

SOME OUTLANDISH PROPOSALS FOR THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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Three propositions which bear upon second language learning are defended: (1) Some students need or desire only to be able to read and it is legitimate to design courses for such students which omit training in oral skills unless these help with reading. (2) Passive linguistic knowledge can develop far ahead of active ability, and this fact can be exploited when teaching reading by not demanding the simultaneous ability to write. (3) A number of examples suggest that grammar, lexicon, and phonology can be learned in greater independence of one another than is often assumed. It follows from these three propositions that it might be worth experimenting with courses which first teach the recognition of grammatical forms, then the recognition of lexicon, but which minimize both phonology and the active production of sentences in the new language. Techniques by which this could be accomplished would have the added advantage of avoiding the childish level of materials with which even adult students must usually contend when beginning a foreign language.

The proposals which I make in this paper are so outlandish that I hardly dare broach them without first preparing the ground. I feel compelled both to consider the goals for which some foreign language teachers might realistically strive, and to make some observations about the nature of the interaction between divergent languages, observations which, I believe, are relevant to the task of second language learning. Only after comments on these two points will I make my specific proposals.

The Goals of Foreign Language Teaching

When teaching foreign languages, we have generally taken it for granted that speaking, understanding, reading and writing are all important enough to be given some attention though it is often assumed, possibly on the analogy of first language acquisition, that oral skills are the more fundamental, and that reading and writing can be somewhat delayed. The cram courses given to graduate students who need to prepare for their reading examinations are notable exceptions to this generalization, but many linguists and language teachers look upon these courses as at least marginal to

to respectable pedagogy if not completely disreputable. Yet for such students (and possibly for a good many others), reading should be an honest and respectable prime objective. Some students care little about speaking a foreign language and only a small proportion ever want to write it. Most of them would be able to use a reading knowledge if only they could learn enough.

The massive efforts made with American help to teach English in other countries since the Second World War have, I believe, over-emphasized oral proficiency. The major need for English in the non-English speaking world is to give access to the vast and ever-increasing quantity of written matter. Relatively few students really need to speak English, but a reading knowledge is useful and in some countries essential, for almost any educated person. Clearly there are varied reasons for studying a foreign language, and no single pedagogy need be used with all students, but it should not be disreputable for *some* students and their teachers to cling to reading as their main goal, and to design courses which will teach reading by the least painful route. We have tended to assume that the shortest route to a reading knowledge is to learn the spoken language first, but I believe this assumption has been more often proclaimed than demonstrated. The legitimate but quite different interest that linguists have in the living, spoken language, should not keep us from trying to design a course with the over-riding goal of imparting a reading knowledge. For some students (certainly not all!), speaking and the understanding of speech are secondary if not entirely irrelevant goals, and linguists should be willing to help these students and not only those who wish to speak.

We might be able to simplify the task of students who are willing to minimize oral skills by concentrating upon passive knowledge. Our use of spoken language inevitably demands the almost simultaneous ability to speak and to understand. As a result we find it difficult to separate an active speaking knowledge from a passive knowledge. Yet even the most casual observation of small children should persuade us that their passive ability to understand is always far ahead of their active ability to speak, and even as adults, of course, our passive vocabulary considerably exceeds our active. We expect children to speak in short and broken sentences, and we accept their limitations as inevitable and possibly even as endearing, but we do not grant the same privilege to adults. If an adult can understand what is said to him, we want him to be able to answer back. In teaching written skills, however, we have a greater possibility of divorcing active from passive abilities. There is really very little point in having an elementary student write anything at all in a foreign language. Writing is a skill

which few students will ever need, and it is surely much the most difficult and inhibiting of linguistic activities. The conclusion seems clear: we should see if we could not teach reading without worrying about the ability to write, and reading should be accepted as a legitimately over-riding goal of foreign language instruction for some students. For these students it would seem reasonable to introduce oral skills only to the extent that these help them to read, and if it should turn out that this teaching requires only a very minimal oral training that fact should not disturb us.

