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A Consideration of the Factors involved in Native
Language Acquisition and Foreign Language Learning
and their relevance to Modern Languages Methodology

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Graham H. Soles

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Section 1

NATIVE LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

i) Introduction. Towards a Definition

Language has been described as a system of arbitrary signals, which makes possible communication between human beings.¹ Language is specifically a human activity and the most frequent aspect of behaviour, which makes man unique. It is through language "that the child becomes once and for all a verbally functioning human being".²

Man is essentially a social animal and speech has been outlined, not merely as an accomplishment, but as a highly complex means of communication.³ Fowler contends that language is a natural activity and that although other species possess communication systems, no other branch of the animal kingdom has a natural propensity for communicating through the medium of language and it would appear that no other species can be induced to learn language.⁴

Potter distinguishes language from communication, asserting that communication is instinctive behaviour, whereas language is a deliberate and intended activity. There must be a consciously transmitted signal to the receiver, who decodes the message and consequently perceives the intention of the sender.⁵

Language is not necessarily vocal, but can be visual. Road signs are an example of non-vocal language, whose message is conveyed by visual means. The analogy with the road sign indicates two types of non-oral language: the pictogram, where the image in the sign depicts the information, for example a road works warning; the ideogram, where the symbol represents an idea as in the No-Entry sign. The sign language employed by mute persons is a further mode of visual language, which Kadler defines as "paralanguage".⁶

It is in the development of language that man has evinced, which distinguishes him from non-humans. Although there are instances where animals have produced elementary language and communication, there is no

current evidence of them having mastered the higher level concepts significant of human beings.⁷

Speech is primarily the human manifestation of language. When a child learns his mother tongue he is dependent on the presence of a reality, the acoustic symbol is merely a supplementary representation of a concrete entity.⁸

Man's native language is an important factor in establishing a sense of identity and a means of conforming to the group norm.⁹ Linguistic symbols also provide a potent and adaptable vehicle for thought and an influence on the acquisition of knowledge.¹⁰ Indeed the child's understanding and use of language often provides the most ideal view of the development of thought and reasoning. It is the ability to deal with thought at a higher level and to transfer it into words, which differentiates man from other animals. Any model of language acquisition must be complemented by a parallel development of an organised perception of the world, including the various activities associated with the different stages of human maturation.¹¹

Theorists maintain that language is primarily a means of discovering the environment and the most difficult skill to be accomplished by a human being.¹² Indeed no individual could ever say he has completely mastered his native language, for man is continually learning and using new words throughout a lifetime.

Although there are differences between individual human beings, most theorists appear to concur on the same general stages of development.

ii) The Physiological Development of Language

The development of language in human beings is problematic and has been considered in many circles as a highly abstract concept.¹³ Any study of the development of language in children must take cognisance of the biological factor in speech acquisition.

Wallwork maintains that the physiological development of the child's brain may be a major determinant of several aspects of language acquisition, including the age at which he begins to utter speech sounds, combining words and expressing certain complex sentence forms.¹⁴

Lyons contends that all human beings make use of the same physiological mechanisms in speech and that it is conceivable that man is genetically conditioned to acquire speech.¹⁵ The predisposition of man to acquire speech is not to be confused with his biological propensity to acquire language, assuming that he has both. It is important to appreciate that the one cannot be taken as corroboration for the other.¹⁶

Every individual possesses three networks of nerve cells: the autonomic nervous system, which controls the lungs; the sensorimotor system enabling perception with the senses and muscular control; a third involving memory, language, disposition, imagination and symbolism. These are integrated into a single neural framework and the countless cells of which it is composed are formed some months before birth. The control of speech is centred in the area of cerebral cortex (Broca's area). Integration between nerve cells occurs, a little more slowly in the Broca's area than in some others and nothing that can really be defined as language is part of the child until the end of the first year of life and any acquisition of language cannot be accounted for, without some notion of the dependence upon physical growth.¹⁷

In reviewing the biological aspect of language, Wallwork claims:

Only in human anatomy are those features found which enable the production of speech. This is much more than the question of suitable organs for articulation for these, such as lips, tongue and lungs, have other purposes and are used only secondarily for speech

production. It is more likely to be a question of
the organisation of the brain. 18

This proposition is likely to take into account the limitations of human memory and attention, the time it takes for signals to be transmitted from the brain to the muscles involved in speech and the interference of one physiological or psychological process with another.

De Villiers maintains that a potent factor in any contemplation of the physiological development of language, is the hypothesis of a critical period for language acquisition, based on the maturity of the child's brain.¹⁹ Penfield and Lenneberg conclude that the period of greatest facility in language acquisition is the first decade of life when the brain has more plasticity before maturation.²⁰ Lenneberg asserts that there is a point where language becomes difficult if not impossible to acquire after a certain age, his evidence suggesting a period of maximum sensitivity beginning around the age of two and brought to an end by the physiological changes of puberty. Roberts refutes Lenneberg's neurophysiological and neurosurgical evidence on the grounds that such testimony is almost always taken from abnormal subjects and he does not feel that the analogy can necessarily be drawn for normal people.²¹

iii) The Development of Language in the Child

The child cannot begin learning his native language until he is physically ready to do so, but it would appear that theorists agree on the common approach to the order in which language is developed.

One fact to begin with is that children do not need to be taught language. The 'idea' of language seems to be there from the beginning and it takes only exposure to the speech of the family to bring the 'idea' to the surface . . . If a child is not exposed to a natural language in infancy, and furthermore if for this reason he has no language, it is well-nigh impossible to teach it to him later in life. 22

Language is a natural part of human development, but a child must have a language environment in order that language should evolve, but this need, in fact, be only minimal. Fowler contends that children learn language quickly and early in life, generally when they have acquired many basic motor skills. Furthermore he maintains that some children acquire their own language against the background of an impoverished linguistic environment, which can include inattentive, uncommunicative or even speechless parents and this does not appear to inhibit the fundamentals of the language, although fluency and range of vocabulary in later childhood may be restricted. In fact, congenitally blind, deaf and handicapped children learn to speak, albeit with great difficulty.²³ Conditions such as mongolism in effect do no more than delay the rate of acquisition, although slight deficiencies, including poor pronunciation, occasional grammatical errors, will be manifested throughout their lives. It is only the most intensive psychological disorders, for example autism, which affect the development of language.²⁴

In spite of the fact that children with very limited motor skills are enabled to develop language, there seems to be a correlation between the acquisition of language and the motor development of children. Research in this field has suggested that, in all normal children, speech begins at about the same age and that other levels of development occur in

the same sequence in all children and at a relatively constant chronological age.²⁵ There would appear to be a parallel between the acquisition of language and the development of physical maturity, although just as they differ in growth and disposition, children exhibit considerable individual variation in their language development.²⁶ Van Parreren claims that the acquisition of language is synonymous with the child's discovery of the world, which acts as a stimulus to learning and forms a source of motivation.²⁷

Clark maintains that all children pass through approximately comparable stages in the process of acquiring their mother tongue.²⁸ Cook, reviewing research on language acquisition, contends that the young child assimilates only the linguistic information which will correlate and not interfere with his own knowledge and that each stage he passes through has its own grammatical system. He posits the opinion that the child makes hypotheses about the structure of language, which he evaluates and either discards or retains them. The final hypothesis is the ultimate adult grammar, reflecting competence in the language.²⁹

The initial stages of language acquisition are spent in listening comprehension with some early attempt at communication through gesture. The child is exposed to the language for hours at a time with no simplicity of structure by the adult (this merits comparison with the structurally controlled procedure generally applied to second language learning), but what the child produces reflects the chronological development of language in the child.³⁰

The initial manifestation of communication in the infant is crying, which begins at birth and becomes increasingly varied. By this means the child differentiates between emotions, for example hunger and pain. After one month the child is aware of sounds; at four months he exercises his speech organs by babbling, gurgling, laughing and pays attention to human voices. At seven months in addition he squeals and shrieks and comprehension is apparent. At forty weeks the muscles used in mastication

and speech can be perceived maturing together and by the end of the first year the child responds to simple commands, listens intently to words and usually has a collection of one word sentences.

The second year marks the continuing accumulation of these one word sentences, that condense the idea of a whole situation into a single locution. By the end of the second year his vocabulary has increased and he is beginning to express his needs in words.

During the third year long sentences, including complex structures, are noticeable and tenses, moods and parts of speech can be distinguished.

At the age of four, the speech skills are improved by asking questions and continuous discussion. At this age some children are producing over a thousand words an hour with the average being around four hundred.

By the time the child reaches the age of six, his knowledge of structure is virtually complete and he can express himself in finished correct sentences.

The rates of learning the native language will not be identical for all children but by the age of six, a substantial amount of the patterns of the mother tongue will have been assimilated.

iv) Lateralisation and Cerebral Dominance

Neurological research has attempted to show that language is related to the dominance of different sides of the brain and that there are language areas within it which affect speech.³¹

The two hemispheres of the human brain are involved in different processes of language acquisition, with activity in the left hemisphere carrying out the procedure for language development.³²

Seliger contends that the ability to acquire language is dependent on various changes which take place in the brain as a result of maturation. As the child grows older, the brain gradually loses its plasticity, particularly in those functions of the left hemisphere responsible for language. Different aspects of language are apparently affected at different stages, but it is believed that there are critical phases coinciding with the gradual loss of plasticity and localisation which Seliger defines as the different roles or characteristics that various regions of the brain possess, being directly responsible for patterns of behaviour.³³ Any account of the acquisition of language and the effect this will have on second language learning should consider the depreciation of plasticity and the localisation of specific functions within hemispheres.

Studdert-Kennedy contends that the ability to assimilate written and spoken messages is the function of the right hemisphere, but the dominant left hemisphere can perform purely linguistic assignments.³⁴ In other words, the right hemisphere has a practical role to play in rote learning and memorisation of facts, but the left hemisphere gradually loses suppleness and the ability to create language from the facts assimilated by the right hemisphere. Taking this hypothesis to its logical conclusion, it would appear that any method of language learning, based on strategies of rote learning and drills, without any attempt to exploit the material, would inevitably be less successful, for the brain would seem to be physically

incapable of making the transfer from the store of information to creativity in its own right, as would appear to be the case for first language acquisition in infancy, where the brain seems to be genetically programmed to accommodate this.

