

Editorial

RESEARCH AND TRAINING NEEDS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

I

Training of Teachers

Our present understanding of human language and of ways of teaching it, if imparted to all the teachers of foreign language in the world, would produce a dramatic improvement in the effectiveness of foreign language teaching everywhere. Making available this knowledge and experience is a major challenge. To be sure, this knowledge is reaching many teachers through articles, books, films, radio, television, conventions, visits, and perhaps most effectively through direct instruction of teachers and teachers-to-be. But the number of teachers effectively helped through these means is very small compared to the present number of language teachers and the greater numbers needed.

By far the largest number of teachers of English as a foreign language receive training at the University of Michigan in connection with the work of the English Language Institute. Approximately 170 received such training there this past year. Adding to this the numbers being taught at other institutions in the United States where linguistic training is available, we still have a very small number of the teachers of the world, when we consider the fact that in Japan there are more than 50,000 teachers of English, and in Indonesia the number considered by the Indonesian Government in its plans is more than 80,000.

Intensification of the training of new teachers and of teachers now in service offers real promise. English-speaking teachers who go abroad in significant numbers through U. S. Government grants under Fulbright, Smith-Mundt, and other programs, and under private sponsorship or on their own, have a unique opportunity to make available our knowledge and experience when they are properly trained. Teachers whose native language is not English who receive our training are making a significant contribution in their countries through demon-

stration, lectures, articles, and a steady stream of textbooks which they are producing, especially adapted to the age, language background and education of their students.

The need here is to make available this training to more teachers, both native and non-native speakers of English. This means in some instances setting up or strengthening programs that offer the work in linguistics and the teaching of English known to be the key to progress. These programs should not be restricted to the United States or even to the English speaking world but may in many instances be in the countries where the need is felt.

At the University of Michigan's English Language Institute it would mean the support of research and the physical facilities to accommodate larger numbers equally as effectively as those now being trained. One particular bottleneck is the observation of model classes of the Intensive Course in English by large numbers of teacher observers, and the practice teaching necessary for fully trained teachers. The observation by large numbers of teachers could be solved easily through closed-circuit television. The practice teaching could be solved through the use of proper electronic aids in sufficient numbers. Progress is held up here by lack of funds.

In addition to the training centers and their effectiveness, we can intensify the training of teachers by making available a larger number of fellowships to both English and non-English speaking teachers, for ultimately they will have to do the teaching, and their economic resources are usually so limited that they cannot afford to pay for the training even when they are willing to make sacrifices to have it.

II

LANGUAGE RESEARCH

In spite of the contribution that our present advances in language analysis and teaching would make to the teaching of foreign languages in the world, it would be a serious mistake to concentrate all our energy in the direction of imparting this knowledge to language teachers. If we do this, we will surely run stale and will soon find ourselves without any possibility of advance in our own work. If recent history of technological progress is any guide, we might soon find some other nation, perhaps not a friendly one, taking the lead from us through research that we failed to carry on because we were intent only on spreading what we knew. Or, what happens even more fre-

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quently, there might simply be no further progress during this generation and the next.

If we are to bring the teaching and learning of foreign languages anywhere near the effectiveness needed by the dramatic advances in transportation, travel, and communication, we must not starve basic research on (A) the analysis and description of languages and of those aspects of culture that relate closely to language, and (B) more effective ways to impart a foreign language to the variety of students who need and want it.

RESEARCH ON DESCRIPTION OF LANGUAGES. We need to accelerate our work on the description of languages in various ways, particularly the following:

(1) We need to proceed with descriptions of languages not fully described, or described in prescientific or inaccurate terms. All other research will benefit from these descriptions.

(2) We need structural comparisons between the language of the student and the foreign language he is to learn. These comparisons, when adequately prepared for pedagogical purposes, can make a decisive difference in foreign language teaching and testing.

(3) We need to test conflicting descriptions of languages both from the assumptions under which they are made and from the assumptions that are necessary for pedagogical purposes. Very little if anything is being done in this area of research, and it is an area which is considered essential to scientific study in other fields. Unless there is some way to test the hypotheses reported by others, we hardly dare call our research scientific. In this area there is little initiative in linguistics, and the problem is to awaken the need for research. This area includes English in particular because of conflicting descriptions which cannot be resolved satisfactorily by compromise but should be resolved by additional and testable research.

