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The Teaching of English as a Second Language with special reference to the Language Laboratory

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by
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IN THIS PAPER I want to discuss the following.

1. The place of the language laboratory in a course in English as a second language, i.e. its integration into our teaching of English.

(The course I have in mind is not a beginner's course, but rather a remedial course intended for those who already have some knowledge of English; in other words, pupils in the higher classes of the Primary School, the Secondary School, students at a Teachers' College and students taking a course in Practical English at an Afrikaans-medium university).

2. The Planning of the Programme.

3. The use of contrasts in the teaching of pronunciation and structural forms (Grammar).

4. A practical demonstration of a language programme.

1. The place of the Language Laboratory in an English Course

Before we can determine the place of the language laboratory in our English course, it is necessary that we should have a clear idea of our aims in teaching English as a second language and especially of the methods by which these aims may be achieved.

But before we can decide on our methods it is essential that we should make a study of the basic psychological principles underlying the teaching of a foreign or a second language. In the limited time at my disposal it is hardly possible to explore all the possibilities of this field of study.

Allow me briefly to give a few conclusions drawn by psychologists who have made a study of the teaching of foreign languages.

There are always two aspects in the process of language teaching and learning: *the study of the language and learning to speak it.* As a result of theoretical study of the language students acquire phonetical, lexical and grammatical knowledge, i.e. knowledge *about* the language. But as the result of the practical learning of the language by means of linguistic practice and repetition students acquire habits and skills which help them to speak the language.

Both aspects are important: Without studying the theory of the language one cannot master written language (reading and writing): one cannot aim at a complete mastery of the language. On the other hand we must remember that we cannot master a language merely by studying it. Practical mastery of language is always the result of previous linguistic practice. Therefore, the task of the language teacher is not only to impart knowledge, but to develop in the child a sub-conscious skill, to develop the pupil's feeling for the language. It is a development from conscious study of the language to intuitive speech in the language. Every teacher of a foreign or a second language should remember that only practice leads to true mastery. There cannot be any direct transition from the theoretical study of the language to the mastery of it. Only if the child has learnt to speak correctly, will he write correctly. *Therefore one must skilfully combine theory with practice, while giving definite preference to practice because only practice is a guarantee of success.* When learning a foreign or

second language the student must study the language theoretically and at the same time learn to use it in practice.

Application of these psychological principles

The question now arises: How would one apply these psychological principles in deciding upon the content of an English course and the methods to be used? It is obvious that if we base our course on the principles I have mentioned, it will embrace:

(i) Theoretical study of the language, i.e. imparting knowledge about the language;

(ii) practice in the language (or linguistic practice), i.e. developing speech habits and skills, leading to linguistic intuition.
To these two we may add:

(iii) Written work, and

(iv) Reading and the study of the literature of the language.

In the primary school and, to a certain extent, in the secondary school, the oral practice takes the form of the so-called controlled conversation lesson.

Correlation of theoretical study of the language, linguistic practice and written work

In order to obtain the best results the theoretical study of the language (grammar), linguistic practice (oral drill) and written work should be correlated and integrated. For example, if, according to our programme, the subject of our grammar lesson this week is the Past Indefinite tense, our oral lessons (linguistic practice) should aim at giving the pupils the necessary practice in that tense. After this grammatical form has been explained in the grammar lesson and practised in the oral period(s) the pupils may be required to write a composition based on the vocabulary used in the oral lesson and in the tense dealt with in the grammar lesson and the oral lesson. Therefore, when the pupil eventually writes the composition he has been thoroughly drilled not only in the vocabulary, but also in the tense and other structural forms he will need in writing the composition.

Let us assume that we have six periods a week at our disposal for English (say, in the secondary school). How would we use those six periods?

I would suggest the following division:

Two periods for literature.

One period for grammar, i.e. theoretical study of the language, explanations, etc.

Two periods for oral practice in the linguistc form that has been done in the grammar period, vocabulary, etc. (Controlled conversation).

One period for free conversation (to give the pupils the opportunity to apply the basic patterns) before the Present Perfect Tense in order to get a significant contrast between the two tenses. In the same way the Present Indefinite and the Present Continuous tenses may be contrasted.