Studdert-Kennedy concludes that a methodology which concentrates on exercising the right hemisphere capabilities provides no more than an illusion of language learning.

However, Cook casts doubts on this theory, contending that the evidence for locating lateralisation is questionable. He claims that the connection between lateralisation and language learning relies on evidence from pathological cases, where brain damage has been considerable and consequently the hypothesis may not be valid for normal people.³⁵

v) The Role of Imitation

Imitation or repetition is undoubtedly a significant factor in second language learning and probably forms the basis of most methods. It is worthwhile evaluating the function of imitation in the acquisition of the native language and its relevance to the child's development of speech.

Friedmann observes that at the one word stage, the young child possesses a discrete grammar, made up of single units, which have an extended meaning. At this juncture, imitation is predominant and perhaps this is the only manner in which the many phrases which are learnt as lexical items can be described.³⁶

Imitation of adult speech may be viewed as an integral component of language development but Clark maintains that no amount of correction of mistakes the child makes in his repetition will necessarily enable him to perfect them. This will be achieved only when his linguistic system can cope with the new knowledge required to rectify the mistake.³⁷

Pit Corder claims that imitation is significant in speech development, but that it cannot account for the whole process. He contends that observation has shown that children, even in their earliest attempts at producing language do not always mimic the adult model and that the child, by uttering phrases he may not have heard before, may indeed be generalising on the basis of a syntactical pattern he has already internalised.³⁸

Cook declares that the child usually omits the grammatical items in his initial attempts at imitation.³⁹

Brown and Bellugi propose two possible explanations for this: either the child is capable of analysing adult language and refining it to his limitations or the adult places either conscious or unconscious emphasis on those words principally conveying meaning, which the child subsequently remembers.⁴⁰

When the adult repeats what the child has said he expands the process, so that the infant will utter a word or short phrase, which transmits the intention and the adult will supply the grammatical item absent from the child's sentence, whilst preserving content words in the same order. For example, the child might say "milk . . . table", to which the parent would probably reply "Yes, the milk is on the table". The adult's expansion occurs at a stage of development, when the child is paying more attention to the suggestions, which teach meaning, so that the child is initially providing the cue for the adult to extend and supply a model for adaptation or imitation. Cook maintains that this is a procedure which is rarely employed in foreign languages methodology in the classroom and the process of repetition and reduction is one of the most important strategies in which a child learns his native language.⁴¹

vi) The Social and Cultural Context of Language

"A language has no life apart from the lives of the people who speak it."⁴²

Language would appear to be the servant of man and the speech community to which he belongs. Christopherson maintains that it is an integral component of a community's culture and the vehicle for expressing society's life style.⁴³

"The most important single influence on a language is the linguistic needs of the society it serves."⁴⁴

In order to appreciate the social implications of language it is necessary to define culture. Theorists differentiate between "biological growth and intellectual refinement".⁴⁵ For the purpose of most discussions on language, culture is interpreted in the social-anthropological sense of the community's way of life.⁴⁶

Fowler maintains that when the child learns to talk, he is not only acquiring a means of transmitting messages, but is in fact learning through language the values of society and how to conform to them.⁴⁷

Each language follows the conscious and unconscious conventions of the social environment to which it belongs and into which the child is born. Each speech community - "an arena within which a set of rules for language variation is played"⁴⁸ - has its own ideas about the exact conditions under which different modes of expression may be used.

Farb contends that there are social constraints placed on language and that no individual is at liberty to say what he wants, in any form he cares to use, at any time, although he may be fully conversant with the patterns and vocabulary of a particular language.⁴⁹ Consequently a child growing up in a community of the foreign language learner, will not only have to assimilate the syntactical rules and meanings of words, but also the subtleties and strategies required to evaluate the appropriateness of a particular situation, for the expression of ideas. Each speech community

has definite notions about the contexts in which certain words can be employed or pronounced and particular tones of voice used.

We adjust the style of our discourse most delicately in response to the kinds of communicative situation we find ourselves in, to the speaker role we assume on a particular occasion; in accordance with our status-relationship to other participants in a communicative event and with our intentions and feelings towards them.

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These readjustments of style are often referred to as registers, which are inextricably woven into the grammar of a language and the expression in speech, reflecting the social system of the community.⁵¹ In most situations a speaker will have to discriminate between the manner in which he addresses a particular person and the construction of his utterances. Fowler contends that the greater the range of registers the person has at his disposal, the more effectively will he be able to conduct himself in all strata of society, so that a child or foreign language learner will not only have to accommodate sounds and meanings, but also develop "a great range of sociolinguistic skills for fitting speech to situation".⁵²

If "the function of language is to relate its speakers to one another and to the world they live in",⁵³ then a major influence is the physical location of the place where the language is spoken. A frequently cited example of this factor is the vast range of specialist words in the Eskimo language. A person has numerous ways to communicate his needs, but the manner in which he will express them is limited, because his environment will inevitably act as a constraint.

When distinctions within a community have to be made, language will reflect the importance placed on a particular value by society.⁵⁴ For example, there is only one word "horse" in English, where Arabic has many different words for different breeds and conditions of horses, but no expression as such for "horse", thus reflecting the variety of emphases in the culture of a language.

The study of the relationship between language, culture and thought is defined as "linguistic relativity"⁵⁵, which contends that the structure of a language reflects the inner nature of its speakers.⁵⁶

The principal proponents of this hypothesis are Sapir, who believed that our perception of the world is largely shaped by language and Whorf, who maintained that the world has to be organised largely by the linguistic system of the culture of which an individual is part.⁵⁷

This cultural relativity theory suggests that the language a person possesses is shaped by a broad context, namely the culture into which he is born. Man would appear personally to contribute little to his own linguistic and perceptual development. It is undoubtedly significant where an individual is brought up and the situation in which he finds himself influences the language he uses. The child learns to distinguish between speech considered appropriate and inappropriate by adults, according to the nature of the child's relationship towards those with whom he is communicating.

Sapir and Whorf's theories emphasise, therefore, the close correlation between language and the culture of the speech community. "No linguist today doubts that language and culture interpenetrate one another."⁵⁸

Berry acknowledges the relationship between language and culture, postulating that as society changes, so in fact is language modified. "One of the most important statements regarding language can be made: the constantly changing linguistic needs of a society and the other fluctuating influences make language an ever-changing entity."⁵⁹

Farb contends that the existence of linguistic relativity implies that "no one can adequately learn a foreign language by instruction".⁶⁰ A course of study only teaches the vocabulary and grammar, but is unable to acquaint the pupil with the appropriate situations in which to use the alternative means of saying something in a foreign language.

However, Pit Corder accepts that there is a difference between cultures, but argues: "Learning a second language does involve learning to see the

world as the speakers of that language habitually see it; it does involve learning their culture."⁶¹

Rivers believes that if the culture is taught within the framework of language instruction and the pupils can identify with the people of the foreign culture, then a major source of alienation may be surmounted. The course of study must progress systematically with cultural understanding developing in conjunction with mastery of the language.⁶² She maintains that for a thorough comprehension of a language, it is necessary for the pupil to understand the function of the syntactical and semantic patterns in relation to each other and their role in the cultural system. If this objective can be achieved, the teacher may transmit to the pupils the concepts which make language learning enjoyable and meaningful, whilst at the same time developing mastery. "Learning a language is a great deal more than the acquisition of a mechanical skill."⁶³

vii) Language as Behaviour

One of the key issues of language acquisition is the role of the child in the process of speech development. De Villiers poses the question whether the child participates actively in the evolution of language, attempting to understand the world, or whether his behaviour is passively conditioned by the environment.⁶⁴

J. B. Watson has been cited as the founder of the behaviourist approach in psychology.⁶⁵ He maintained that:

The behaviour of any organism, from an amoeba to a human being, was to be described and explained in terms of the organism's response to the stimuli presented by features of the environment. 66

Many psychologists of the environmentalist or behaviourist school, the principal proponent being B. F. Skinner, contend that the child's mind at birth is a blank state, which lacks any innate capacity to acquire language, and that speech development can be explained in similar terms to other kinds of behaviourist theories. Skinner argues that language or "Verbal Behaviour"⁶⁷ is the consequence of processes of training, in much the same way as an animal can be conditioned to learn by offering rewards and other reinforcements.

A child acquires verbal behaviour when relatively unpatterned vocalizations, selectively reinforced, gradually assume forms which produce appropriate consequences in a given verbal community. 68

The factors of verbal behaviour would therefore appear to be stimulation, leading to response and consequent reinforcement or lack of it from the environment, usually of course from human beings.

A behaviourist approach would explain the development of language in the infant as follows. The baby reacts favourably to the sound of his mother's voice by babbling in a random fashion. He is more likely to repeat those elements of babbling that are similar to pleasurable sounds made by the mother. At a later stage, the mother rewards the child for

imitating sounds approximating to adult speech. The child discovers that such imitations are reinforced and therefore tends to imitate mother or other adults. In this fashion appropriate speech patterns are accumulated.⁶⁹

De Villiers argues that the notion of reinforcement in language is more complex than straightforward approval or disapproval. In adult speech this factor is not fundamentally significant; there are many instances where approval or disapproval are not necessary for the communication of feelings.⁷⁰ "The role that reinforcement plays in learning, beyond attracting the attention of the organism and providing the motivation for behaviour, is an open question."⁷¹

Many linguists have questioned the environmentalist hypothesis of language and Fowler maintains that enough is known about the manner in which children acquire language to be certain that they do not learn by rote an inventory of completely formed utterances provided by their environment, selecting the appropriate response as the occasion demands. He contends that the behaviourist theory is totally implausible, positing that "it would imply an inordinately inefficient use of brain 'storage space' ".⁷²

It may well be that some of the words referring to objects in the child's environment and certain utterances that occur in the repetitive situations in which he finds himself are learnt in a manner that can be expressed in behaviourist terms (by stating that the utterances are responses to the stimulation of the objects and situations).⁷³ Routine expressions such as interjections and other stereotyped phrases, learned as complete segments of language which are produced quite thoughtlessly and are often devoid of meaning, form a very small proportion of language behaviour.