The Interaction Between Languages

Linguists and language teachers have generally assumed that the various parts of a language form some sort of integrated system, that its phonology, its grammar, and its vocabulary are in some way all interdependent and inseparable. The implication of this assumption has always been that all three systems must be taught more or less simultaneously. A teacher may give a few initial pointers on pronunciation, but he is likely to insist on doing so only with the help of words in which the sounds appear. Words, it is felt, cannot be taught without their sounds; grammar cannot be taught without words to exemplify the grammatical constructions; words cannot be taught in isolation from their grammatical context. However, in opposition to this assumption of interdependence, we can find examples which suggest that phonology, grammar and lexicon are, to some degree, independent. They can even be borrowed independently from one language to another. I will consider one example of each type of borrowing.

a) Grammatical borrowing. The borrowing of grammar is generally considered to be less likely than either lexical or phonological borrowing but rather striking cases of grammatical borrowing do exist. The Burmese, who have been Buddhists for many centuries, have always devoted reverent study to the Pali Buddhist scriptures. Pali is an Indo-European language anciently spoken in India, whereas Burmese belongs to the Tibeto-Burman family. Thus the structure and vocabulary of the two languages have utterly different origins. To assist Burmese speakers who wished to read the Pali scriptures, a style known as Nissaya Burmese developed.¹ In the Nissaya texts each Pali word had a Burmese translation written after it. Burmese translation equivalents were even devised to accompany many Pali grammatical markers though these had no equivalents in ordinary colloquial Burmese. Translations were

¹John Okell, "Nissaya Burmese: A Case of Systematic Adaptation to a Foreign Grammar and Syntax," *Lingua*, 15 (1965), pp. 186-227.

eventually produced in which the Burmese forms were written in the same order as in the mixed texts, but from which the original Pali forms had been dropped. To describe the language of these texts one would need to use Pali grammar, since word order, affixation, membership in form classes and the like, all followed Pali patterns, even though the words themselves were Burmese.

The Nissaya style began to acquire such august and learned connotations that original texts then came to be written in a very similar way. Any one who wished his writing to be taken seriously would want to use many Nissaya conventions. Writing was not all uniform, and some texts varied far in the direction of the colloquial language, but even today the language used in Burmese books and newspapers reflects in varying degree the conventions that were originally derived from Pali. Even beyond this, many Pali conventions leaked over into some kinds of oral styles. A man who stands up to give a formal speech is likely to salt his language liberally with Nissaya (ultimately Pali) forms, and some of these conventions have penetrated even into the most colloquial language. There is an almost unbroken continuum from Pali, to Nissaya Burmese translations, to new compositions in a similar style, to the diluted Nissaya style of much modern writing, to formal oratory and, finally, to colloquial speech. It seems that one almost needs two grammars to describe the verbal behaviour of Burmese: one like the grammar of Pali, the other for colloquial speech; however, any particular example of language use may range anywhere between the two extremes. A Burmese who learns to read Nissaya must learn most of Pali grammar but conceivably he could learn little of the Pali lexicon and almost nothing of Pali phonology.

One might argue that this is a very special situation, a tradition that developed slowly through a thousand years of Burmese history and so suggest that it can have no implication for the way a student today might learn a modern foreign language, but consider also the case of the man who works with texts in which an exotic foreign language is written with an interlinear translation. It is sometimes found that one can learn to understand the interlinear translation rather quickly. At first this word by word or morpheme by morpheme translation of a language remote from one's own appears to be unintelligible gibberish, but it takes surprisingly little time before one begins to grasp the meaning behind these peculiarly ordered strings of words. Like Nissaya Burmese, an interlinear translation follows the grammar of a foreign language, but like the Burmese reader, the scholar who uses these texts finds the translation far easier to learn than the language in

its original form. It can be concluded from the case of Nissaya Burmese and from the scholar who learns to understand an inter-linear translation that one can gain at least a passive knowledge of a foreign grammar without learning either its phonology or its lexicon.

b) Lexical borrowing. When we speak of borrowing, we most often think of vocabulary and surely this is the most obvious influence that one language can have upon another. English speakers are aware that their language has many words of foreign origin, yet borrowing into English is not overwhelmingly active today, and English speakers may fail to realize just how massive a process lexical borrowing can be.

