

## REVIEWS

### THE CHICAGO INVESTIGATION\*

#### I

I take it that An Investigation of Second Language Teaching attempted to survey and evaluate what, at the time it was made, was actually going on in the teaching of foreign language (including the teaching of English as a foreign language). Fortunately, or unfortunately, the work of the investigation itself came at a time when there was great activity in making changes in the teaching of language, partly as a result of the popular discussion of the work done in language courses for the armed forces. I suspect that those courses that displayed this great activity in making changes were the ones called the "new" courses, the experimental courses, and the rest were the "old" courses. As indicated in the report neither the "old" courses nor the "new" courses were homogeneous in their practices and objectives. The report seems to indicate, however, that the basic difference that the investigators used to differentiate the "new" courses from the "old" was the greater emphasis upon oral-aural procedures and objectives.

The basic assumption on which the programs of experimental courses rested was that a second language like a first (i.e. native) language, is most naturally acquired in its spoken form. . . Thus the ear and tongue are to be trained first, and the eye only later. This became the justification of teaching command of the spoken language even where, within the liberal arts tradition, the cultural reading aim could and must not be forsaken.<sup>1</sup>

If this is to be taken as the "basic assumption" of the "new approach" to language learning - i.e. the basic

\*This paper, consisting of comments on chapters II, VII, and VIII of the report of the Chicago Investigation, was read at the Chicago Language Conference held at the University of Chicago from August 30 to September 1, 1948. The full report is contained in two volumes entitled An Investigation of Second Language Teaching by F. B. Agard and H. B. Dunkel, and Second Language Learning by H. B. Dunkel; Ginn and Company, 1948, Boston and New York.

<sup>1</sup>F. B. Agard and H. R. Dunkel, op. cit., op. 280-1.

assumption of what has been often characterized as the application of the more recent developments of linguistic science to the practical problems of teaching foreign language - then it points to a fundamental misunderstanding. For at least ten years some of us have been trying to explain that the fundamental feature of the "new approach" to language learning is not a greater allotment of time, is not smaller classes, is not even a greater emphasis on oral practice, although many of us believe these to be highly desirable. The fundamental feature of this new approach consists in a scientific descriptive analysis as the basis upon which to build the teaching materials.

In the Graves and Cowan report on the Intensive Language Program at the end of 1942 occur the following statements.

Moreover, since all experience with intensive language instruction had already shown a high correlation between good results and implementation, it became obvious that the first task of the Committee must necessarily be the provision of the implements of instruction before instruction itself. <sup>2</sup>

All instruction which is not based on a scientific analysis of the language in question is inefficient. <sup>3</sup>

The following quotations are also pertinent here.

The "oral approach" as here advocated depends for its effectiveness not solely upon the fact that there is much oral practice in hearing and in speaking the foreign language, but also and fundamentally upon having satisfactory materials selected and arranged in accord with sound linguistic principles. It is the practical use of the linguistic scientist's technique of language description, in the choice and sequence of materials, and the principles of method that grew out of these materials, that is at the heart of the so-called "new approach to language learning". <sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup>Wortimer Graves and Milton Cowan, Intensive Language Program, 1942, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup>Op. cit. p.18.

<sup>4</sup>C.C. Fries, Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language, University of Michigan Press, 1945, p.7.

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In learning English one must attempt to imitate exactly the forms, the structures, and the mode of utterance of the native speakers of the particular kind of English he wishes to learn. But the person who is untrained in the methods and techniques of language description is not likely to arrive at sound conclusions concerning the actual practices of the native speakers he observes. He will certainly not do so economically and efficiently. And the native speaker of a language, unless he has been specially trained to analyze his own language processes, will be more likely to mislead than to help a foreigner when he tries to make comments about his own language. On the other hand the modern scientific study of language has within the last twenty years developed special techniques of descriptive analysis by which a trained linguist can efficiently and accurately arrive at the fundamentally significant matters of structure and sound system amid the bewildering mass of details which constitute the actual rumble of speech. If an adult is to gain a satisfactory proficiency in a foreign language most quickly and easily he must have satisfactory materials upon which to work- i.e., he must have the really important items of the language selected and arranged in a properly related sequence with special emphasis upon the chief trouble spots. It is true that many good practical teachers have, out of their experience, often hit upon many of the special difficulties and some of the other important matters of a foreign language that would be revealed by a scientific analysis. Usually, however, such good results from practical teaching experience alone are achieved by chance; are not related to any principle and are thus unsystematic and uneven. The techniques of scientific descriptive analysis, on the other hand, can provide a thorough and consistent check of the language material itself and thus furnish the basis for the selection of the most efficient materials to guide the efforts of the learner. . . only with sound materials based upon an adequate descriptive analysis of both the language to be studied and the native language of the student (or with the continued expert guidance of a trained linguist) can an adult make the