The behaviourist hypothesis, however, will not support the production of sound patterns unheard by the child but uttered by him. Observation has shown that children do not imitate directly, but the environmentalists would explain the utterance of apparently novel phrases on the basis of generalisation

or learning a word in a certain sentence position and then transposing its use into other similar sentence positions.⁷⁴

Wallwork asserts that there are many powerful arguments against the theory that language is primarily the consequence of stimulus-response-reinforcement mechanisms and maintains that the work of Chomsky provides a comprehensive critique of 'Verbal Behaviour' and a more plausible hypothesis of language acquisition.⁷⁵

viii) Language as an Innate Quality

Noam Chomsky has revealed new insights to psychologists and linguists, attempting to unravel the complex question of language acquisition, whereas Skinner analyses language in terms of behaviour. The key concept in Chomsky's hypothesis is the notion that all human beings possess an inborn capacity to learn language.

It may well be that the general features of language structure reflect, not so much the course of one's experience, but rather the general character of one's capacity to acquire knowledge - in the traditional sense, one's innate ideas and innate principles. 76

Chomsky maintains that the behaviourists' battery of statistics and scientific explanations fail to illuminate the true nature of language.⁷⁷ He contends that the capacity for language is biologically determined and that it is part of the genetic inheritance of the child. In studying the words and actual combinations of words a child employs in the early development of language, Chomsky argues that what the child actually says cannot be explained merely on the basis of imitation, since there is an obvious ability in the child for understanding and producing sentences he could never have heard. In his theory of linguistic grammar, an attempt is made to discover the strategies that enable a speaker to understand an arbitrary sentence on a given occasion, without ever being exposed to that particular pattern or utterance.⁷⁸ New utterances are similar to those previously heard or produced, only in that they are determined in their form and interpretation by the same system of underlying rules.⁷⁹

Chomsky contends that a person who has developed a complete knowledge of his native language has internalised a system of rules that relate sound and meaning in a particular way.⁸⁰ These rules are of such an intricate and abstract nature that the speaker is not generally aware of them.

Of course, the person who knows the language has no consciousness of having mastered these rules or of putting them to use, nor is there any reason to suppose that this knowledge of the rules of the language can be brought to consciousness. 81

Chomsky's theory of language acquisition can be explained in similar terms to other genetically endowed abilities that make the child human and can be compared with the capacity of learning to walk: he is not told how to raise his legs and coordinate his muscles. Chomsky maintains that man is born with competence in the structure of a language, but this is not detailed enough to prespecify the exact language the child will eventually speak. It is to be assumed that the child is furnished with the capacity to acquire the property of language.

The child cannot know at birth which language he is going to learn. But he must 'know' that its grammar must be of a predetermined form that excludes many imaginable languages.

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The grammars that children use to form their speech show a uniformity in their basic structures. Chomsky argues that these features of language are 'linguistic universals', which can be explained in terms applicable to all languages.

Obviously, this conclusion, if justified, would represent an important advance in the theory of language, since it would then have been shown that what appears to be a peculiarity of English is actually explicable in terms of a general and deep empirical assumption about the nature of language, an assumption that can be refuted if false, by study of descriptively adequate grammars of other languages. 83

Wallwork maintains that there is an element of credibility in both the environmentalist theory of Skinner and the nativist hypothesis of Chomsky and that in order to arrive at a satisfactory answer to the question of language development, characteristics from both points of view must be considered.⁸⁴

Carroll comments on Chomsky's hypothesis as follows:

I do not find any basic opposition between conceiving of language behaviour as resulting from the operation of 'habits' and conceiving of it as 'rule-governed' . . . I would define a habit as any learned disposition to perceive, behave or perform in a certain manner under specified circumstances. To the extent that an individual's language behaviour conforms to the habits of the speech community of which he is a member, we can say that his behaviour is 'rule-governed'.

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It is important to realise when considering the implication of Chomsky's theories for second language learning, that the rules he specifies as being significant in language development are not the same as the classical 'grammar' rules which appear in traditional foreign language learning text books. Roberts contends that very little is known about the internalised rules of the mother tongue, that there would appear to be little justification that learning of explicit grammar rules will aid language learning and that the memorisation and assimilation of rules is not a necessary condition for effective language development.⁸⁶

To conform with Chomsky a model of foreign language learning will make it possible for the learner to internalise a system of patterns, so that when they are fully assimilated the pupil will be able to produce utterances to express his meaning, without being consciously aware of the patterns. It is not enough for the learner to know them, the strategy of teaching must allow him to use them in the production of appropriate speech.

One aim of basic language instruction should be to attain the same kind of automatic control, the same internalization of morphophonemic and syntactic patterns inherent in the speech of a native speaker.

ix) The 'Language Acquisition Device'

Linguists have devoted much attention to the innate element of language and explain that the young child's ability to acquire speech can be attributed to an inborn mechanism, which is exclusively a human characteristic, enabling human beings to learn a language. Katz and McNeill refer to this capacity as the Language Acquisition Device, which permits the child to abstract and internalise unconsciously the structural rules that are part of the language to which he is exposed. They contend that this device is present in all normal children and allows for a complete command of language by the age of five or six.⁸⁸

The young child absorbs the language he hears, which is of different levels and types and the device processes certain kinds of information, which is then used to produce coherent speech.⁸⁹

Chomsky employs various other terms to describe the innate component, for example, "tacit knowledge of linguistic universals",⁹⁰ but he does contend "that there would be a qualitative difference in the way in which an organism with a functional language acquisition system will approach and deal with systems that are language like and others that are not".⁹¹

The device would enable the child, therefore, not only to learn the syntax of his own language, but also to recognise sentences as grammatically correct independently of their meaning. By making hypotheses about the grammar of the particular language he hears and rejecting those which do not match, a limited amount of language received is required to approximate to the adult model.

Hill maintains that the presence of the language acquisition device accounts for the speed with which children learn their mother tongue, but cites Lenneberg's theory that the language acquisition device ceases to function with the completion of maturation of the brain.⁹²

Friedmann challenges the notion of the 'LAD' being solely responsible for language acquisition. She agrees that there is an innate capacity to learn language, positing that coherent utterances would not be possible unless there were an inborn ability to recognise and reproduce examples of meaningful speech, but she finds it difficult to accept that other factors are not more significant.

It is difficult to understand how a genetically programmed LAD can explain the continued existence of anomalous forms, whose only interpretation would appear to be the result of imitation and socialization.⁹³

Slobin in countering the hypothesis of a specific language mechanism claims:

Substantive universals are not given in the child's genetic make-up but are rather the result of the way he processes the world. 94

In considering the relevance of the LAD theory to second language learning, Hill maintains that innatist hypotheses would appear to be unimportant.⁹⁵ McNeill contends that the language acquisition device becomes partially redundant for second language learning, because the learner's maturity and previous experience allow him to avoid some of the procedures of native language acquisition.⁹⁶

Roberts argues that very little is known about the true nature of grammatical rules, but believes that foreign language learning must be a compromise between the stimulus-response hypothesis of the Behaviourist School and the rule-governed theories of the Mentalists.⁹⁷

x) Creativity

Chomsky maintains that the most important characteristic of language is its creativity and the one fundamental factor that differentiates human language from any other means of animal communication.⁹⁸

In fact whatever evidence we do have seems to me to support the view that the ability to acquire and use language is a species-specific human capacity, that there are very deep and restrictive principles that determine the nature of human language and are rooted in the specific character of the human mind.

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It is the creative aspect of language and the capacity of man to use it as a vehicle for the free expression of thought and feeling which is, in Chomsky's opinion, the most difficult to comprehend.¹⁰⁰

Linguists have focused on the essence of creativity, which is the ability to express an indefinite and infinite number of thoughts, using sentences never heard before, as a direct consequence of the internalisation of the rules of word combination that govern language use.¹⁰¹

Dulay and Burt contend that regardless of the environment in which children are raised, the child has the capacity to reconstruct gradually the rules for language, aided by the language acquisition device, enabling him to construct certain theories about the speech system being acquired, until they achieve congruence with what they are exposed to and what they produce. The child is generally unaware of applying any grammatical rules or systematic principles of formation, when he formulates either new sentences or utterances he has previously encountered.¹⁰² Potentially human beings have access to an unlimited source of sentences, even though in the course of a lifetime they use only a minute amount of them. An adequate account of language must be able to show how a native speaker has learned to utter sentences he has never heard before. A theory of behaviour which regards as significant the role of experience finds it difficult to explain the creative component of language and Lyons maintains that a more plausible explanation of this ability is the dependence on a well-organised body of

knowledge:

There can be little doubt, however, that the behaviourist account of the acquisition of language, as formulated at present fails to come to grips with, let alone solve, the problem posed by what Chomsky calls 'creativity'.

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Scholars have emphasised that not only does man produce novel utterances without conscious effort, but he is also capable of understanding an indefinite number of sentences that are new to him.¹⁰⁴ Fowler argues that the capacity for creativity, both in speech production and reception develops in the child; "A facility for associating sounds and meanings in an infinite number of sentences."¹⁰⁵

The element of creativity therefore is the natural inheritance of every human being, no matter what language he speaks, the kind of community he lives in or the degree of his intelligence. In comparing the ability of man to create new speech utterances and the capacity of animals to communicate, Bertrand Russell was induced to comment: "No matter how eloquently a dog may bark, he cannot tell you that his parents were poor but honest."¹⁰⁶

xi) Competence and Performance

An important concept in the mentalist theory of language acquisition is the distinction drawn by Chomsky between competence and performance. Pit Corder contends that the notion is related to De Saussure's division of 'langue' from 'parole', but Fowler maintains that the two distinctions are not exactly parallel, but share the same objective.¹⁰⁷

'Langue', as defined by De Saussure, is the possession of the total speech community: "a socially shared system of rules",¹⁰⁸ which is drawn on by the members of that community, but which can never be completely known by an individual.