In India, as in other parts of the world that have been simultaneously subjected to colonial rule with its many new social and political concepts, to massive technological innovations, and to an educational system which relies heavily upon the colonial language, the colloquial use of indigenous languages has come to incorporate an awesome number of borrowed terms. Borrowing can reach the point in India where a speaker will feel free to use any term from English which he thinks will be understood, and in an important sense the lexicon upon which a native speaker can draw includes not only the older resources of his native language, but the entire lexicon of English as well. Indians often resist the incorporation of these foreignisms when using their language in a formal context, but in informal situations they are rarely so fussy. It is difficult to speak an Indian language for very long without using at least a few English terms, and the active incorporation of foreign words into Indian languages goes far beyond the experience of modern English speakers, though perhaps the impact of French upon English was similar at one time. Whereas Burmese has borrowed grammatical forms from Pali, the Indian languages have largely borrowed lexicon. In both cases, however, the sharp divisions which we often feel to separate one language from another have been somewhat blurred, for when English words are used as freely as in India it becomes impossible to draw a clear line between the native and the foreign vocabulary.

c) Phonological borrowing. We are all acquainted with non-native speakers of English who are grammatically fluent and who use an ample vocabulary but who, whether through lack of phonetic aptitude or inadequate training, speak with powerful foreign accents, sometimes indeed with hardly any compromise with their native phonology. The speech of such a foreign speaker can be reasonably looked upon as a variety of English in which the phonology has been heavily influenced, or even replaced by foreign phonologi-

cal patterns—a form of speech in which foreign phonology has been borrowed into English and incorporated with its grammar and lexicon.

Since the second world war, language teaching has been greatly influenced by oral-aural methods, and by the ideal of speaking a language with as little residue of foreign accent as possible. Much class and laboratory time is occupied by phonetic drill and sophisticated techniques are used for correcting errors. But should we not occasionally ask why we want a student to speak like a native? If he wants to speak, he wants to be understood, and this goal imposes limits on his phonological deviation, but the limits are broad and a man whose syntax and vocabulary are adequate can be understood even though his phonology is rather grossly distorted. Perhaps it is our American experience with low status immigrants who speak imperfect English that has made us scorn a foreign accent, though many Americans greatly admire a French accent. I do not mean to argue that the minimizing of foreign phonology is never a laudable goal, but only that it is hardly necessary for everyone. Certainly for the student who simply wants to read, the attention to phonological detail may be an irritating waste of time, and I doubt the validity of the claim that a correct accent can be acquired only at an early stage in language learning. At the very least it seems clear that it is possible to learn a great deal of grammar and lexicon, without mastering much phonology.

These disparate observations show that it is possible to learn some parts of a language without learning other parts. Yet in our conventional teaching of foreign language we always seem to assume that the native and foreign languages are immiscible systems. A sentence must be either in the native language or the foreign language, never a mixture of the two. Since all the patterns of the foreign language are so imperfectly known when one begins a new language, the first lessons must consist of banal if not utterly stupid examples. An adult cannot help becoming bored with the childish level of his accomplishments.

The Outlandish Proposals

Perhaps the trend of my argument will already have become clear. I wish to ask if our pedagogical techniques could not capitalize upon our human ability to mix the features of various languages and to incorporate systems from one language into another. Could we possibly teach grammar, lexicon and phonology more separately than we have in the past, and so prevent the student from being overwhelmed at the start by several simultaneously

unfamiliar aspects of the language? Could we conceivably design a course in which foreign conventions would be introduced into the native language gradually, progressively changing the proportions of the two languages until the foreign language became dominant? Of course, linguistic forms would have to be used along the way which would be aesthetically offensive to anyone who loved the languages, and I believe it would be difficult to carry out such a program where the spoken language was an important part of the teaching goal. If the goal were reading, however, the different aspects of the new language—grammar, lexicon, and phonology—could be introduced at different times so that all three would not be all thrown at the student at once, and it would allow fully adult materials to be used at all times. One would never have to resort to the childish texts upon which most of our elementary courses must inevitably rely. Such a program could start with grammar, teaching a form more or less equivalent to Nissaya Burmese, with foreign grammar but native lexicon. Then the recognition of foreign lexicon could be taught and phonology could be left to those few who want to speak as well as read. In more detail, the course might be organized somewhat as follows.

