

## AUDIOLINGUAL and ORAL APPROACH METHODS

This article reviewing the history of language teaching methods at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, provides a background for discussion of contemporary methods and suggests the issues we will refer to in analyzing these methods. From this historical perspective we see that the concerns that have prompted modern method innovations were similar to those that have always been at the centre of discussion on how to teach foreign languages.

Toward the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century many reformers turned their attention to naturalistic principles of language learning, and for this reason they are referred to as advocates of a “natural” method. Scientists who believed in the Natural Method said that a foreign language could be taught without translation or the use of the learner’s native tongue if meaning was conveyed directly through demonstration and action. For example the German scholar F. Franke wrote on the psychological principles of direct association between forms and meanings in the target language and provided a theoretical justification for a monolingual approach to teaching, using mime, demonstration and pictures. These natural language learning principles provided the foundation for what came to be known as the Direct Method which became widely known in the U.S. The Direct Method was quite successful in private language schools, where paying clients had high motivation and the use of native-speaking teachers was the norm.

Although the Direct Method enjoyed popularity in Europe, not everyone had embraced it enthusiastically. They recognized its limitations. It offered innovations at the level of teaching procedures, but lacked a thorough methodological basis. Its main focus was on the exclusive use of the target language in the classroom, but it failed to address many issues that are more

basic. In the 1920s and 1930s applied linguists systematized the principles proposed earlier by the Reform Movement and so laid the foundation for what developed into the British approach to teaching English as a foreign language.

Subsequent developments led to Audiolingualism in the United States and the Oral Approach or Situational language Teaching in Britain.

The audiolingual method had an interesting background. In 1929 a reading-based approach to foreign language teaching was recommended for use in American schools and colleges. This emphasized teaching the comprehension of texts. Teachers taught from books containing short reading passages in the foreign language, preceded by lists of vocabulary. Rapid silent reading was the goal, but in practice teachers often discussed the content of the passage in English. Those involved in the teaching of English as a second language in the United States between the two world wars used either a modified Direct Method approach, a reading-based approach or a reading-oral approach. During the same period British applied linguists developed approximately a similar method where there was little attempt to treat language content systematically. Sentence patterns and grammar were introduced at the whim of the textbook writer. There was no standardization of the vocabulary or grammar. Neither was there a consensus on what grammar, sentence pattern and vocabulary were most important for beginning, intermediate, on advanced learners.

But the entry of the United States into World War II had a significant effect on language teaching in America. To supply the U.S. government with personnel who were fluent in German, French, Italian, Chinese, Japanese and other languages, and who could work as interpreters, code- room assistants, and translators, it was necessary to set up a special language-training program. The government commissioned American universities to develop foreign language programs for military personnel. Thus the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) was established in 1942. Thirty-five American universities were involved in the program by the beginning of

1943. These field studies of languages involved the school of structural, or descriptive linguistics. Language teaching based on this school of thought operated on the following premises:

1. Language is primarily an oral phenomenon. Written language is a secondary representation of speech.

2. Linguistics involves the study of the recurring patterns of the language.

3. The major focus of study is phonology and morphology.

4. Language is acquired through the overlearning of its patterns.

5. All native languages are learned orally before reading ever occurs. Therefore, second languages should be learned in the "*native order*"; listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

6. In learning languages, a student should begin with the patterns of the language rather than with deductive learning of grammatical rules.

This theory was translated into practice in the 1940 s in the Army Specialized Training Program intensive language courses, first taught at the Defense Language Institute. Later this same essential methodology was to dominate academic programs in the country in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Audio-lingual Method, also known as the Aural-Oral, Functional Skills, New Key, or American Method of language teaching was considered a "*scientific*" approach to language teaching. The University of Michigan was the first to develop the first English Language Institute in the United States it specialized in the training of teachers of English as a foreign language and in teaching English as a second language. But Michigan was not the only university in U. S. involved in developing courses and materials for teaching English as a second language.

The most important tenet of structural linguistics was that the primary medium of language is oral: Speech is language. Since many languages do not have a written form and we learn to speak before we learn to read or write, that language is "*primarily what is spoken and only secondary what is*



written" (Brooksn 1964). Thus it was assumed that speech had a priority in language teaching.

Audiolingualism holds that language learning is like other form of learning. Since language is a formal, rule - governed system, it can be formally organized to maximize teaching and learning efficiency. Audio-lingualism thus stressed the mechanistic aspects of language learning and language use.