'Parole' is the individual manifestation of the community's 'langue' and the use a person makes of the language he possesses. Fowler outlines the discrimination between 'langue' and 'parole' as "the essential separation between knowledge of a language and its concrete use".¹⁰⁹

Chomsky repudiates the idea of 'langue' as a framework of material from which individual speakers select 'parole'. Instead he envisages competence as man's inner knowledge of his language, reflected in performance - "the actual use of language in concrete situations".¹¹⁰

Performance is governed by many constraints in the speech environment and in the individual himself, for example distraction, lapse of memory or attention. These combine to ensure that performance never truly mirrors the speaker's competence.¹¹¹ Indeed Lyons asserts that many of the utterances produced by native speakers will be, for various reasons, grammatically incorrect.¹¹²

To study a language, then, we must attempt to disassociate a variety of factors that interact with underlying competence to determine actual performance; the technical term 'competence' refers to the ability of the idealized speaker-hearer to associate sounds and meanings strictly in accordance with the rules of his language. 113

Brooks claims that learners of a foreign language require a thorough training in the elements of phonology, syntax, morphology and meaning

associated with 'langue' and the oral and productive skills involving 'parole'.¹¹⁴

The learner's competence at the beginning of foreign language study is negligible in the target language and he totally lacks a mastery of linguistic forms. He may wish to convey meanings, but is unable to do so, lacking the native speaker's "secure reference system, sense of orientation, intuitive feeling for right or wrong."¹¹⁵

Stern maintains that the learning of a new language from the beginning has all the characteristics of full competence, except at first, they are possessed in an insecure and elementary form. Learning a language is a cumulative exercise, demanding time and foresight:

The question that course writers have tried to answer is how best to divide the learning activities in progressive stages, which are most advantageous for the student in the development of second language competence.

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Good language learning leads gradually to levels of competence which become more secure, varied and complex, increasingly resembling the native speaker.

Stern cites the native speaker's competence as the ultimate objective of the learning progress, but warns that although he may have fully internalised all the necessary rules of the target language, the learner may still not have acquired the cultural and social concomitants in the possession of the native speaker.¹¹⁷

Hawkins maintains that evidence from the areas of research into competence and performance is relevant to foreign language learning. Practice in perceiving and consolidating the patterns of the new language is a vital stage in acquiring competence, but these need to be exploited in new situations or performance, if there is to be any progress towards language control.

Both elements seem to be necessary. The truth may be that while it is only in performance (or near performance) activities that the learner makes progress in language mastery, which is why the teacher must provide as many of these as possible and in great variety, yet rapid learning

in performance sessions is facilitated by the sessions
which strengthen insight into pattern and which set up
expectations. 118

xii) Redundancy

A person hearing a sentence has an intuitive knowledge of the role of its parts, although he probably could not name all the grammatical items contained in it. When several of these parts of speech are omitted for the sake of brevity, as in the case of a telegram, the individual receiving the message can still reorganise the basic structure of the sentence and can expand the abbreviated signal into a grammatical sentence. This is possible as a consequence of the essential property of redundancy.

The concept of redundancy also applies in routine verbal communication and "makes it possible to understand a message without hearing all its parts."¹¹⁹

Almost every sentence in every human language contains some degree of redundancy and Kadler maintains that it is an essential factor, because the repetition or duplication of all or part of a message prevents misinterpretation.

If all the components of an utterance are not of vital importance, then listening is facilitated and the process of decoding the message is not lengthened. Communication would be extremely unreliable if sentences lacked redundancy, because the slightest lapse of attention on the part of the listener, mispronunciation by the speaker or excessive background noise might render the entire sentence confusing and incomprehensible.

Although, as Kadler argues, a minimal signal is usually required to decode a message, it is important that the sentence should not omit the necessary components to convey meaning, which Farb defines as 'content words',¹²⁰ since this will inevitably result in poor comprehension. 'Functor words' (such as 'and' or 'to') can be omitted with a high probability that the message will still be understood.¹²¹

The context or situation in which the utterance occurs is significant in any consideration of the factor of redundancy. For example, a person walking into a restaurant who says, "I have come to eat," would be making

a redundant statement. Whereas if the same individual speaks at work about dining out, then he is faced with a 'transferred linguistic situation',¹²² which would require accuracy of communication.

Farb contends that approximately half a typical English sentence is redundant, because of the repetition of parts of speech. Consequently speakers can utter sentences at great pace, hesitate or even speak in an ungrammatical manner and probably still be understood.¹²³

It is not essential for the listener to understand the meaning of a word, to realise its function in a sentence. Context and expectation are significant elements to be considered, for they permit easier interpretation of a message.

Redundancy allows for a whole sentence to be comprehended in spite of the mispronunciation or use of words, whose exact meaning may not be known, or even errors in the structures of the language itself.

The factor of redundancy permits the foreign language learner to understand the gist of an utterance, where perhaps he would not be able to identify or decode every single component of it and this must be allowed for when providing practice in comprehension.

xiii) Motivation

Our language is first of all an instrument through which we find out about our surroundings; it is a means of getting what we want, not a goal to be achieved.

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All children acquire their language within a cultural framework and from their first attempts at communication they use language as a social instrument to evoke a response from other people. The motivation of communication is powerful, for if the child cannot say what he wants, he will not be able to satisfy his needs. Therefore he must acquire the appropriate use of speech in various situations. Hawkins, in a consideration of the motivating factor of the satisfaction of basic requirements, compares the learning of a foreign language with the infant's acquisition of his own language:

There are many important differences between the two processes but one is crucial. During the acquisition of the mother tongue every speech act, every new act of comprehension by the baby is an act of performance: a play with the curtain up and the audience in their seats. Each linguistic step forward is motivated. Language is used to satisfy a need. By contrast in the foreign language classroom, very few speech acts satisfy a real need. They are mere rehearsals against the day, which for many pupils must seem very far distant, when the language will be really needed and when we cannot drop the pretence and break into English.

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In native language acquisition the child spends more time receiving language than producing it, therefore his powers of understanding are a reliable base upon which to build in speech production. One striking contrast between foreign language learning and first language acquisition is that for the mother tongue, learning and use are the same activity. The child is motivated to learn his native language, since his brain is constructed to do so and his wants demand it.¹²⁶

Christopherson maintains that during the development of the child into a complete personality, he is eager to model his behaviour on others in order to conform to their particular social group.¹²⁷ Mackey contends

that it is contact with children of approximately his own age which shapes the control of his language. "The main factors in the development of the language of children are the children they play with."¹²⁸

The young child's learning is therefore motivated by a basic wish to be a valued member of his speech community,¹²⁹ but Pit Corder would appear to be uncertain of the significance of the role of motivation in first language acquisition and contends that congenitally deaf children, by developing means of non verbal communication, satisfy their needs in the earlier stages of development, "so that it does not appear that young children must specifically acquire language to cope with their environment."¹³⁰

It could be argued, however, that the non-verbal communication cited by Pit Corder is a justifiable substitute for speech, and that were these children able to communicate through language, the need for a replacement would be superfluous.

Language develops naturally in all normal children and would seem to have a social, cultural and instrumental value in allowing the child to understand his environment and satisfy his fundamental needs, in order to become ultimately an independent member of society.¹³¹

xiv) The Conditions of Language Acquisition

It has been hitherto suggested that apart from possibly innate factors, language was acquired partly because the child happened to be in the relevant language environment and partly as a result of some motivation or will to use language.

The full value of an utterance and the motivation for its specific form can only be realised if it is seen as actively functioning within, and responding to, the framework of characteristics set by the situation in which it is produced. 132

A child acquiring his native language is in contact with that language for months before his first attempts at speech production. Language is being spoken around him and he has other people on whom he can model his speech. Obviously with nothing to imitate, the child would not produce any utterances that were meaningful in terms of language, although imitation by itself would not appear to be a satisfactory answer to the question of how children acquire their mother tongue. Before learning to speak the child constantly finds himself in everyday situations. He listens and then attempts to copy, experiencing considerable phonetic difficulties in reproducing the sounds with his own speech organs. Eventually he tries out his own version of the adult model on other people, making mistakes by either presenting adult speech perfectly but in the wrong context, or vice versa and refining them in the light of experience. These are creative, constructive errors which are an integral element of successful language development.

The language of the child's environment is not made up of perfect samples of grammatical speech,¹³³ and Wallwork maintains that evidence from experimental linguistics suggests that children exhibit a comprehension of grammar before they can produce sentences containing similar syntactical forms.¹³⁴

Wilkins contends that the natural development of a young child's language is based on a capacity for using words and phrases in new combinations.¹³⁵ The child learns new phrases by analogy and relies on feedback from the adult to correct the use of language. He further maintains that adults do not simplify language for the infant but De Villiers argues that there is some degree of simplification by the adult for the very young child.

Adults oblige by being sensitive to the child's level of comprehension and by restricting their use of complex transformations such as passive or embedded sentences, 136

but this bears no comparison with the structurally controlled procedures generally applied to second language learning.

Language, therefore, would not appear to be inseparable from the corpus of human behaviour, originating primarily from the unique nature of man. Within each speech community, language reflects human life and forms the basis of all cultural concerns. It serves as a classification for the complexity of human experience and guides man in his attempts at an understanding of the world and himself. In this respect language and behaviour would seem to be indivisible.

Section 2

FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

i) Reasons for the Study of a Foreign Language

The objectives of foreign language learning tend to influence the teaching methods employed. In the past language learning seemed necessary as part of a systematic study to provide an excellent mental discipline. The principles of language learning were based on the classics, as a means of training logical facilities. It was thought necessary to be able to read and translate the language, but less essential to use it personally. The modern change of emphasis has been concerned with not only conveying the language, but also the cultural context of which it is part.¹³⁷

Rivers maintains that far too much attention is still being paid to the formal structure of teaching, which is hindering the promotion of cultural understanding.¹³⁸

The study of a foreign language should furnish a valuable cultural insight of the people whose language is being acquired.