1) The first step could be to teach the student to read the equivalent of a word for word translation of the foreign language. Like the linguist who learns to read an interlinear translation he could absorb a good deal of the syntax without worrying about the lexicon. For pedagogical purposes the materials could be presented systematically, and more thoroughly than they are in random texts. I would think it most appropriate to begin on the more gross level of word order in the sentence, so that students can quickly learn the general patterns of sentence construction without worrying about the details of morphological irregularities let alone a mass of new lexicon. The materials presented to the student could take the form of a non-technical contrastive grammar but it would seem reasonable to allow this contrastive description itself to incorporate one after another the foreign conventions as they are successively described. In this way, the student who read the explanation of the new language would at the same time get practical experience in understanding the foreign patterns. When teaching a language such as French to speakers of English, the large areas of grammatical similarity could usually be taken for granted. For English speakers, much of French word order is quite natural, but a few points would require explanation: adjectives usually follow their nouns; pronoun objects come before the verb rather than after; definite articles are often used where they are not used in English; impersonal constructions with *one* are more common than passives;

signs of negation sometimes come in pairs which look a bit like double negatives. It would take little more than this, however, to make Passage A understandable.

PASSAGE A

This book has an object very limited: that of indicating briefly the concordances that one observes between the diverse languages Indoeuropean and the conclusions that one thence can draw.

It is not intended for persons who know the grammar comparative of the languages Indoeuropean; they would not there find neither an idea new nor a fact new. It presents only a sketch of the structure of the Indoeuropean, such that the grammar comparative it has revealed.

The knowledge of the Sanskrit is useful for to have a view even superficial of the subject, and those who would wish to push a little ahead these studies would not know how of it to dispense no more than of that of Greek; but it not is not necessary for reading the present work, and although one has needed naturally to cite the facts borrowed from diverse languages of the family, one is forced to render the exposition intelligible to all readers who have studied the Greek.²

Reading examples of this sort would, I believe, give students a more rapid passive grasp of the foreign syntax than would a large amount of formal drill, and if all a student wants is to read, there seems no need to force him to make up examples which use this syntax.

For a language like German where word order is a good deal more divergent from English, a longer and more gradual approach would seem to be in order. In particular, a description of the position of the verb and its various auxiliaries within the sentence and in various sorts of clauses would be needed. Still, once this description has been given, the most efficient way in which to force students to recognize and understand the patterns, might be to have them read passages such as Passage B.

PASSAGE B

The need for an aid to the Sanskrit-studies, as I it here to offer try, needs not first proven to be. While

²Antoine Meillet, *Introduction à l'Etude Comparative des Langues Indo-Européennes*, University of Alabama Press, 1964, p. vii.

several excellent works the historical understanding of Greek and Latin convey, satisfy themselves the existing text-books of Sanskrit with the descriptive examples of the language, without themselves in the least with the historical study of old-Indian to be concerned. And yet is the interest of most philologists, who themselves with the Sanskrit acquaint make, only conditioned by the significance which that language for the study of the remaining Indo-European languages still always possesses, although the old-Indian from its central position in the sphere of the Indo-European linguistic science moved been is.³

