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## EASY METHODS OF LANGUAGE TEACHING ENGLISH

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### ABSTRACT

*The article attempts to investigate briefly the causes of current situation of teaching English as a foreign language and to suggest a brief theoretical guideline that may be of help in remedying the deficiencies.*

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**Keywords:** *age of the pupils, teacher's equipment, pronunciation drill, presenting semantic material, grammatical information, text.*

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### АННОТАЦИЯ

*В статье предпринята попытка кратко исследовать причины сложившейся ситуации с преподаванием английского языка как иностранного и предложить краткое теоретическое руководство, которое может помочь в устранении недостатков.*

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**Ключевые слова:** *возраст учащихся, техника учителя, произношение, подача смыслового материала, грамматическая информация, текст.*

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### INTRODUCTION

In communities whose culture is undeveloped no languages are taught. As the consciousness of nations increases, the interest to the languages of important fellow-nations increases too. This is a deliberate widening of the bonds of communication: it is desired that a large element of the nation understand the writing and speech of foreign contemporaries. Just as the study of ancient languages is to preserve the cultural tradition, so that of modern is to keep the community abreast of modern progress. The latter study is prompted also by material motives, such as the need of foreign languages in commerce and the desirability of promptly utilizing foreign inventions in science and industry. Finally, as the idea of humanity takes form, there comes the wish not only to be acquainted with the character and history of one's own nation, but also, in part as an elucidation of these, to understand the motives, achievements, and ideals of the sister-communities. At this stage, which the European nations more fully than America have reached, the school studies include not only

instruction in foreign languages, but also a suitable introduction to the life, culture, and ideals of the foreign nations.

### **LITERATURE ANALYSIS AND METHODS**

In the course of the research, relevant literature and Internet sources were used. During the writing of the article, the principles of theoretical-deductive conclusion, analysis and synthesis, logicity were used.

### **DISCUSSION AND RESULTS**

It is only in the last twenty-five years and in the European countries that success in modern-language teaching has ever been attained. Of the students who take up the study of foreign languages in American schools and colleges, not one in a hundred attains even a fair reading knowledge, and not one in a thousand ever learns to carry on a conversation in the foreign language. While a growing number of teachers have acquainted themselves with the modern methods, their efforts are largely checked by the antiquated outer circumstances, such as the late age at which pupils begin the study and the small number of class hours, coupled with the reliance on home assignments, which are of little use in language instruction.

The fundamental mistake is to regard language-teaching as the imparting of a set of facts. Language is not a process of logical reference to a conscious set of rules; the process of understanding, speaking, and writing is everywhere an associative one. Real language-teaching consists, therefore, of building up in the pupil those associative habits which constitute the language to be learned. Instead of this teachers try to expound to students the structure and vocabulary of the foreign language and, on the basis of this, let them translate foreign texts into native language. Such translation is a performance of which only people equipped with a complete knowledge of both languages and with considerable literary ability are ever capable. As a method of study, moreover, it is worthless, for it establishes associations in which the foreign words play but a small part as symbols (inexact symbols, of course) of English words. The excuse usually given for this practice is that school conditions make only a 'reading knowledge' of the foreign language of importance, — that it is not the purpose to enable pupils to order a meal in the foreign language. It's believed, moreover, that school conditions are coming to make a 'speaking knowledge' more and more desirable and that the time is not far off when the ability to converse in one or two foreign languages will be looked upon as one of the ordinary marks of education. The purpose of the report is to investigate briefly the causes of current situation of teaching English as a foreign language and to suggest a theoretical guideline that may be of help in remedying the deficiencies.

According to the point of view of American linguists, the best age at which to begin a foreign language is that between the tenth and twelfth years [1]. If the study is begun earlier, the progress is usually so slow that nothing is gained, the pupil who begins later soon overtaking him who began younger. If the study is begun at the age indicated, further languages may be taken up at intervals of a few years; as the student accumulates experience, the later languages will be learned more rapidly and with less effort than the earlier, until a facility may be acquired which astonishes those who have had less practice. Older students who have never before studied a language are too exclusively practiced in conscious, logical grouping of facts to accept the repetition of what is already understood but not yet assimilated; when they have grasped the 'meaning' of a text in terms of the native language, they are disinclined to go on using the text with attention to the foreign expression. The necessary simplicity as to content of the elementary texts also bores them. At the age of ten or twelve, on the other hand, the pupil is attracted by the novelty of what he learns, enjoys the growing power of expression and understanding in a new medium, and the playing at being something strange (e.g. an ancient Roman, a German, or a Frenchman), nor is he intellectually too superior to the simple content of the earlier lessons. Once the habit of foreign-language-study has been at this age set up, the student finds no difficulty in going on to other languages even when he is more mature, for he knows from experience the necessity of the processes involved and the fruits which they so soon bear.