By cultural we mean all the beliefs and behaviour patterns of the societal group as they appear in arts and crafts, in tales and myths, in work and play, and in religion and everyday life. 139

Wallwork claims that in many modern language learning processes the culture is dissimilar to the kind that would have been apparent formerly.¹⁴⁰ As society changes, its social mores and customs reflect its adaptations. Many teachers would argue that to provide access to literature is one of the principal aims of language learning and Harding believes that it would not be justifiable to separate the literary language from everyday life:

Only by understanding the force, the colour and the overtones of words and phrases in everyday conversation can readers come to see the importance of those expressions when employed by a successful writer in poetry, in drama or in the novel. 141

A significant depth of cultural understanding is necessary for the learner to comprehend how the linguistic patterns function in relation to each other and their place in the cultural system. The feelings and

attitudes of the speech community find expression through the medium of language and the juxtaposition of language and culture must be carefully balanced.¹⁴²

Brooks would appear to concur with this hypothesis maintaining that "unless the facts of persons and places are taken into account as well as linguistic facts, we do not have the full dimension of language."¹⁴³

Whilst acknowledging the role of culture in the language learning process, Lambert warns that the pupil in the classroom could suffer to a certain degree from the loss of some of his personal identity. In a comparison between the culture shock and the condition of schizophrenics unable to make use of their surroundings, he discovered a correlation between the language of the latter and foreign language learners.¹⁴⁴

Hawkins believes that the development of a better understanding of how language works, the relationship between patterns of speech and meaning is a primary objective of language study, which should culminate in a contrasting analysis of aspects of the native and foreign culture;

It is an important aim of language teaching to develop the capacity to make a just comparison between a culture one has grown up in and a different, challenging complex of values. 145

Whitfield argues that a comparative judgement of the different values speech communities possess "can contribute to the goal of education for international understanding, first hand experience of which frequently necessitates language competence."¹⁴⁶

There has been increased attention on the teaching of oral skills, enabling people to communicate with the inhabitants of other countries. Language is basically an instrument of communication, which provides a basis for the structuring of thoughts. There is a need for a country to have a group of people who can converse with other countries in their specialist fields.¹⁴⁷ Calvert maintains that if the role of education is to anticipate the requirements of the future, then foreign language study can contribute to the solution of the problem for more people who can

communicate with other nationalities,¹⁴⁸ a hypothesis supported by a report of the Confederation of British Industry:

There are many occasions when a high proficiency in the knowledge of a language is required . . . The most usual requirement, however, is one of effective oral communication. Industry needs many more people who can speak at least one foreign language. 149

One of the functions of the foreign language programme should be to develop the intellectual powers of the learner, but unlike the traditional approach, it is not intended to be the sole prerequisite.¹⁵⁰

The study of a modern language can contribute to a deeper appreciation of the learner's own language and Whitfield asserts that one of the objectives of language learning is to create a 'verbal symbolic understanding.'¹⁵¹

Hawkins claims that one of the less easily measurable aims of foreign language study is the development of a capacity for "learning how to learn a language",¹⁵² so that the foundations would supplement any attempt at further language learning not provided for in the school, but required by professional or leisure interests.

It could be argued that a function of the school curriculum is to provide the pupil with an introduction to many areas of human knowledge and experience. A foreign language taught actively and as a means of communication can further this aim.

It would appear that the content of the foreign language course and the process of learning should acknowledge the reasons for language study and endeavour to fulfil the objectives prescribed for pupils of varying abilities and requirements.

ii) The Characteristics and Conditions of Second Language Learning

In learning a second language it is impossible to recreate the favourable conditions and atmosphere in which the child acquires his mother tongue. The most obvious difference is in the amount of time the foreign language learner is exposed to the language. Wilkins maintains that one year spent in a typical language learning situation in the classroom is merely the equivalent of three weeks contact for native language acquisition.¹⁵³

In native language development, children do not learn from a limited and structured framework, but hear language at most levels of complexity. In second language learning, the child enters the situation with a fully developed system of his own and although it is related to both his first and second languages, it has its own characteristics.¹⁵⁴ The child is more aware of learning a foreign language and by the time children undertake language study, they have to take an imagined situation for a real one, whereas in native language acquisition, language and use are synonymous.¹⁵⁵

In summarising the contrast between the conditions for native language and foreign language learning Hornsey states:

We grasp the system of our mother tongue largely spontaneously through long exposure to it, but we cannot hope for the same spontaneity in the short time available for a new language in school. 156

It is unrealistic to assume that foreign language learning can follow similar processes to the factors involved in native language acquisition. Not only are the sound patterns and structures of the mother tongue familiar to the learner, but he also uses them automatically and with relative ease.¹⁵⁷

The language in the child's environment is not systematically graded, but in foreign language learning the only means of achieving competence is by carefully graded and structured procedures employed in restricted situations.¹⁵⁸ Cook defines the contrast between first and second

language learning in terms of informal learning, which occurs in a natural setting and formal learning, which takes place in a classroom.¹⁵⁹

However Macnamara argues that language teaching is not strictly formal, since the teacher is not able to supply formal rules that are linguistically and psychologically valid.¹⁶⁰

Some theorists would argue the case for a strategy of foreign language teaching based on the conditions of native language acquisition and that on this basis, pupils learning a second language should not be presented in the early stages with a simplified form of the language but Rivers maintains that:

More recent child language acquisition studies have shown however that it is not the case that the child learns from a wide variety of complicated structures and vocabulary. Actually, the child takes out much of what he does not understand in language, which is not addressed to him.

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Memory is an important characteristic in second language learning and Hawkins differentiates between medium and short term memory.¹⁶²

In assisting children to remember the teacher should consider that what is already retained in the memory store is as important as the new material to be assimilated. There are two means by which new items may be linked with items in an existing store, either "by association (or contiguity) or by sharing some feature or features (as part of a perceived pattern) with part of the existing store."¹⁶³

The more effective procedure of the two would appear to be connecting items by insight into the patterns of the language rather than by linking them by association. A teaching strategy which assists the learner to perceive the relationships between the patterns, with consolidation by further practice would appear to be advantageous.

However, before new items can be reinforced by being connected to items already in the memory store, there is a short period of time, of a few seconds duration, immediately after they are introduced, when it is possible for them to be remembered because the trace or echo remains in

the short term memory. If pupils cannot hold in their short term memory more than three or four items for enough time to repeat them, then they cannot be interconnected with items already in the longer term memory and consequently there is no transfer of learning.¹⁶⁴

Von Humboldt maintained that language could not really be taught, and that only the conditions in which it would develop spontaneously in the mind could be created.¹⁶⁵ Brooks asserts that learning a foreign language may be successfully achieved provided that the conditions under which it is presented are favourable:

Could all learn a second language? Where the conditions for learning are reasonably similar for both first and second languages, as in many bilingual areas, the answer seems to be yes. Even in the schools with a proper understanding of the mechanisms involved and the necessary disposition and activity on the part of the learner, it is patently possible for him to become bilingual within the area of his experience with the second language.

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iii) The Process of Learning

Language learning, being largely a psychological problem, benefits along with other psychological problems from our knowledge of the process of learning, thinking and remembering.

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Many theorists have attempted to explain the process of learning a foreign language and have arrived at a number of different and conflicting theories.

Researchers have had to repeat at regular intervals that we are still far from understanding the learning process and that until we do, generalisation about teaching methods must be tentative.

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Mackey maintains that learning theories may be based on two major divisions derived from cognitive and associative hypotheses. The cognitive theory posits that learning is part of the total framework of the mind and that assimilation is by perception, interpretation and problem solving strategies. The associative or behaviourist theory claims that learning is through trial and error, as a collection of conditioned responses to stimuli.

The different theories, however, are not all mutually exclusive; there is a certain measure of agreement among them on the factors which affect the learning process.

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Rivers argues that language learning is a compromise between the two approaches.¹⁷⁰ The learner needs a sound foundation on which to base his efforts at language production. Mere vocabulary teaching or labelling will not form the basis for language use, the pupil must learn to utilise the syntactic patterns.

It is clear from research in testing aptitude for language learning that the most important single factor is insight into grammatical relationships.

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The presentation of the foreign language in the teaching situation must comprise strategies, which facilitate an understanding of the manner in which the foreign tongue operates and enable the pupils to discriminate pattern.

The process of learning should initially involve exposure to examples, allowing the formulation of hypotheses by analysis at various stages and the development of language by analogy using these hypotheses.¹⁷²

Belyayev acknowledges the importance of insight into pattern in language learning and the necessity for the pupil to test hypotheses by creative use. "When using language, a person always creates his speech anew, making creative use of both habits and knowledge."¹⁷³

The teacher must take care not to place the learner in a situation where he has to apply language before he has internalised the rules, but must also beware of constructing a procedure contrived solely on a basis of remembering grammatical structures. "Knowledge and habits form a necessary basis for speech activity, but the essence of speech lies in the creative function of skills."¹⁷⁴

Harding proposes a rationale for the learning process based on the following principles: acquisition of new behaviour patterns and the learning of new skills and habits; use of the spoken language; limitation and grading of new linguistic items; insight into the structures of the language; the presentation of linguistic items in a meaningful context, which promotes understanding.¹⁷⁵

Pupils cannot achieve language mastery in one step for learning a language is a cumulative process demanding time and preparation.

The question that course writers have tried to answer is how best to divide the learning activities in progressive stages which are most advantageous for the student in the development of second language competence.

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Stern, in outlining the stages for the development of second language competence, argues that the learner advances from an elementary level of mechanical skill or manipulation of patterns to a point of transfer of patterns with an emphasis on meaning. From this platform he progresses to true communication, using language in an intuitive and natural manner.¹⁷⁷ Language is far too complicated to be handled at a conscious level, so that

the patterns of the foreign language must be overlearned to facilitate spontaneous and active use.

Brooks would appear to be aware of the significance of the understanding of pattern but asserts that exploitation and practice are essential.

If the understanding of a language pattern led immediately and directly to automatic control of that pattern, language learning would be far different from what it is.

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Mackey proposes a framework for teaching based on the fundamental elements of selection, gradation, presentation and repetition. Selection is necessary because it would be impossible to learn the whole of an area of knowledge. Gradation is required because all of what has been selected cannot be taught immediately. Presentation is important, for it is inconceivable to teach without communication. Repetition is vital since it would not be feasible to learn a skill from one single example.¹⁷⁹ To this list of basic elements could be added exploitation, because all skill depends on practice and the necessity for assimilation and improvisation in new situations.

Hawkins has developed a logical sequence in learning founded on Bruner's three stages that all children normally pass through: enactive (learning by doing), iconic (learning through perceptual organisation and imagery), symbolic (learning through symbols). The three stages are not mutually exclusive and interact in the learner's cognitive system.¹⁸⁰

Since we have all gone over this ground in all our learning through pre-school and primary school, it makes sense when embarking on a new language to retrace a well-known path via the same stages.

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By following this learning process, it is believed that pupils will feel confident in facing a new situation.

A successful strategy for second language learning must take account of the different and occasionally conflicting views of the learning process. The teacher is faced with the dilemma of whether to encourage the pupil to handle the language rationally or intuitively. There would appear to be

some justification in the belief that the mentalist and behaviourist approaches are not irreconcilable and that features of both could be incorporated.