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maximum progress toward the satisfactory mastery of a foreign language."<sup>5</sup>

The most efficient materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner. It is not enough simply to have the results of such a thorough-going analysis; these results must be organized into a satisfactory system for teaching and implemented with adequate specific practice materials through which the learner may master the sound system, the structure, and the most useful lexical materials of the foreign language.<sup>6</sup>

In order to avoid another type of misunderstanding, let me insist that I do not mean that this descriptive analysis of the structure of the language being learned and that of the native language of the learner constitute in themselves the materials to be taught. These analyses precede and furnish the groundwork for the building of the materials to be mastered and the ordering of them in a proper sequence. Dr. Pike, for example, spent more than a year (1941-1942) making a structural analysis of the intonation of American English and then the results of this study and others were used in the building of the exercises used by the English Language Institute in the teaching of pronunciation, both productive and receptive.

In the summary chapter of the report some space is given to commenting on the "materials" of the "Experimental Courses" (pp. 284-5),\* but there is nothing to indicate whether these materials were based upon a satisfactory structural analysis of the language to be learned and whether any systematic attention had been paid to a parallel analysis of the native language of the student being taught. In examining the teaching of English as a foreign language five training centers were used, but I could find in the report no description or discussion of the specific

<sup>5</sup>Op. cit. p.5.

<sup>6</sup>Op. cit. p.9.

\*Page references in the text of these comments refer to An Investigation of Second-Language Teaching, op. cit.

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materials used in any of these centers.

It seems to me a mistake<sup>7</sup> to examine and discuss the "new" courses in language teaching, centering attention primarily upon externals of procedure (such as the amount of oral-aural practice), and ignore the fundamental matter of this new approach to the basis upon which to build the materials for teaching. It is in the matter of structural analysis that linguistic science has made special advances during the last twenty years and it is our belief that in the struggle to find solutions for the many practical problems facing us in learning and teaching foreign language we cannot afford to neglect to explore the contributions which the new materials of structural analysis might make.

What I have said thus far leads to the first suggestion I would make concerning "next steps". We need, I think, much more complete descriptive analyses of the languages to be taught. The advances of structural linguistics have led to the asking of many questions concerning language systems that we did not ask formerly, and the asking of these questions has led us to varieties of new information that seem to have great practical significance for learning and teaching language.

These descriptions themselves will not be enough. We must have careful and systematic comparisons of the structural analysis of the language to be taught with the structural analysis of the native language of the student. The materials for such comparisons are now only fragmentary and not easily accessible. And if such analyses and comparisons are to be usable for those who build texts and

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<sup>7</sup>It seems to me also a great mistake to equate the language teaching program of the armed services with the "new approach", or to assume, as is done in the book referred to in this report (p. 279 footnote), P.F. Angiolillo, *Armed Forces Foreign Language Teaching* (New York: F.S. Vanni, 1947), that intensive courses and other new emphases in language instruction (English for Foreigners, for example), stem from the ASTIP program (p. 406, 407, 421). Intensive language courses have been a feature of the Linguistic Institute of the Linguistic Society of America since 1937. The investigations that lay back of the teaching materials of the English Language Institute began in 1938 and the first intensive course of that Institute began in the summer of 1941. The teacher training programs centering in this type of foreign language teaching began in the summer of 1942.

The report of a Special Committee, prepared for the M.L.A. Commission on Trends in Education, gives the following concerning the Foreign Area and Language Study Curriculum of the ASTIP (p. 4). "This curriculum was based for the most part on the experience derived from the Intensive Language Program of the American Council of Learned Societies, a civilian training project which at that time had been in operation for two years."

develop teaching materials they must also be expressed in terms that can be understood by the profession of language teachers.