(4) The descriptions needed in foreign language teaching must be very complete in some respects if they are to be useful. One cannot give the student a vague overall description of articulation of a language and leave it there. The student has to construct sentences, pronounce them, use the words of the language, and understand the whole thing when spoken by natives. He needs specific help on specific problems as well as the overall pattern of the language. We, therefore, need research to fill out structural descriptions which give only an outline of the structure of a language. Furthermore, we need to complete the research on languages in which only certain parts have been described. This area of research includes English, which has not been fully described yet.

DISTINCTION BETWEEN DESCRIPTION OF A LANGUAGE FOR THE RECORD AND DESCRIPTION FOR PEDAGOGICAL PURPOSES. In general the linguistic scientist who is interested in describing a language to preserve a record of it (as in the case of languages which are near extinction, or the description of languages for a linguistic map of the world) can be satisfied with a structural outline of the language. Since his data is not intended for the teaching of the language, much can be overlooked, and the statements can be condensed in ways that will be esthetically and practically satisfactory to the specialists that will read them.

On the other hand, the description of language for pedagogical purposes needs to be more complete and more fully stated in some respects. In other respects, the description of language for pedagogical purposes can be simpler than descriptions for the record. This is particularly true in showing dialect differences within a language. In doing research for the linguistic map of English in the United States, for example, it is necessary to record some regional differences in great detail to establish dialect boundaries. In teaching English as a foreign language, it is helpful to have this information if available, but it is more important to have a full description of a standard variety of English than examples showing points of difference among dialects.

It is important also not to turn up our nose at the mention of linguistic description for pedagogical purposes. Nothing could be so unjustified or have such deadly effect on research. We must not forget that some of the most important advances in linguistic description were made in connection with pedagogical description and other applied research. The work of Fries and many others was spurred by pedagogical needs. The postulation of four pitch phonemes for English was made by Pike for pedagogical purposes at the English Language Institute. The phonetics research of Daniel Jones was pedagogically directed. The work already done on vocabulary studies by non-linguists was pedagogically inspired, and we need this and additional vocabulary research.

III

RESEARCH ON TEACHING TECHNIQUES AND METHOD

Some of the findings of linguistics and the insights into the nature of human language, which linguistics has given us, are so obviously related to effective teaching of foreign languages

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that no research seems really needed unless we are forced to elaborate the obvious. Linguistic training on the part of foreign language teachers should be enough to take care of these contributions. It is only before the teacher has been introduced to linguistic study that he might question these findings and their relevance to language teaching.

But there are matters of teaching technique and of method in which there are differences of approach among linguists in the United States and abroad. Some use the native language freely in their textbooks, while others avoid the use of the native language in the materials but concentrate on comparative analysis to predict the learning problems. Some emphasize the memorization of specific dialogues, while others emphasize the substitution of elements in patterns. Some attempt to achieve phonetic perfection in pronunciation from the beginning, while others attempt phonemic accuracy first. Some bring into memorization, patterns required by the context before a systematic order of presentation would have reached them; others grade the introduction of patterns of sentences more strictly even at the cost of some contextual restriction in preparing conversations for study. Some favor a transcription that attempts to account for all the dialects of English; others favor transcription of a single dialect. We need research to determine if these differences are important; and if so, what particular practices are the most effective ones. We must remember that we are now talking about teaching practices, not about describing languages; and no one with a scientific attitude will accept as scientific a method that is merely the practice of some linguists, especially since linguists are not agreed as to which practices are the most effective. We need basic research to compare these differences in technique under carefully controlled yet realistic conditions.

And more important even than research to resolve differences among linguistically sound approaches is research to discover and test techniques that may prove more effective than any practices now propounded. In fact, if the learning of foreign language is to keep pace with technological advances in transportation and communication, we need to discover and test techniques that are at least twice as effective as those we now consider up to date.

We will certainly not achieve this goal under present conditions and attitudes, in which much of what we defend and consider scientific practice is based not on scientific discovery and testing but on esthetic reaction and preferences of linguists and others who have not explored the full range of possible

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techniques but continue to grope forward with some insights and memories as if insights and memories were scientific findings. Nothing but a dead end awaits us in this direction; while on the other hand, a brilliant promise of new discoveries lies in the direction proposed here.

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