Any effective procedure depends on the fundamental element of a transfer of learning. This implies changing the behaviour of the learner, so that he is able, when encountering a particular problem or situation, to display a behaviour which he did not previously exhibit. In other words, if there is no new or changed behaviour, no learning has taken place. Essentially it is what the pupil does that determines what he learns, following from active response and participation on the part of the pupil. It would be erroneous to separate the process of learning from the needs of the pupils.

It is by a better understanding of learners, their strategies, their thoughts and feelings during the learning process, their successes as well as their difficulties and failures, that we may gradually arrive at a better understanding of language learning and teaching.

iv) The Relevance of Age

It has been previously suggested that an individual acquires his native language effortlessly and that he would appear to be genetically conditioned to develop speech at an early age, although some elements of grammar seem to be attained over a period of several years.

Although a substantial degree of basic competence in the rules of the native language is attained by the normal child at school-entry age, development is by no means complete at that time. Certain advanced stages of phonology are not normally mastered until about eight years of age, and it is probably the case that complete competence in the grammatical rules of the language is not approximated until the period of adolescence.

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In the school context foreign language learning does not usually occur until the mother tongue has been almost completely assimilated and Christopherson maintains that the significance of age for the acquisition of the native language bears no relevance to the learning of a second language:

Since second language learning does not usually begin until the instinctive capacity has reached some degree of maturity, our knowledge of the early stages of first language learning provides no clue to any later learning process.

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Seliger contends that as a person matures, the ability to learn a foreign language as competently as a native speaker depends on changes which take place in the brain, allied to the gradual loss of plasticity.¹⁸⁵ Obviously the nature of learning will vary with the age of the learner. A child possesses the neurological and physiological flexibility that allows him more easily to deploy the new speech habits, but this is counterbalanced by a limited outlook on life. Whilst the older learner may have less resilient muscular control, he will compensate by a probable increase in motivation, a more extensive experience of learning and precise, prespecified objectives, enabling him to focus his efforts.

Rivers argues that it is impossible to generalise about the effects of age on the successful learning of a foreign language.

Recent research in second language acquisition in natural environments makes it abundantly clear that different people at different ages acquire a second language in different ways and at different rates. 186

Contrary to the assertions of some theorists that children prove to be better language learners than adults, Cook produces research findings which would seem to merit the opposite conclusion, that mature persons are more successful than children in tests conducted under controlled conditions.¹⁸⁷ Braine maintains that the evidence for the popular opinion, that adults are less efficient language learners, is very inconclusive. It may evince the decline of a special facility at the phonological level after the critical period at the age of puberty, but there is no suggestion that it extends to other areas of language.¹⁸⁸ It is at the phonological level or the ability to acquire a native-like pronunciation of a second language, where the evidence for the age of completion of cerebral dominance is most convincing. Studies in this field imply that it is virtually impossible for an individual who commences study of a foreign language after the age of puberty, to speak without any trace of a foreign accent.¹⁸⁹

Brooks contends that the learner's age is an important factor in language learning, for this determines the extent to which he still retains the properties that made possible the acquisition of the native language.¹⁹⁰ For this reason Seliger recommends that second language learning in the school should be initiated as soon as possible, in order to capitalise on the residual language readiness of the brain.¹⁹¹

Mackey considers that the age of the learner affects the suitability of the methods employed in terms of content and presentation. "One cannot expect a child of fifteen to learn in exactly the same way as a child of five."¹⁹²

The manner in which the material is presented to pupils of different ages will naturally have to be adapted to their requirements and capabilities.

Depending on their age and ability ranges, individuals manifest a diversity of learning strategies, some preferring habit-forming procedures, while others are quicker to learn by insight into pattern or grasp of 'rules'. This will have implications in the classroom, for pupils who are able quickly to see the pattern in speech behaviour have the great advantage that every new piece of language learnt can potentially be generalised in new contexts. For the rote learner each new piece of learning tends to remain 'sui generis' with no applicability outside the context in which it was learnt.

The way the material is presented in the method may be more appropriate for one age group than for another . . . In the presentation of the structure and meanings of the language children may need only the examples, whereas more mature learners may demand to know the rules. New associations are established more easily in children; adults have a body of associations not so easily disturbed.

v) Repetition and Second Language Learning

"Repetition is one of the most important elements in remembering what is learned."¹⁹⁴

Repetition is regarded as an essentially fundamental component of many theories of language learning and especially in the audio-visual and audio-lingual techniques. As applied to foreign language teaching procedures, the role of imitation is clearly linked to Skinner's Behaviourist principles, where it is a first stage in establishing a collection of responses in the new language. In Behaviourist theory, immediate reinforcement increases the likelihood of a response recurring. The foreign language teacher provides the reinforcement by confirming the correct responses and the pupil hears these model answers, which with repeated reinforcement at intervals become established as habits.¹⁹⁵

Usually in the second language learning process, repetition is almost always of complete sentences and the pupil is not expected to manifest that he is capable of abstracting the grammatical pattern or the content words.¹⁹⁶

Rivers maintains that a strict adherence to the notion of repetition in conditioning theory as a means of analogising syntactical patterns, concentrates on language at a very superficial level.

In many cases the analogy may be valid; in others the surface features will hide real divergencies in usage and the student will fall into error because his knowledge of the language is insufficient for him to recognise the limits within which he may safely analogize.

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In second language learning, techniques should encourage insight into pattern or concept formation and not merely rote learning of items in a sequence. Repetition ensures frequency of contact with the language but this should be reflected in the subsequent competence and performance of the learner.¹⁹⁸ Pupils rely on short-term memory in imitation and there must be some form of exploitation if he is to transfer the concept to the

long-term memory store.

Mechanical, nonmeaningful activity does not use up a great deal of processing capacity - just enough to imitate more or less accurately and make minor adjustments.

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Mackey emphasises the importance of practice or consolidation in order to assist memory and stresses the importance of overlearning.²⁰⁰ He does warn, however, that continual repetition of the same or similar items may lead to a saturation point, when the additional time or effort spent does not justify the end product and may indeed jeopardise performance.

This may be due to the fact that the significance of constantly recurring stimuli is eventually ignored, since its high expectancy reduces the amount of new information conveyed.

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Mackey cites the benefits that accrue from repetition, claiming that the more often a situation is acted out, the more likely it is to be repeated in the same arrangement. However, it could arise that incorrect forms could be reinforced by the imitation of mistakes. "The problem is to obtain the maximum amount of repetition with the minimum of mistakes."²⁰²

Four basic types of repetition are employed in foreign language methodology: rote, in which the same forms are used continuously; incremental, where each new utterance adds an element to the structure, requiring the pupil to build up longer and longer sentences. These varieties of imitation do not necessarily ensure an understanding of the meaning of what is repeated. Variational repetition allows for sequences to be repeated, while altering their constituents slightly. The possible alternatives may be assembled in the form of chains or tables. Operational repetition combines the elements of a particular language skill in order to make it the possession of the pupil. It assumes that all the constituents and abilities have been already acquired and is used to consolidate the material, before it is employed creatively by the learner.

Variational and operational repetition are arranged so that the pupil has to exhibit some knowledge of what is being uttered, in order to be effective.²⁰³

Repetition can, therefore, be shown as an important factor in language learning, but will only be expedient if it is regarded as a mere step to language control.

Wringe, in evaluating its role in language courses, would appear to be cognisant of the limited virtue in unexploited imitation and the need for strategies to consolidate the material.

The value of this kind of work may be doubted, since the net result is imitation or formal reading rather than the independent use of the language. Though this criticism is sometimes met by saying that material . . . is intended to be re-used in a meaningful situation, this does not always take place.

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vi) Interference from the Mother Tongue

Interference can be described as the negative effect of earlier learning on new skills and the adverse influence of the native language on foreign language learning.

The second language learner inevitably possesses a collection of concepts linked with the language in which he thinks and consequently it is very difficult for him to acquire initially many concepts in the new language.²⁰⁵ Rivers maintains that it is also at the surface structure level, where the pupil experiences interference from his native language and finds it exacting to differentiate between the patterns of his own speech and the particular language he is learning.

When, however, even a young child learns a second language . . . we have evidence that he too suffers from the interference of the surface features of one language with the surface features of the other. 206

This hypothesis can be demonstrated by the example of an English pupil who, having learned that a French adjective frequently follows the noun, may still say incorrectly 'une bleue jupe' instead of the correct French structure 'une jupe bleue'.

Brooks implies that the learner is unaware of the nature of the interference from his own language:

Despite his best efforts, a certain amount of interference and distortion will often be induced in his performance in the new language by the mere presence in his head of the words and patterns of the mother tongue. 207

There is no field of learning, apart from foreign language study, where a pupil, however enthusiastic, talented and diligent, has to struggle with a subconscious resistance of tremendous strength, like that created by the ingrained patterns of the mother tongue.²⁰⁸ Pickett asserts that the effects of interference are increased when the learner is tired or excited or if the conditions for learning, including a fellow pupil or teacher, somehow strengthen the mother tongue bond.²⁰⁹

The most noticeable native language interference manifests itself in accent. A foreign accent is very difficult to eliminate by post adolescent learners and even expert linguists. It would appear to be a part of the mother tongue identity, which the learner is most reluctant to yield. Frequently there is a stage beyond which he will not improve, as if he were no longer aware of the need for improvement, yet paradoxically many learners strive to improve their pronunciation. Pickett suspects that this attempt is a conscious attitude compensating for the psychological feeling that they really do not want to submit their identity by losing their accent.²¹⁰

Rivers suggests that a foreign accent is inevitable when pupils position their mouth and lips as for their own language and to alleviate this recommends that pupils be made aware of the total pattern of the integrated phonological system of the foreign language by frequent practice and muscle training.²¹¹ Bearman maintains that too little account is taken of the fact that when the mother tongue is firmly entrenched, only controlled and systematic practice of each pattern of the foreign language can hope to make it the possession of the learner.²¹²

As the pupil makes progress in foreign language learning, he builds up a completely new reference system, which is initially precarious and badly structured, filtered through the reference system he already possesses. The teacher should be cognisant of the fact that the pupil does not come to the classroom as an empty, passive individual, whom he can inculcate with words and sentence patterns. He is an active participant, approaching any new language with a store of speech habits and preconceived ideas about language, inherent in his native language competence. These notions can interfere with effective learning and will inevitably dominate the development of a new language reference system.