In many ways the methodology used by U. S. linguistics and language teaching experts at this period sounded similar to the British Oral Approach, although the two traditions developed independently. The British Oral Approach or Situational Language Teaching Method was developed by British applied linguists from the 1930 s to the 1960s. But few language teachers in the 1980 s were familiar with these terms. Even though neither term is commonly used today, the impact of the Oral Approach has been long lasting, and it has shaped the design of many widely used EFL /ESL textbooks, and courses, including many still being used today. One of the most successful ESL courses of recent times, "*Streamline English*" (Hartley and Viney1979), reflects the classic principles of Situational Language Teaching, as do many other widely used series. It is important therefore to understand the principles and practices of the Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching.

British applied linguists in the 1920 s and 1930s began to work out this method. A number of outstanding applied linguists developed the basis for a principled approach to methodology in language teaching. Two of the leaders in this movement were Harold Palmer and A. S. Hornby, two of the most prominent figures in British twentieth-century language teaching. What they attempted was to develop a more scientific foundation for an oral approach to teaching English as a second language. One of the first aspects of method design to receive attention was the role of vocabulary. In the 1920 s and 1930s several large-scale investigations of foreign language vocabulary were undertaken. One of them was Michael West who had examined the role

of English in India in the 1930s. Vocabulary was seen as an essential component of reading proficiency. This was later revised by West and published in 1953 as "*A General Services List of English Words*", which became a standard reference in developing teaching materials.

Parallel to the interests in developing rational principles for vocabulary selection was a focus on the grammatical content of a language course. Hornby, Palmer and other British applied linguists had established the problems of grammar for the foreign learner. Their work was directed toward developing classroom procedures suited to teaching basic grammatical patterns through an oral approach. They analyzed English and classified its major grammatical structures into sentence "*patterns*" "*substitution tables*" which could be used to help internalize the rules of English sentence structure. A classification of English sentence patterns was incorporated into the first dictionary for students of English as a foreign language, developed by Hornby, Gatenby and Wakefield and published in 1953 as "*The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*". Several books on English grammar were published as Hornby's "*Guide to Patterns and Usage in English*" 1954, which became a standard reference source of basic English sentence patterns for textbook writers. With the development of systematic approaches to the lexical and grammatical contents of a language course and using these resources as part of a comprehensive methodological framework for the teaching of English as a foreign language, the foundations for the British approach in TESL-the Oral Approach - were firmly established.

The Oral Approach was the accepted British approach to English language teaching by the 1950s. It is described in the standard methodology textbooks of the period. The main characteristics of the approach were as follows:

1. Language teaching begins with the spoken language. Material is taught orally before it is presented in written form.
2. The target language is the language of the classroom.

3. New language points are introduced and practiced situationally.
4. Vocabulary selection procedures are followed to ensure that an essential general service vocabulary is covered.
5. Items of grammar are graded following the principle that simple forms should be taught before complex ones.
6. Reading and writing are introduced once a sufficient lexical and grammatical basis is established.

This method was also called Situational and Oral Language Teaching. How can Situational Language Teaching be characterized at the level of approach, design and procedure? It can be characterized as a type of British "*structuralism*". Speech was regarded as the basis of language, and structure was viewed as being at the heart of speaking ability. In the initial stage of learning, the learner is regarded simply to listen and repeat what the teacher says and to respond to questions and commands. The learner has no control over the content of learning. The teacher's function is threefold. In the presentation stage of the lesson, the teacher serves as a model setting up situations in which the need for the target structure is created and then modeling the new structure for students to repeat. Then the teacher becomes more like the skillful conductor of an orchestra. But this is not enough. Situational Language Teaching is dependent upon both a textbook and visual aids. The textbook contains tightly organized lessons planned around different grammatical structures. Visual aides may be produced by the teacher: they consist of wall charts, flashcards, pictures, stick figures and so on. The visual element together with a carefully graded grammatical syllabus is a crucial aspect of Situational Languages Teaching, hence the importance of the textbook, which should be used as a guide to the learning process.

Procedures associated with Situational Language Teaching in the 50s and 60s are an extension and further development of well-established techniques advocated by proponents of the earlier Oral Approach in the British school of language teaching. They continue to be part of the standard set of procedures advocated in many current British methodology texts.

Textbooks written according to the principles of Situational Language Teaching continue to be widely used in many parts of the world. In the mid-sixties, however, the view of language, language learning, and language teaching underlying Situational Language Teaching was called into question. We want to discuss this reaction and how it led to Communicative Language Teaching later. But because the principles of Situational Language Teaching, with its strong emphasis on oral practice, grammar and sentence patterns conform to the intuition of many practically oriented classroom teachers, it continues to be widely used in the 1980s.

## References

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