What then, is the place of the language laboratory in this scheme? The language laboratory should take the place of the formal oral practice periods (controlled conversation). The language laboratory is eminently suitable for providing linguistic practice, i.e. for intensive drill and practice in the basic structural forms.

I can assure you that, in the ordinary classroom situation, one can never achieve the results that are possible with the language laboratory. In this respect I should like to quote what a colleague of ours said at a meeting of the Language Study Group in Johannesburg recently:

"In the ordinary classroom situation no teacher can ever acquire the same turn-over in the practical use of the second language in so short a time as is the case with the language laboratory."

2. The Planning of the Programme

In planning the programme one has to bear in mind the peculiar difficulties of the Afrikaans-speaking student in learning English. Most of the difficulties experienced by the Afrikaans-speaking student of English are the result of the structural differences between English and Afrikaans. Therefore, in planning the programme, one should select language patterns which are representative of these differences in structure.

The student learns these patterns by repetition and is then required to apply them to new situations by analogy. The following are examples of such patterns:

(*a*) The tense patterns and (*b*) other grammatical forms, such as *this*, *these*, *that*, *those*, *many*, *few*, *little*, a friend *of mine*, *yours*, etc.; he is the *taller* of the two; word order, e.g. adverb order, prepositions, the position in the sentence of words such as *often*, *never*, *sometimes*, *usually*, *already*, etc.

The vocabulary is presented in the form of a

dialogue because the dialogue represents a real life situation and, as far as possible, the grammatical drill (linguistic practice) is based on the dialogue.

Each lesson contains a *sound drill*; i.e. the student is given practice in the pronunciation of certain words, as they occur in words and sentences. I realise that I may be accused of being too "item-centred" in my thinking about language. Some people seem to think that the student should learn the correct pronunciation by imitating the sounds in the lesson as a whole, and that a separate sound drill is not necessary. However, my experience has been that some people have a peculiarly undeveloped auditory sense and are therefore unable to catch the subtle differences between the sounds of the mother tongue and the second language. They are sound deaf and unless they are made aware of the pronunciation of certain difficult sounds, they never learn to pronounce them correctly.

3. The use of contrasts in the teaching of pronunciation and structural forms

Items of sound and structure have no linguistic significance by themselves. Only as such items are contrasted with other items do they have linguistic significance. In his book *Linguistics and Reading* Charles C. Fries says:

> "Language learning, in the thinking of both laymen and teachers, most frequently has meant the mastering of items — the items of sound that must be pronounced, the individual words that must be identified with meanings, the parts of sentences that must be classified. From our point of view items such as these have no linguistic significance by themselves. Only as such items contrast with other items in the patterns of an arbitrary system do they have linguistic significance. In other words, all the significant matters of language are linguistic features in contrast."

It is not necessary for me here to explore the use to which students of linguistics put contrasts in the study of languages. I have found the use of contrasts very effective, not only as far as the sounds of the language are concerned, but also in teaching tense and other structures.

(One should always be on the look-out for significant contrasts.)

Sound

I believe that sounds should not be taught separately, but in pairs. In selecting these pairs of sounds one has to take into account the differences between English and Afrikaans, as far as their phonetic features are concerned. What I mean is that it would be more effective to contrast *æ* and *e* than, e.g. *æ* and *u*. In other words, the contrast must be significant. The following are some examplies of pairs of contrastive sounds:

æ and *ɛ*, as in *hat* and *head*.
ɔ and *ɔ:*, as in *pot* and *paw*.
i and *i:*, as in *sit* and *seat*.
u and *u:*, as in *book* and *moon*.
b and *p*, as in *knob* and *loop*.
d and *t*, as in *head* and *heat*.
k and *g*, as in *pick* and *pig*
f and *v*, as in *loaf* and *loaves*.
θ and *ð*, as in *thin* and *then*.
dz and *j*, as in *judge* and *yet*.
s and *ʃ*, and in *sane* and *shoe*, etc.

Vocabulary

The language form dealt with in this programme is the Present Perfect Tense. Therefore, as far as possible, the Present Perfect Tense is used in the dialogue, in order to get the necessary correlation. The students are required to repeat the dialogue a number of times with a view to memorising as much of it as possible. In this programme we use the so-called mimicry memorisation technique.