## II

Concerning that part of the report that deals with English as a foreign language (Chapter VII) I must confess that there is much that I do not understand. The chapter ends with summing up "the two urgent needs of instruction in English as a foreign language for foreign students studying in this country." It insists upon "(a) a raising of the general standard required and (b) the preparation of materials which will enable students to cover this higher level of language. . . ." It advocates also that students be required to have mastered much more English before they come to this country. (p. 277)<sup>8</sup>

The investigators were led to this conclusion from general observation and from the results of tests given to students in several training centers.

We began our search for standards and our construction of tests with the assumption that most of the existing standards tended to be too low. We came to this conclusion from having noticed the difficulties of foreign students at our own university, students who had been cleared by various training centers, but who were, none the less, proving deficient in English. (p. 254.)

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<sup>8</sup>I should oppose vigorously the view that students be excluded from this country until they had developed a "satisfactory" English. The mastery of a "good" English can proceed much more rapidly and efficiently in this country than in a foreign country partly because the connections between new symbols and direct experience are much more real and partly because contextual orientation can proceed effectively here which would be impossible in the foreign country. Besides, learning the mechanics of English constitutes only a part of the total task assumed by the English training centers in this country. The best of them have become real laboratories in intercultural adjustments and that part of their work can most effectively be managed in connection with the common struggle of students from various countries to develop a control of the language itself while living in this country.

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The phrase "who had been cleared by various training centers" seems to imply that the training center had certified that the equipment in English of the students for the work they were to do in the university was satisfactory. If that is the fact it surprises me on two counts: (1) that the admissions officer of the university should at that time have thought it worth while to ask for certification in English from a training center rather than depend on his own resources; and (2) that any training center would at that time have been willing to give a general recommendation for English. I suspect that "cleared by various training centers" simply means "having attended various training centers."

The results of the tests given to students in the several training centers appear in the scores of various tables (pp. 256, 258, 260, 262, 265) and are used as evidence that the standards are extremely "low." These tables are based on the scores of approximately 200 students in five training centers. It seems to be assumed that these scores are of students who were ready to leave the center for other work, and whose equipment in English had been approved as satisfactory by these centers.

If the scores from the English Language Institute were used, they included those of students in the beginning sections as well as those of students in advanced sections; those who had just arrived in this country as well as those who had been here more than two months; those of the wives of students (wives who did not plan to study in any school or college), and those of visitors to this country who had come for only two months of intensive work in English and would return to their countries immediately after the course. It seems to me that the only conclusion possible from these scores is that our training centers are serving those of a considerable range of achievement in English. In the English Language Institute the separate classes are homogeneous with not more than 10 students to a section and cover from six to ten different levels of achievement.

Concerning one table (p. 265) of 197 students in 7 centers, the writers of the report say "These scores were all made by students nearing the end of their training program." The writers should probably have said "near the end of a course of session" for they go on in the very next sentence to remark, "It is, of course, impossible to judge

how many of them will stay on (either by choice or force) for further training in English before taking up other work."

So far as I can see from the summary here, there seems to be no evidence whatever concerning what the "standards" are, and nothing upon which to decide concerning raising or lowering them. Everyone will agree that students in our colleges and universities whether native or foreign should have an adequate command of English for the work they undertake. It is obvious too that foreign speaking students who attend our law schools will need to have a much more complete command of English than those who do graduate work in physics or chemistry. To insist as the report does (p. 261) that "in aural comprehension he (the foreign student) must be up to native standards" is to demand the impossible. For the native user of a language, the symbol, with the wide range of experience it stimulates, is so much a part of the very texture of his thought that he exercises great freedom in turning attention upon any aspect of this experience in line with the pressing needs of his thinking. The "meanings" of words are, therefore, more fluid than we realize. For the foreign speaker of a language who learns this new language as an adult, the words as stimuli probably never function with anything like the same fullness and freedom as they do for a native. In this connection I would remind you of Sapir's comment made nearly twenty years ago.

It is quite a mistake to suppose that an English speaking person's command of French or German is psychologically in the least equivalent to a Frenchman's or German's command of his own language. All that is managed in the majority of cases, is a fairly adequate control of the external features of the foreign language. <sup>9</sup>

But this emphasis in the report does point to kinds of work that we greatly need. We need first more tests that are valid instruments for measuring various areas of linguistic ability, aural comprehension, oral production, struc-

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<sup>9</sup>Edward Sapir, "The Case of Constructed International Language," in Actes du Deuxième Congrès International de Linguists, p. 87.