2) Soon, a few foreign terms would have to be introduced. The first would probably be the kinds of grammatical particles that in an interlinear translation are likely to be marked by descriptive labels such as "aspect marker" or "relative prefix" or the like, rather than by a translation. When such grammatical markers are unlike anything in the native language, it would seem simpler to introduce them directly than to invent bizarre translation equivalents whose familiar look may suggest a spurious identity with something in the native language. If only a passive understanding of these particles is required, their use could probably emerge in considerable part from examples, for they tend to be repeatedly exemplified in all texts. I would still be cautious about introducing them too rapidly, lest the student would be overwhelmed by unfamiliar-looking signs. The use of each particle or affix could be described. Such use could be contrasted with the use of analogous phenomena in the native language and from that time on it could be incorporated into any further discussion. Most derivational forms, particularly the less productive varieties, might be withheld for a while, and to this extent the text would continue to be a word for word translation of the foreign text rather than a morpheme for morpheme translation. At this point too, I would also be willing to regularize some morphology. Eccentric irregularities which merely divert attention from the more pervasive patterns can wait until later. The result of this step would be a text in which words and to some extent the morphemes within the words followed the foreign pattern very closely. Many of the morphemes would still be drawn from the students' native language, but an increasing number of grammatical markers from the new language would begin to appear.

Students of French could have the various verb suffixes explained so that they could use these to interpret tense, and they

³Albert Thumb, *Handbuch des Sanskrit*, Heidelberg, 1905, p. v.

could learn about gender in nouns and the agreement in gender and number which is shown by adjectives and articles. With this knowledge and some instruction in recognizing various articles and their compounds, negation signs and parts of the commonest verbs, they should find the following revision of Passage A to be intelligible. Passage C would give students practice in recognizing and understanding these features of French grammar. Non-English forms are italicized.

PASSAGE C

This book *a un* object very limit-*é*: that of indicat-*er* brief-*ment les* concordance-*s* that one observ-*e* between *les divers-es* language-*s* Indoeuropean-*es* and *les* conclusion-*s* that one thence can draw-*er*.

It *n'est pas* destin-*é* to person-*s* who know-*ent la* grammar comparative-*e des* language-*s* Indoeuropean-*es*; they *ne* there find-*eraient* neither *une* idea new-*elle* neither *un* fact new-*eau*. It present-*e* only-*ment un* sketch *de la* structure *de l'*indoeuropean, such that *la* grammar comparative-*e l'a* reveal-*ée*.

La knowledge *du* sanskrit *est* useful for to have *une* view even superficiel-*le du* subject, and those who wish-*raient* push-*er un* little ahead these study-*s ne* know-*raient* it dispense-*er non* more than *de* that *du* greek; but it *n'est pas* necessary for read-*er le* present work, and although one *ait* needed natural-*ment cite-er des* fact-*s borrow-és* from diverse-*s language-s de la* family, one is force-*é de* render *l'exposition* intelligible to all reader who *a* study-*é le* Greek.

3) Next, the smaller classes of morphemes should be introduced, gradually being substituted for the native terms. Pronouns, conjunctions, tense markers, case markers, demonstratives and prepositions (or their equivalents) for instance could be gradually introduced in their native form. The mastery of such forms involves the learning of their semantic associations, of course, and these may deviate rather sharply from the closest equivalents in the students' native languages. Once again the items could be the subject of descriptive passages and the descriptions could gradually incorporate the newly explained forms. A large part of learning a new language consists in the mastery of these forms, and I would expect that many sections of the text would be needed to get all such forms introduced. If the contrastive description would systematically and progressively incorporate the new forms, the ability

to understand the description would be evidence of the students' progress, but it may be that the contrastive description alone would not provide enough practice. In this case, practice passages might be needed at various levels to give the students more experience. Such passages could be on any adult topic and at no point would they need to be restricted to childish trivia. The result of this third step would be the ability to read a text which is fundamentally in the foreign language except that virtually all the "full" words (such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives) would in effect be borrowed from the student's native language.

The German passage, Passage B, might at this stage assume a form such as in Passage D, in which the English "borrowings" are now italicized.