Structure

In the following section the Present Perfect Tense is taught by contrasting it with the Past Indefinite Tense. May I say at once that I am not trying to teach two tense forms at the same time. You have to assume that the Past Indefinite Tense was done in a previous lesson. This also means that the tenses will not necessarily be done in a logical order, e.g., first the present tenses, then the past tenses, etc. OR the simple tenses, then the continuous tenses, etc. The order in which I teach the tenses is determined by the contrasts I wish to get. It is better to do the Past Indefinite they have learnt to new situations by analogy. (This may be correlated with literature).

4. A Language Programme

The sounds and the Present Perfect Tense.

I *Sound:*

Listen carefully to the following words:—

Can you hear the difference between:– hat and head; mat and met; lead and let; man and men; carrot and merit; paddle and peddle; bat and bet; axe and eggs; rack and wreck; pack and peck?

The vowel sounds in these words are *æ* and *ɛ*
Now repeat after me: hat, head . . .

Now repeat the following sentences after me:—
He had a hat on his head.
The lad let the cat out of the bag.
The girl played with her pet on the mat.
The axe fell on the eggs.
I bet you a new bat that Jennie will buy that set.
Jack begs him to put the bags in the barn.
My friend says there are many apples in the bag.
I'm glad there aren't any apples in the basket.

II *Listen to the following conversation:—*

Mrs. J.: The doorbell has already rung twice. Aren't you going to open the door, John?/

John: Oh goodness, Mother, I haven't even heard it. And I don't think the front door has been unlocked yet./

Mrs. J.: Hurry up then. I suppose it's Mrs. Smith./

John: Good morning, Mrs. Smith. I am sorry I've kept you wating. Our maid hasn't turned up this morning. /Mother and I have been so busy that we've completely forgotten to unlock the door./

Mrs. S.: It doesn't matter. I can see that you are as busy as bees./

John: Won't you sit down, please? Mother will be here in a minute. She has just flattened dough on the pastry-board./

Mrs. S.: I'll go and help her. Has she washed the dishes yet?/

John: Yes, thank you. She has already done all the washing up. I have just cleaned the pots and pans for her./

Mrs. S.: But have the beds been made?/

John: Yes, they have been made, thank you. Mother has already baked a delicious cake./

Mrs. S.: I've been busy since six o'clock myself. I've already driven quite a few miles./

John: Won't you have a cup of tea with us? Mother has just put the cups on the tray and I have switched on the kettle./

Mrs. S.: That will be refreshing, thank you.

Repeat in the pauses:—

III *Listen to the following two sentences:*

Mr. Smith bought a farm last week.

Mr. Smith has bought a farm.

If we say *Mr. Smith bought a farm last, week* we are interested in *when* he bought the farm.

But if we say *Mr. Smith has bought a farm*, we are not interested in *when* he bought the farm, but only in the *fact* that he *has bought* a farm.

Now answer the following questions in the affirmative, i.e. begin your anwers with "yes":—

Example: Have you read that book?
Yes, I have read that book.
Did you read the book last year?
Yes, I read the book last year.

Now do the following:—

Has Mrs. Smith rung the doorbell?
Did Mrs. Smith ring the doorbell last night?
Have you unlocked the front door?
Did you unlock the front door early this morning?
Has the maid turned up this morning?
Did the maid turn up yesterday?
Have they made the beds?
Did they make the beds yesterday morning?

Answer the following questions in the negative, i.e. begin your answer with "no":—

Example: Have you done your homework?
No, I haven't done my homework.
Did you do your homework last night?
No, I did not do my homework last night.

Now do the following:—

Have you switched on the kettle yet?
Did you switch on the kettle last night?
Has mother baked a cake?
Did mother bake a cake last Friday?
Has mother put the cups on the tray?
Did mother put the cups on the tray this morning?

I am now going to give you a number of sentences. You are required to change them according to the words or phrases given after the sentences.

Here is an example:—

I use a camera.
Yesterday I used a camera
Several times . . . I have used a cameral several times

Now do the following:—

Mrs. Jones washes the dishes

already .....

yesterday .....

Does he switch on the kettle?

Yet .....

A little while ago .....

The servants turn up.

Last week .....

Just .....

We don't have breakfast.

Yet .....

Yesterday morning .....

My friend doesn't write to me

Last January.....

Since Christmas .....