of a given unit.

- (A) By material association—i.e. associating the unit with that which is designated by it.
- (B) By translation—i.e. associating the unit with the equivalent native unit.
- (C) By definition—i.e. associating the unit with its definition or paraphrase (i.e. its polylogical equivalent).
- (D) By context—i.e. giving examples of its use. (P. 77.)

Section 18.—Learning by Heart (i.e. memorizing or catenizing). Learning by heart is the basis of all linguistic study, for every sentence ever uttered or written by anybody has either been learnt by heart in its entirety or else has been composed (consciously or subconsciously) from smaller units, each of which must at one time have been learnt by heart. We may

term *primary matter* all units learnt by heart integrally, and *secondary matter* all units built up or derived by the pupil from *primary matter*. (P. 108.)

Section 19.—Gradation. In order that the pupil may proceed by the line of least resistance, he should pass from the known to the unknown by easy stages, each of which will serve as a preparation for the one immediately following. (P. 119.)

Section 20.—The Microcosm. In order that the pupil may reach the 'point of transition' with the least delay, the vocabulary must be selected with the greatest care and perspicacity; it should include none but the commonest and most characteristic units, representing the most important ergonic classes. A vocabulary of this nature may be termed the Quintessence or the Microcosm of the language. This Microcosm should be formed and organized systematically in accordance with and as a compromise between the principles of Frequency, Ergonic Combination, Concreteness, Proportion, and General Expediency. (P. 122.)

Section 21.—Subconscious Comprehension. The pupil's powers of subconscious (or immediate) comprehension will be developed concurrently with his conscious study of the microcosm, and quite independently of the matter contained therein. (P. 131.)

PART V: AN IDEAL STANDARD PROGRAMME

Having reviewed the main principles of Linguistic Pedagogy, we will now endeavour to draw up a working programme embodying the conclusions suggested by our inquiry. We will consider as a standard programme that which will prove to be the most suitable for school-children. It will comprise the study of the foreign language (which we will assume to be French) in its oral and written aspects with a view to active and passive use. The whole period of study will be divided into three stages. (P. 138.)

Section 22.—The first or elementary stage, of the duration of at least one term, will consist of :

- (a) Easy exercises in subconscious comprehension.
- (b) Imperative drill.
- (c) Easy articulation exercises.
- (d) Easy exercises in the use of phonetic symbols.
- (e) Simple talks on the five lexicological theories. (P. 138.)

Section 23.—The second or intermediate stage, of the duration of from one to three years (according to the radius of the microcosm), will consist of :

- (a) More advanced exercises in subconscious comprehension.
- (b) Articulation and fluency exercises.
- (c) The assimilation of primary matter by means of various catenizing devices.
- (d) The production of secondary matter by means of a large number of varied exercises based on etymology, semantics, and ergonomics.

During this stage the traditional spelling will be introduced and taught by means of various types of orthoepic exercises. (P. 168.)

Section 24.—The third or advanced stage, of the duration of from one to three years, will complete the scholastic training of the pupil. It will consist of :

- (a) Subconscious work (rapid reading, mental and oral ; listening to talks, stories, and lectures).
- (b) Free composition (descriptions of objects, pictures, and events).
- (c) Free translation (French into English and English into French).
- (d) Conversation.
- (e) Systematic study of texts. (P. 198.)

Section 25.—We may append here a comprehensive and descriptive list of most of the types of exercises which will be found of use during the three stages. While many of them are suitable for work in the class-room, they will generally

be utilized as material for homework and for private study. (P. 207.)

PART VI: SPECIAL PROGRAMMES

Section 26.—In that part of this book devoted to the Preliminary Factors of Linguistic Pedagogy, we have seen that no one programme can possibly be ideally suitable for all classes of students; hence, in addition to the Standard Programme that we have just described, we must be prepared to draw up Special Programmes. *Limited Programmes* of various types are designed to meet the special requirements of those whose aim is less than the four aspects of a given language. (P. 225.)

Section 27.—A *Documentary Programme* is designed to meet the special requirements of those whose aim is not the assimilation of a language in any or all of its aspects, but a documentary knowledge only. (P. 228.)

Section 28.—*Corrective Programmes* are designed to meet the special requirements of those who have previously studied the language in so disproportionate a manner that one or more of the four aspects has, or have been, totally or partially neglected, or of those who have previously studied the language in so defective a manner that the unsound knowledge so acquired will have to be converted into sound knowledge. (P. 230.)

PART VII: THE FUNCTIONS OF THE TEACHER

Section 29.—The first qualifications of the expert teacher are a knowledge of the foreign language and of the student's native tongue, and the ability to organize the programme, to choose the appropriate material and the most appropriate means of conveying and of inculcating it. (P. 238.)

Section 30.—Another function of the teacher is to furnish explanations. (P. 243.)

Section 31.—The vehicular language for all explanatory matter should be that which is best known by the student. (P. 249.)

Section 32.—The teacher should foster and encourage the