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tural production, receptive response to the clues of structural meanings, receptive response to specific areas of lexical meaning, and production in specific areas of lexical meaning. The task here is huge and will require more resources than are now available for this type of work. These tests must, as indicated in the report, have high ceilings.

We need next to have correlations between scores on these various tests and successful use of English by students in a variety of subject matter fields. We must expect that the requirements of widely different fields will vary greatly. Perhaps the greatest immediate need of teaching of English as a foreign language is valid tests with score norms that mean something.

### III

Before concluding let me touch briefly one or two other matters that have a bearing upon our "next steps."

#### A

The more we deal with English as a foreign language the more we are impressed with the need of special materials for each linguistic background. "Foreign" language teaching is always a matter of teaching a specific "foreign" language to students who have a specific "native" language background. The problems of the Chinese student are very different from those of the Spanish speaker. The Portuguese speaker does not need a whole set of drills both in recognition and in production that are necessary for Spanish speakers. There should be provision for the developing of satisfactory new materials for a variety of linguistic groups that we are not now equipped to serve. (Koreans, Turks, Syrians, Arabs). But in connection with this principle there is another consideration that needs special comment here. In this country, whatever foreign language is taught is directed to those who speak English as their native language, and many of the problems of this foreign language teaching arise out of the special character of the English language. It is not enough for the foreign language teachers to be able to speak English; to be effective they should know English — its sound system, its structural system, and its vocabulary — from the point of view of a descriptive analy-

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sis in accord with modern techniques. Teachers of foreign language and, we believe, English speaking students, electing foreign language would improve the efficiency of their approach to a foreign language by devoting a brief time to a preliminary descriptive survey of the chief features of English. Whether the gain would be as significant as we believe could only be learned from a satisfactorily controlled experiment.

## B

The report stresses the need for qualified drill instructors, and points out the need of training in "the special technique of drilling." Let us approve heartily. The view that anyone who speaks a language is by virtue of that fact alone satisfactorily equipped to handle the language drills is certainly not tenable. "Pattern practice" makes more demands upon the resourcefulness of a teacher than perhaps any other phase of language teaching. In practical courses where the aim is learning the language rather than learning about the language, pattern practice is the most important aspect of the teaching. We need to pool our experience in an effort to develop and perfect new techniques that will make the limited time we have for drill pay fullest dividends.

## C

The report says little concerning other matters of the training of teachers. I should like to urge that professional language teachers cannot afford to neglect the contribution which the scientific study of language, historical and descriptive, has made and is making to our knowledge of the nature and function of language, and to our tools for the observation and analysis of its structural system. That these matters can be taught successfully and helpfully to the average college student in a very reasonable time has been amply demonstrated by the work of Drs. Pike and Nida and their assistants of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. The practical value of this material seems to be demonstrated by the tremendous enthusiasm of the language teachers who have had this training. Measured results are not

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available and may not be possible to obtain, but certainly the language teaching profession cannot afford to ignore completely the tremendous activity in exploring the use of new tools that is going on in the scientific study of language.

Unfortunately most linguistic studies in the new approach present such a changed vocabulary, method of work, and point of view that many of the older scholars find considerable difficulty in understanding what has happened. And yet the newer approach (which I prefer to call structural linguistics) is not particularly difficult in itself; it is simply confusing to those whose thinking in linguistic matters has been channelled by the traditional methods and materials of grammatical study. One of our important next steps must be to bring linguistic scientists and practical language teachers into closer understanding in order that each may profit from the labors and the experience of the other.

Of all the matters that call for immediate attention in the "next steps" of investigations for language teaching I should choose, for practical purposes, the following as the two most pressing.

(1) More complete descriptive (or structural) analyses of the languages to be taught, carefully and systematically compared with a parallel analysis of English, and expressed in terms to meet the experience of the profession of language teachers.

(2) Practical tests that are valid instruments for measuring the various areas of linguistic ability - aural comprehension, oral production, structural production, receptive response to the clues or signals of structural meaning, receptive response to specific areas of lexical meaning, and production in specific areas of lexical meaning, - tests that have high ceilings and for which we can get meaningful score norms.

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