PASSAGE D

Das *need* nach einem *aid* der *Sanskrit studies*, wie ich es heur zu *offer try*, *needs* nicht erst *proven* zu werden. Während *several excellent* Werke das *histor-ische understanding* des *Greek-ischen* und *Latin-ischen convey*, *satisfy* sich die *existing textbook-er* des *Sanskrit* mit der *descriptive-n examples* der *language*, ohne sich im *least* um das *historische study* des *old-Indian-ischen* zu *be concerned*. Und doch ist das *interest* der *most philologist-en who* sich mit dem *Sanskrit acquainted mak-en*, *only conditioned* durch die *significances* welche jene *language* für das *study* der *remaining indogermanic language-en* noch immer *possesses*, *although* das *old-Indian* aus seiner *central-en position* im *sphere* der *indogermanic linguistic science moved* worden ist.

4) The students would now have gained a passive comprehension of most of the essential grammar of the language and it should be possible to introduce some basic vocabulary. As more and more forms in the new language are introduced, most students would probably welcome some explanation of the sounds for which the letters stand, but I see no need to dwell on phonology. In most languages a systematic consideration of word formation would also be in order. Up to this point I would expect most complex derivational forms to be translated as units but sooner or later the students must learn to disentangle these for themselves. The use of various derivational affixes could be explained and exemplified, and then the forms could be introduced.

By this time, the students would really be reading the foreign language. Their texts would contain a very large number of loan

words from the native language, but the grammar (word order, affixes, etc.) and many common terms would all be foreign, and as more vocabulary is mastered, the text which is offered to the students can approach ever more closely the ordinary written form of the foreign language. After some time they will be able to read unprepared texts if they use a dictionary, but I would think that the learning could be made less agonizing if they had ample materials prepared at least to the point where the rarer words continued to be translated within the text. At this point it would seem most reasonable to include the foreign term, but to add a translation in parentheses immediately after it. For many students the need to shuffle constantly through the dictionary is one of the most painful aspects of learning a language, and I cannot believe that the effort is rewarded by rapid learning of the foreign terms. My hunch is that learning will be faster if students can spend their time reading more and using a dictionary less than students usually have to do.

If the language is close enough to the native language (as is either French or German to English) a good deal of vocabulary could be introduced without too much difficulty. Particularly in French where much of the vocabulary is immediately transparent, or even orthographically identical to English, a large amount of vocabulary could almost be taken for granted and once the grammar has been well covered a student could move on to passages in the form of Passage E.

PASSAGE E

Ce livre (book) a un objet très limité: celui d'indiquer brièvement les concordances qu'on observe entre les diverses langues indoeuropéennes et les conclusions qu'on en peut tirer (draw).

Il n'est pas destiné aux personnes qui savent (know) la grammaire comparée des langues indo-européennes: elles n'y trouveraient (find) ni une idée nouvelle ni un fait nouveau. Il présente seulement un aperçu (sketch) de la structure de l'indo-européen, telle que la grammaire comparée l'a révélée.

La connaissance (knowledge) du sanskrit est utile pour avoir une vue même superficielle du sujet, et ceux qui voudraient (wish) pousser (to push) un peu avant (ahead) ces études ne sauraient (know) s'en dispenser non plus que de celle du grec; mais elle n'est pas nécessaire pour lire (read) le present ouvrage, (work) et, bien qu'on ait dû (needed) naturellement citer des faits (facts) empruntés

(borrowed) aux diverses langues de la famille, on s'est efforcé (forced) de rendre l'exposé (exposition) intelligible à tout lecteur (reader) qui a étudié (studied) le grec.

In German some of the more basic vocabulary is much like English and perhaps a student could be helped to guess at and then to remember some German words, if a few of the more obvious sound correspondences were explained, but a good deal of the vocabulary would need a more gradual approach. I believe this could be made less painful to students were they to have ample chance to read passages in which the less common words and those far from English in form had translations inserted directly into the text as in Passage F.

