

E d i t o r i a l

NEW PERSPECTIVES IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Ten volumes and twelve years ago *Language Learning*, A Journal of Applied Linguistics, was launched. The members of the Research Club in Language Learning had a clear purpose for it: to publish articles exploring the application and implications of linguistics in foreign language teaching. The journal promised also to publish articles in related fields which attempted to show some of the practical uses of linguistics.

During these twelve years we have witnessed some major developments in the teaching of foreign languages in the United States. Language laboratories, which twelve years ago constituted news are now so generally accepted that no one would think of writing an article to report the installation of another one. Foreign Languages in Elementary Schools (FLES) spread throughout the land, guided by the Modern Language Association (MLA) with assistance from the Rockefeller Foundation. In 1958, the Center of Applied Linguistics was organized and opened offices in Washington, D. C., also through MLA, this time with financial support from the Ford Foundation. The National Defence Education Act (NDEA) exploded on the scene with its inclusion of foreign languages on the same level of urgency as the sciences. The MLA project to develop tests of professional competence for language teachers got under way in this past decade.

With these developments and many others not mentioned, *Language Learning* steadily continued to fill the need for the publication and distribution of those articles that more or less deliberately applied linguistics to language teaching. Articles that presented synchronic descriptive comparisons of languages for the identification and description of the learning problems of students remained through the years a unique contribution of this journal. *Language Learning* has dared to publish articles which would be rejected as too linguistic for the non-linguist and not linguistic enough for the pure linguist. Pressures from both sides have been felt throughout these past years, but they were successfully resisted in line with the purpose of the journal.

A stream of good articles presenting original teaching techniques or illustrating older techniques adapted to better linguistic material has also been a distinct contribution of *Language Learning* in the past.

If increased circulation may be taken as a measure of the impact that the journal has had, then *Language Learning* has done well. The first volume had a circulation of less than 200 paid subscriptions mostly in the United States. Today there is a paid circulation of more than 1200 in 76 countries. Its articles are read and quoted by scholars and teachers in many parts of the world. Bibliographies on language teaching and applied linguistics include a goodly supply of *Language Learning* titles. Permission for translations, and reprinting of articles in collections has to be granted often.

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Looking ahead into the future one can easily see the role of professional language teachers becoming more important and more professional. New possibilities, new knowledge, new skills, in short, new perspectives lie ahead. Merely knowing a language will become an increasingly inadequate qualification to teach it. The language teacher will have to learn more about some sciences such as linguistics, psychology, anthropology, more about electronic and other machines, about mass media, examinations, and new methodology, as well as about the language and culture that he teaches.

Since he teaches language, and since the central science of language is linguistic, he will have to keep informed in the rapidly developing science of language. Psycholinguistics and the psychology of learning hold promise of technical assistance. Cultural anthropology and sociology as they refine their methods and produce more complete and specific studies of cultures will have increasing significance for the language teacher.

Mechanical translation, though an applied problem in itself, will have significance for language teaching not through its end product or the computers and their use but through the clarifications of the theoretical descriptions of languages, which will be put to a pragmatic test in translation by the computers.

The language teacher will have to know about some of the technical problems of laboratories since he will increasingly be called upon to guide the installation or improvement of language laboratories. We will see developments in telephone dial type of selectors for labs, in the use of radio equipment for lab and outside practice, and we may expect to see claims to the

ultimate in laboratory design and invention. Even the ultimate lab, one that could be operated entirely by the student without help of a teacher will not eliminate the necessity of the teacher to achieve best results. This prediction is based on the experience with libraries and printing. One can find most of the information given in university classes in the library of a good university. It is all neatly written and indexed for the convenience of any reader who will take the trouble to locate the right books and read them. Yet the number of teaching institutions and live classes continue to gain rather than decrease. Somehow people need more than merely the availability of the words; they need the social situation of the class to learn, and the approval of the teacher.

Teaching machines will not eliminate the need for a teacher either. Students apparently prefer working for the teacher than for themselves or the machine.

Of the mass media, television may demand greatest attention from language teachers in the years ahead. Yet textbooks will not be eliminated nor relegated to insignificance. The professionally trained language teacher and expert will simply have to know more and be more versatile.

Examinations and tests should and will receive more serious attention in the next decade. Measuring with greater precision both language proficiency and professional competence will be required. The MLA tests of professional competence should be explained and supported as they appear. Increasingly greater sophistication will be demanded of experiments and claims to progress.

Finally method will continue to be on everybody's mind given the complexities and difficulty of language learning and the need to achieve a high degree of success in a relatively short time in order to derive the desired benefits from language study.

The oral approach has been widely accepted. It does not seem necessary or wise to continue defending it, or any other general approach, in the mass. We should at this stage borrow a page from our colleagues in the medical profession who no longer debate the microbe theory of disease, or any other theory in the mass but write in detail about the syndrome of a particular illness and the search for specific treatment, and give their results with enviable statistical precision that permits readers to judge for themselves rather than depend exclusively on opinions and authority based on the name and reputation of the writer. We need to know what results were obtained, with what techniques to teach each learning problem to speakers of a specific language background of a particular age and educa-

tional group. The descriptions of the techniques and control conditions must be neatly stated and the results objectively measured and reported.

The next ten volumes of *Language Learning* should be filled with information on these new perspectives as they develop, and the point of view should continue to be that of applied linguistics. I for one will eagerly look at *Language Learning* for the wonder of exciting developments to come.

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