It may well be that the answers to the problem of interference of the mother tongue, in constructing a meaningful methodology of foreign language

learning, are the factors of Contrastive and Error Analysis, which seek to relate the new language to the available but often misleading reference system in the familiar language.

vii) Errors in Second Language Learning

The attitude to errors in foreign language learning would appear to have changed significantly during the late nineteen sixties and seventies. Earlier Brooks had maintained that error had a relationship to learning resembling sin to virtue: "Like sin, error is to be avoided and its influence overcome, but its presence is to be expected."²¹³

This rather negative approach is not reflected, however, in later literature and the rapidly developing discipline of error-analysis has provided discerning teachers with a new procedure for their attempts at perfecting language control in their pupils.

Teaching language as communication is now an accepted aim of foreign language study and teachers are encouraged to develop situations in which pupils will want to express themselves creatively about their own interests and experiences, which will naturally entail them making some mistakes. "More important than error-free speech is the creation of an atmosphere in which the students want to talk."²¹⁴

Pit Corder maintains that this conspectus towards errors in the second language is founded partly on the analogy to the infant acquiring his mother tongue, where errors are regarded as part of the natural and progressive development of language competence and that consequently teachers should allow pupils to try out their hypotheses, even if mistakes might arise.²¹⁵ He proposes a discovery approach to error correction which might help pupils to make inferences and construct hypotheses about the foreign language. Rivers, however, suggests that a systematic approach to error correction would be more effective:

What is required is for the instructor to note silently consistent and systematic errors made by the student in his presence . . . these errors will then be discussed with the student at a time when the instructor is helping him evaluate his success in interaction, with particular attention being paid to those types of errors which hinder communication. 216

This methodical analysis of errors may provide useful insight into the process of foreign language development in the pupil and serve as a focus on his progress.

Hendrickson contends that there are three types of errors, whose correction may be helpful in the foreign language classroom:

Errors that impair communication significantly;
errors that have highly stigmatizing effects on the
listener or reader; and errors that occur frequently
in students' speech and writing. 217

Lee would appear to concur with many of the theorists that both native and foreign language learners are obliged to learn by making mistakes, but believes that second language learners on the other hand do not have to learn in this way to anything like the same extent. The attitude of researchers and course writers should be that mistakes can aid an understanding of how pupils are learning and mislearning but warns that language teaching methods which seem likely to cause pupils to make them should be avoided.²¹⁸

Most theorists would seem to suggest that a major source of error is the interference from the pupils' first language, but it has been argued that although this hypothesis may account for the majority of phonological errors, it cannot entirely explain many errors found in the lexicon, syntax, morphology and orthography of pupils' patterns of speech in the foreign language.²¹⁹

Linguists have introduced the device of contrastive analysis for assisting with pupils' errors. This theory assumes that interference from the first language causes errors in the second language.

Many linguists believed that once a teacher had a systematic knowledge of the differences between the two languages, he or she could begin developing appropriate techniques and materials that would help students avoid producing errors. 220

Rivers acknowledges the benefits to be derived from contrastive analysis but cautions that if the foreign language pattern is taught as if some elements within it function as in the native system and others function

contrastively, it is not being perceived as a part of the total functioning system of the foreign language and the pupil begins to learn the language in isolated segments which can inhibit spontaneous and active use.²²¹

The concept of error analysis is still in the process of development, although from the empirical evidence so far evinced, it would appear that the teacher who is aware of its basic principles could avail himself of a significant strategy for foreign language teaching. Much work still needs to be done by linguists and researchers in this field and with effective dissemination of the findings to the practitioners, error analysis may well come to be viewed as an important progression in foreign languages methodology.

viii) Motivation

The more the student is interested in an activity, the more he feels the desire to communicate in the language, and this is the first and most vital step in learning to use language forms spontaneously. 222

Gardner and Lambert distinguish between instrumental motivation in which the pupil wants to learn for utilitarian purposes and integrative in which the learner develops an interest in the other language community to such a degree that he wants to communicate actively with the speakers of that language.²²³ According to their hypothesis, foreign language learning is less likely to be successful if the pupil's motivation is instrumental rather than integrative although Burstall in her study of the teaching of French in primary schools claimed that

there was also ample evidence of instrumental motivation in the emphasis placed by the experimental pupils in the 'pay-off' value of learning French in terms of enhanced employment opportunities. 224

In native language acquisition, language and use are synonymous, but in the act of using the child learns. In a foreign language learning situation cognitive learning must be stimulated as well as the acquisition of skills.²²⁵ It must be accepted that the degree of artificiality in the language classroom is a significant contrast from the natural environment of the young child acquiring his mother tongue. Hawkins maintains that a means of overcoming this is for the teacher to make the learning process an enjoyable experience where rewards for successful work are immediate and the interaction between enjoyment and success carefully balanced.²²⁶ He argues the need for an intrinsic interest in language lessons with time spent effectively exploiting the willingness to work, when there is a likelihood of some success. Social motivation is important in directing a pupil to take up and persevere with a second language, with the family playing a part. Some languages are considered by parents to be better or more useful than others and Hawkins contends that "teachers must find ways of modifying parental attitudes."²²⁷

The teacher through his attitude and through the examples he draws of other people can be an important influence. Ing maintains that the key factor in any consideration of children's learning is the teacher and one of his prime functions is that of motivator; without motivation effective learning cannot occur.²²⁸ He should establish good relationships with his pupils, modify his attitude towards them by adapting his work to their different talents and make them realise that learning a foreign language is not an easy process of acquiring new skills, but a hard task requiring determination and persistence. "The art of teaching is to know when to encourage, when to exert pressure and when to leave alone."²²⁹

ix) Creativity

Possibly the most important aim of foreign language teaching is to enable pupils similarly to make creative use of the finite number of grammatical rules and the finite amount of vocabulary which we, as teachers, can pass on to them in the time and with the material available. 230

The transition from the controlled and restricted store of linguistic patterns to free communication may be regarded as the most difficult aspect of language teaching. It is not enough for the pupil to be able to express predigested utterances in a carefully rehearsed situation, he must understand the meaning and underlying principles, so that the knowledge he has acquired may be used to create further language.²³¹ Adequate opportunity must be provided in order that the learner will discover which forms are not possible in certain situations and by careful error correction, the teacher can furnish feedback to the pupil, enabling him to learn by his mistakes.

Rivers maintains that the transfer from the well-structured and controlled circumstances to a free, unrehearsed situation may be compared with the non-swimmer learning the basic movements and skills, who relies on the support and encouragement of somebody else, until he becomes autonomous in his own movement.²³² She divides language learning into two basic interacting components: skill acquisition, which permits internalisation of rules and their use in structured settings, referred to as 'pseudo-communication' and skill-using, a self-originating, independent activity, where the pupil employs language for normal purposes, establishing social relationship, seeking and giving information, personally relevant to himself and other people.²³³

It is important, therefore, that a pupil should be able to produce naturally the language which has been presented to him and which he has practised in various structured situations. This is particularly important where the pupil feels he has the means of saying what he wants, rather than what he is channelled into saying. This is not easy to achieve and demands

considerable creative thought on the part of the teacher to provide situations and stimuli that will enable all the pupils to make active use in a communicative way of the language they have learnt.

This experience is not intended to replace the careful teaching of the language we already supply (the skill-getting activities we organise) but to expand it with regular and frequent opportunities for autonomous interaction, thus making full provision for a dimension of language which at present is, if not completely neglected, at least given insufficient place in our programs.

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Section 3

METHODOLOGY

i) Fundamental Principles and Development

Cognitive mastery in a world that generates stimuli far faster than we can sort them out, depends upon strategies for reducing the complexity and the clutter.

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The formulation and implementation of effective teaching methods is the key to the teaching of foreign languages. It has been hitherto suggested that a successful strategy depends on the basic factor of a transfer of learning and that it is what the learner does that influences what he learns as a result of active response and participation.

"Children learn by talking: talk of the right kind helps to clarify thinking."²³⁶

Method would appear to be one of the prime causes of success or failure in language learning, but is of little consequence if there is not a will to learn. The crucial factor in any consideration of methodology is the teacher: methods are only instruments in his hands.

The one . . . important variable in the learning situation is the teacher himself. His skill and personality are instrumental in creating the conditions for learning. His skill is dependent on two factors, his own proficiency in the language and his knowledge of and expertise in methods and techniques of language teaching.

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Mackey maintains that all methods must include the basic elements of selection, gradation, presentation and repetition.²³⁸ To this list of fundamental elements could be added exploitation to achieve the creativity and improvisation in new situations.

Many methods are founded on notions of how languages are acquired. Some methods, for example, are supposed to reproduce the conditions under which the native language was acquired. Such methods stress imitation, rote memory, association and analogy. On the other hand there are those based on the opinion that there can be no such strategy as a natural method, since a method is a device which is necessarily artificial.²³⁹

The first concern with language teaching method in Europe was the teaching of Latin in the Middle Ages. In those days Latin was the international language of culture throughout Europe. Latin was taught intensively like the mother tongue, until at least the Renaissance period. Latin was still taught in an active manner, first orally and then through reading and composition. When the preoccupation with teaching Modern Languages, usually French, made itself felt in the Renaissance, modern languages were taught in a direct, intensive manner. In those days, learning French was considered an important part of a nobleman's education. Towards the end of the following century, this practice was also introduced into the upper middle class. The aim of language study was essentially practical, to acquire the ability to manage in the ordinary circumstances of daily life. Between the Renaissance and the turn of the nineteenth century, when Latin had ceased to be a normal vehicle for communication, language learning developed into a systematic study to provide an excellent mental discipline.²⁴⁰

ii) The Grammar-Translation Method

When a modern foreign language had to be found a place in the school curriculum during the last century, it was taught following the principles of the classics as a means of training logical facilities. Its formal approach is detached from actual language and depends on the memorisation of rules explained at length, with groups of words. The words are then put together according to the rule, thereby giving practice in the application of the rule.²⁴¹

The teaching begins with rules, isolated vocabulary items, paradigms and translation. Easy classics are then translated, with the teacher moving from one half digested item to another. The manner in which the vocabulary is taught usually presents special difficulty to the learner. No scientific choice of words is made, based on frequency counts or practical utility. The words are usually listed and supposed to be memorised as individual units. Consequently they are not usually retained in the memory on account of their excessive number. The teaching procedure is inadequate, for no attempt is made to drill and recall these words in the following lessons and teaching them out of their context makes meaningful retention almost impossible.²⁴²

The grammar is traditional, derived from Latin and based on artificial rules and classifications. It is taught abstractly, analytically and deductively, even to young pupils, who are still insecure in the logical processes of abstraction and deduction. As a result, very little transfer of learning occurs between theory and practice with very little opportunity for manipulation of the foreign language.