PASSAGE F

Das Bedürfnis (need) nach einem Hilfsmittel (aid) der Sanskritstudien, wie ich es hier zu bieten (offer) versuche, braucht nicht erst nachgewiesen (proven) zu werden. Während mehrere treffliche (excellent) Werke das historische Verständnis (understanding) des Griechischen und Lateinischen vermitteln (convey), begnügen (satisfy) sich die vorhandenen (existing) Lehrbücher des Sanskrit mit der deskriptiven Darstellung (examples) der Sprache, ohne sich im mindesten um das historische Studium des Altindischen zu kümmern (concern). Und doch ist das Interesse der meisten Philologen, welche sich mit dem Sanskrit bekannt (acquainted) machen, allein bedingt (conditioned) durch die Bedeutung, welche jene Sprache für das Studium der übrigen indogerm. Sprachen noch immer besitzt (possesses), obwohl das Altindischen aus seiner zentralen Stellung im Kreis der indogerm. Sprachwissenschaft gerückt (moved) worden ist.

I suspect that vocabulary can be learned least painfully by one who already has a rather thorough grammatical knowledge, and that it will come most easily by appearing in context. Mastery of vocabulary remains a major part of the students' task, of course, and perhaps a series of essays which deal descriptively with the lexicon of various semantic areas could be provided. However, I would think these essays would be most effective if they were written in the foreign language and if they themselves incorporated the new terms as they were introduced. Such essays would be identical in nature to ones written in the readers' native language but which were intended to introduce them to a new technical vocabulary.

Eventually, of course, students must become emancipated from prepared texts. Perhaps they would differ in the point at which they felt willing to move to unprepared material, but by the time a particular student switches, he would already have read a great many pages which approximate the natural form of the language. He should have internalized the general sentence patterns of the language quite thoroughly and most of its detailed morphology, at least to the extent required for recognition. When he comes to a word which he does not recognize, he should be able to use the dictionary with skill, having already mastered the grammatical context in which the unknown word occurs. At this point the language will have become useful to him, and he will be able to continue to read by himself and so to refine his skill. Of course, his phonology, if any, will probably be atrocious. He might be unable to satisfy his most elementary biological needs if forced to rely upon the foreign language. For some students this would matter not at all.

For those who go through such a course but who do later find that they want to order a meal or use the spoken language in any way, it should be possible to design a course that would move a good deal faster than our usual elementary courses. A student might move from a passive reading knowledge to a passive understanding of the spoken language and finally to speaking. Some would argue that to learn in this way, and to postpone phonological drill until a late stage, would encourage bad habits, since students would probably get strange ideas of how the words are pronounced. There is no doubt some validity to this argument, but every student of a foreign phonology must unlearn native habits that are out of place in the new foreign context and I am not convinced that it will be much more difficult to unlearn these habits after learning to read rather than before. Of course, a student who knows from the start that he wants to learn to speak should not take the course I have been proposing. For him, aural-oral methods are appropriate from the beginning. I would never insist on teaching reading first to anyone who wanted primarily to speak. At the same time I see no reason for insisting on having the spoken language first for those who wish only to read.

Some linguists may imagine that my suggestions are a reversion to archaic methods of language instruction, to the time before the modern aural-oral methods proved their worth, but this charge could be fair only of my comments on the goals of language teaching, not on the techniques. New knowledge of linguistics, however, can affect only our techniques, not our goals, and I believe that the techniques of instruction which I suggest are as compatible

with the findings of linguistics as any others. In fact, it seems clear that what we most urgently need in order to design such a course is a thorough knowledge of the contrastive grammar of the two languages in question, and I feel that this knowledge will come only through the methods and principles of modern structural linguistics.

The most disturbing aspect of my suggestion is certainly the ghastly language mixtures that my examples demonstrate, and these unfortunately occupy an indispensable part of my proposals. Anyone who knows and loves these languages is likely to have his aesthetic sensibilities assaulted by the crude and broken forms required. But our usual methods of foreign language instruction assault the finer sensibilities of our students by limiting them to the simplified sentence structure and impoverished vocabulary of a child. In a choice between the student and the skilled bilingual I would rather preserve the sensibilities of the student. It is the student after all for whom the course is designed. The skilled and sensitive bilingual can avoid being offended simply by not looking into our text books.

Would such a program really work? I have no doubt that many detailed and serious problems would have to be resolved before it could become practical, but I would like to see it tried.