

## TEACHER TRAINING WITH CLOSED-CIRCUIT TELEVISION

Bryce Van Syoc  
University of Michigan

How can we train more teachers to teach English as a foreign language? This has been the cry of the English Language Institute at the University of Michigan since its inception in 1941. The Institute was originally founded to teach English to foreign students in an eight-week course known as the Intensive Course. It soon became apparent, however, that a teacher-training program was necessary. The teaching materials and instructional techniques developed at the Institute were the outgrowth of the application of the findings of modern descriptive linguistics. For optimum success teachers specially trained in the use of these materials and techniques were required. Thus a new profession, the teaching of English as a foreign language, was born.

In the early days teacher trainees at the English Language Institute could be carefully and almost individually guided by the Institute's founder, Professor Charles C. Fries. Eventually other universities entered the field of scientific teaching of English as a foreign language and the need for teachers specifically trained in the necessary techniques has been snowballing ever since. In spite of the efforts of the English Language Institute and other institutions to meet the demand, it has not been possible to supply the needed number of teachers to teach the so-called linguistic or oral approach. There is a continuing demand, not only from colleges and universities in the United States but from the far corners of the globe. Because of the shortage of trained personnel, many of the openings either are not filled or they are filled by linguists who have no special interest in English as a foreign language, by social or comparative anthropologists who want an opportunity to get out in the field, or by literature majors. They are even filled by persons who have no other qualification than that they are native speakers of English! Since language learning and language teaching are skill subjects, this makes for a deplorable situation—almost as bad as assigning a person to teach linotype operators when his sole qualification is that he can read a newspaper.

Throughout the world the cry is increasing for teachers of English who know how to get results quickly. Heads of schools in Japan, Indonesia, Afghanistan, Thailand, the Philippines, Cambodia, India, Brazil, Mexico, and so on are calling specifically for teachers who know how to drill students effectively and teach them to use the language freely and confidently in the manifold situations where English is required today.

The Ford Foundation, having long had an interest in the teaching of English as a foreign language and being cognizant of the increasing demand for qualified teachers in that field, has made substantial grants to several institutions, among them the English Language Institute, to help them accelerate their programs in the training of such teachers.

Since the members of the staff at the English Language Institute qualified to train teachers are already working to full capacity, part of the grant received has been invested in a closed-circuit television facility as a means of helping to overcome this teacher shortage. At the same time we believe that certain features of our former training program are being improved by the use of television.

One of the features of the teacher training program at the English Language Institute has been the special demonstration classes for large groups of observers. The trainees have also been required to observe regular classes in the Intensive Course. These demonstrations and the class visiting have many advantages: the future teachers get a better idea of how linguistic concepts can be applied to language teaching as well as how to use language teaching materials inductively rather than prescriptively; they observe techniques of drilling for the acquisition of automatic language habits; they also get an idea of how the materials and methods used in the ideal situation provided at the English Language Institute can be adapted to meet the difficult and far-from-ideal teaching situations they will meet in most teaching situations overseas.

On the other hand, there are many disadvantages to this visiting and observing type of instruction, one of the most outstanding of which is that the Intensive Course students are always very conscious of the visitors and observers, who constitute a distraction when they are trying to acquire the habits required in learning a new language. Members of the teaching staff also find the visitors something to cope with, since they will sometimes laugh at student errors or interrupt the classroom teacher to ask a question, even though instructed in advance not to do so. Nor is the problem of scheduling visits for fifty to seventy teacher trainees several times a week a

small one. In the past this has had to be taken into account whenever the question of increasing the number of trainees to be admitted to the program was under consideration.

By using closed-circuit television as a means for observing model or pilot classes in our Intensive Course, these major disadvantages have been largely overcome. And we believe that the observation classes are now more effective since the moveable TV camera can in effect provide our trainees with a compound eye system as far as direction of vision is concerned. The use of close-up views of articulatory movements, audio-visual aids, and gestures is a decided advantage.

The layout of the closed circuit system consists of one large room, which serves as a viewing room for teacher trainees, and a studio-classroom, where the model or pilot class meets with the teacher just as in any other classroom except for the presence of the camera. The large room, containing a six-by-eight-foot viewing screen, is sufficient to hold 200 viewers. The image from the camera is cast on the screen from an overhead projector. At least one 21-inch television monitor set is also in the viewing room for standby use. It may also be used as an auxiliary screen at the same time as the large viewing screen. There are two loudspeakers in the viewing room and a control panel unit for adjustment of volume of sound and intensity of image. This panel, operated by an engineer, also has a direct connection with the cameraman in the pilot class.

The studio-classroom has a single camera with a Zoom lens for obtaining closeup pictures as well as pictures of wide vision. The lighting is from a fluorescent ceiling and from the windows. When noises from outside make it necessary to close the windows, air-conditioning can be used. The cameramen, who are from our regular staff of teachers and know the Institute's teaching methods thoroughly, are specially trained. A TV engineer is always on hand during the demonstrations to coordinate the technical aspects of the operation.

The system operates as follows: the teacher trainees first study in their methods courses the techniques of teaching which they are going to observe in the model class. The head teacher of the methods courses then conducts the observation classes in the viewing room. He points out the techniques being used at any given time by the Intensive Course instructor. He draws attention to the successful experiences of the class under observation as well as to any weaknesses or failures. He answers questions raised by the trainees on the spot, which could not be done under the former conditions without disturbing the

pilot class. He communicates with the camera man if he wishes close-ups or change of direction. Teacher and trainees can discuss the model performance in a free and impersonal manner while the teaching in the Intensive Course class goes on uninterrupted.

The new system went into operation during the summer session of 1959. Many problems have had to be worked out. For example, the teachers best suited for this type of teaching had to be selected. They had to learn how to play to the camera, that is, always be conscious of the position of the camera so that the techniques being demonstrated can be picked up by the camera lens. The teacher-cameramen have had to learn techniques of maneuvering and operating the camera for best results. One of the most technical problems to be worked out was that of the sound system. The engineers had to experiment in order to obtain sufficiently high fidelity to pick up aspiration, glottalization, and palatalization for the observers to hear them clearly.

As the mechanical and electronic problems are solved it is anticipated that new techniques will evolve which will lead to even more effective teaching of the grammatical patterns and the sound system of English. Undoubtedly new materials and new types of drills will result. It is hoped that eventually these methods and materials for training teachers by means of closed-circuit television can be duplicated for use abroad, thus helping to meet at least a part of the present large demand for teachers of English as a foreign language. It is also possible that kinescopes of the model classes can be made.

Throughout the planning and preparation for the closed-circuit facility, the Institute has had the cooperation of the University of Michigan Television Center, which designed the layout and supplied engineers. The Center held a workshop to train both pilot-classroom teachers and cameramen-teachers.

It is too early to assess the full value of the new facility but the results so far are encouraging and seem to indicate that here is a means of providing better training to much larger numbers of prospective language teachers than was ever possible before.