Greatwood feels that there is a place for grammar learning in the middle years of language study and advocates an adaptation, whereby formal grammar should not be learned in advance of the speech patterns it analyses, but once the patterns are known it can help pupils to make generalisations

and work by analogy. He would use paradigms and lists of irregular forms for reference.²⁴³

Translation is the device by which meaning is conveyed in the Grammar-Translation method. However, according to recent research in language psychology and neuro-physiology, learning any language results in active, productive memory traces being formed in the brain. Learning a foreign language leads to the formation of a new and totally separate system of traces upon which an existing system should not encroach.²⁴⁴ This would suggest that translating, which is a special skill in itself, should no longer be the chief means nor the principal goal of foreign language instruction, because it confuses the different systems of memory traces, thus preventing the pupils from thinking originally in the foreign language.

There would, therefore, seem to be no justification whether theoretical or practical for adopting this approach. The formal methods do not teach the language but about the language and suggest that learning a language is purely an intellectual exercise without any other function or value. They are not useful for learning the spoken language and are hardly justifiable for teaching the written language. A strictly theoretical grammatical approach can be acceptable only at a very advanced level, with students who already have a good, practical mastery of the language.

iii) The Direct Method

At the turn of the century the Reform Movement inaugurated by Sweet and Sayce in England, Jespersen in Denmark and Viëtor in Germany, made an attempt to transform the teaching of foreign languages. Using the spoken language as the basis, the Reform Movement elaborated a method (later called 'Direct') whereby words were to be used in sentences and not in isolation. Sentences were to be used in contexts and new material, vocabulary and grammar forms were to be taught inductively and assimilated intuitively (by mime or gesture, pictures, drawings, illustrations, by definition in terms of the words and expressions already mastered, or from context).²⁴⁵ The ultimate aim of the Direct Method is to encourage the ability to think in the foreign language without passing through the intermediate stage of the native language or any grammatical theory.²⁴⁶ The two fundamental principles of the direct method are: Direct association of the foreign speech with the learner's thought: he must learn as soon as possible to think in the foreign language, and constant use of the foreign language without recourse to the native language.²⁴⁷ Consequently concrete vocabulary is taught through direct association, abstract words by association of ideas. Grammar is conveyed to the pupil by example and visual demonstration. The first stage is always oral, based on intensive listening and repeating until the forms become automatic.

From a positive viewpoint, the Direct Method constitutes a formidable advance over the formal approach by emphasising practice in aural understanding and speaking. A good foundation in the spoken language makes subsequent learning of reading and writing easier and more thorough.²⁴⁸

This method, however, requires a teacher who possesses a perfect mastery of the foreign language and makes great claims on his nervous and physical energy, so that to sustain the effort over a working day could be extremely difficult. The teacher may also waste time by not using the

learner's language when useful and advisable. He may also overemphasise the concrete by presenting predominantly concrete material which, of course, is the only kind demonstrable. The method lacks the scientific bases of selection and gradation and the teacher may, by using conversation as a dominant form of teaching, unwittingly present many different forms for the same idea, thus the pupils will lack a clear notion of what they are trying to achieve. It also favours the highly intelligent pupil with well-developed powers of induction.

Wringe maintains that there are similarities between the Grammar-Translation and Direct methods:

From the standpoint of the seventies, however, the direct method is itself very much a traditional approach . . . Many of its adherents accepted the assumption that language learning was a matter of understanding and applying grammatical rules, even though these had to be explained in a language not yet known to the pupils. 249

The eclectic method is an adaptation of the Direct method, which permits some grammatical explanation in the native language and uses substitution tables to reinforce structures and the explanation of words difficult to convey by realia, visuals, gesture and mime. The success attained by enthusiastic, conscientious teachers employing this approach was remarkable, due largely to well-prepared and energetic lessons.²⁵⁰

iv) The Audio-Lingual Method

The most fundamental tenet of audio-lingual belief is that language is essentially a matter of habit, of verbal behaviour, to be drilled until in certain situations certain responses are surely produced as conditioned reflexes.

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The audio-lingual method is a collection of strategies and techniques assisting the assimilation and consolidation of active skills in the foreign language. A new grammatical item is usually presented to the learner in a specially written dialogue, which provides a context for the new structure and the pupil can learn to use it as a response to another sentence, with which he will probably be familiar from previous lessons. Subsequently the new structure is taken out of the dialogue and through pattern practice (structural drills) the pupil is given intensive opportunity to provide further sentences, identical in structure but varied in vocabulary.²⁵²

This method aims to develop fluency and comprehension together with the gradual compilation of the reading and writing skills. Rivers contends that it provides motivation through a real sense of achievement with the less able being able to experience some success.²⁵³

Buckby argues that the meaningless repetition involved in drills should be avoided and that the drill should not be carried beyond saturation point.²⁵⁴ Cole has studied the limitations of modern audio-lingual techniques from the viewpoint of psychological theory and maintains that language communication involves a relationship between individuals and not merely the repetition of phrases and practising of structures.²⁵⁵

What seems to be implied by most of the literature is that the audio-lingual method at its best only partially fulfils the requirements of foreign language teaching. If taken narrowly, it would neglect more conscious operations required for total learning, by overemphasis on mimicry and memorisation.

For effective consolidation, the pattern must be made as relevant as possible, by presentation in situations related to the pupils' interest and experience. There must also be exploitation by the transition from drills to independent speech.²⁵⁶

The foreign language teacher in England lays great importance on direct contact with the pupils, on his personal presence in the classroom and on situational teaching. This country has never accorded a major place to intensive drills and pattern practice, perhaps for the reason that they are initially dealt with out of situation.

v) The Audio Visual Method

The rapid developments that have led to the popularity of the audio-visual method have taken place over the last twenty years.

The use of audio-visual aids in teaching dates back as far as Comenius (1658) and regained vigour at the end of the last century. After the war, however, technological aids had a great impact on language teaching. Wall charts and printed illustrations had been surpassed, although not entirely replaced by slides, films, television programmes, with the reinforcement of machines to reproduce sound, like tape recorders and language laboratories. There is no doubt that audio-visual aids have a pertinent role to play in foreign language teaching.²⁵⁷

Some techniques in the late nineteen fifties claim to have perfected an audio-visual method. A lesson incorporating this procedure is taught in four interrelated stages. Each stage has distinct characteristics and specific purposes.

The initial stage is presentation, during which each new language expression is presented by film strip or picture sequence, whilst the pupils hear the tape recording in the context of the visual situation, which purports to teach meaning without intervention by the teacher. Pupils are intended to form their own impressions of the overall sense of the material.

The second stage is explication, which confirms or corrects the pupil's conceptualisations of the presentation. To achieve accurate comprehension the teacher directs attention to the significant details of each picture. Krings maintains that this phase is the most vulnerable and that

little is in fact 'explained' but by means of the visuals and some rudimentary questioning and other hints and nudges the pupils are brought to understand the situation depicted and the recorded material. 258

Once comprehension is assured the pupil assimilates the new expressions by repetition, the third stage, which allows for extensive drilling to ensure that the linguistic patterns are overlearned to facilitate spontaneous and active use.

The fourth stage or exploitation is considered to be the most important section of the procedure, whereby the visual-aids are gradually withdrawn until the pupil is self-reliant in his use of the new acquisitions.²⁵⁹

It may be argued from the methodological point of view, that audio-visual techniques cannot alone constitute a method, but only a subsidiary part of any strategy, which aims at teaching the spoken language.²⁶⁰

Cole contends that pictures may have several useful functions in language learning, but questions how far they can impart meaning to a given sound sequence. The notion that a picture in itself conveys meaning and helps the language learning process is debatable. Pictures are ambiguous, since they can always evoke several different verbal reactions. Meaning is acquired not only through visual stimuli, but primarily "intra-verbal association."²⁶¹ The problem of understanding is not solved by means of pictures, as there are varying degrees of comprehension.

Pictures, however, can be highly motivating: they usually have great sensory impact and can focus a converging point of interest for oral interaction.

There is a danger in the strict use of the tape recorder and visual stimuli, that by relying entirely on the machine, the learner may take on a rather passive attitude, thus jeopardising the integrity of the aim of language teaching: the ability to communicate actively in the foreign language, not just receive messages passively.

Strictly speaking, therefore, the audio-visual way of teaching can only improperly be termed a method, although it represents one of the most valuable assets within the framework of any functional oral approach.

CONCLUSION

Theory and practice converge to show that the complexity of the native and foreign language learning process must account for many factors. The literature would appear to suggest that the foreign language learning process is still far from understood and fundamental research has to be conducted still in this field. At present, many theories are centred around general principles of psychology and native language acquisition, which have been applied in the various teaching methods.

It would seem pertinent to query whether the various procedures employed for language teaching are congruent with contemporary knowledge of the process of learning, thinking and remembering. It has been suggested in the study that insight into pattern is the key element in language learning, aptitude and that the ultimate objective is the native speaker's competence. The learner has succeeded if he has internalised the syntactic patterns well enough to communicate naturally in an uncontrived situation. To attain perfect competence or mastery, it is necessary for him to have acquired the semantic, cultural, social and emotional propensities of the native speaker.

The intricacies of the learning process can be met only with adaptable, flexible and varied strategies. Over-emphasis on one or several aspects of the development of language has been responsible for the claim of each method of having unique value. Teachers should adopt the philosophy of language learning as a multivariate approach and accordingly of ensuring that methodological decisions are open to new adaptations and contributions, in most of which there is a grain of truth. Theorists and practitioners are sharing a feeling that effective techniques need to be based on the consideration of many facets and that any one particular method should be envisaged only as a partial set of principles and strategies to be integrated in a more comprehensive, procedural framework.

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