As to the preparation of the teacher, a prime requisite is, of course, mastery of the language to be taught, — in modern languages a knowledge comparable to that of an educated native speaker and in ancient a fluent reading ability and some facility in writing. The teachers, whose knowledge falls far short of this demand, are from the beginning incapable of successful instruction, for, though they may vociferously explain (in English) the abstract grammatical facts of the foreign language, they cannot give the pupil practice which will form and strengthen in him the associative habits which constitute the language. If the services of a teacher approximately possessing these qualifications cannot be obtained, the instruction should be given up, as it is only a waste of time.

The same may be said, though not so universally, of teachers possessing this but lacking another qualification; namely, the knowledge and experience of how a language must be taught. Next in uselessness to a teacher who does not know the language is the teacher who, to be sure, does know it, — he may be a native speaker of it, — but has not the linguistic and pedagogic knowledge of how to impart it. School language-teaching has been successful only where thorough knowledge of the

foreign language and training in the necessary linguistic and pedagogical principles, supplemented by experience in practice-classes under supervision, are demanded of all candidates for teaching positions. In short, the language-teacher must be a trained professional, not an amateur.

Instruction in a foreign language must begin by training the pupil to articulate the foreign sounds correctly and without difficulty or hesitation. The teacher's ability to pronounce these sounds does not involve ability to tell others how they are pronounced. This information must be given in terms of movement of the articulatory organs. The instruction must begin, therefore, with the elements of phonetics as applied to the pupil's native language and, by contrast, to the foreign one. Description alone is, of course, of no avail: the pupils must be brought to practise the foreign articulations until they have become automatic. Overgrown pupils, especially if unused to accurate and painstaking study, will content themselves with noting certain general resemblances to native sounds and interpreting the examples into the nearest corresponding native articulation. The phonetic drill must be based, in the case of languages that are unphonetically written on a transcription into a phonetic alphabet. After pronunciation has been mastered, the irregularities of the standard orthography will cause much less difficulty than if they were at the beginning presented in inextricable confusion with the foreign pronunciation.

As time goes on, the pronunciation will require less and less of conscious attention on the part of the learner. From the very beginning, however, the significance of the expressions that are practised should be made use of. The very first phonetic examples should be characteristic words and phrases. The signification of these cannot be taught in terms of the pupil's native language. The foreign utterance must be associated from the very first, with its actual content. The beginning should be made, therefore, with expressions concretely intelligible: formulas of greeting, short sentences about objects in the classroom, and actions that can be performed while naming them. As the work goes on to connected narrative and descriptive texts, this method must be continued.

The texts, therefore, must at first be confined to very simple discourse about concretely illustrable matters. Pictures are here of great use. Any new text must be explained in terms of what has already been learned, not in native language. Translation into the pupil's native language or other explicatory use of it must be avoided, for two reasons. The terms of the native language are misleading, because the content of any word or sentence of the foreign language is always different from any approximate correspondent in the native language. Once such associations are formed, — and their fictitious simplicity makes them comparatively easy to fix, — no

amount of explanation or insistence on the part of the teacher will overcome them. The second reason for the avoidance of translation is that, in the association of the foreign word with the native one, the latter will always remain the dominant feature, and the former will be forgotten. The learner will know that he has met the foreign word for 'pencil', but the sound and spelling of the foreign word will be very hazy in his mind. Where continued translation has given facility in these associations, the pupils scarcely look at the foreign text before the English word, right or wrong, becomes conscious. The result is that their foreign vocabulary remains small; they are forced to look up in the glossary over and over again the same common word, and, whenever they look it up, their habit leads them to fix only the native interpretation and to go on with the text. Every teacher has known students who have read hundreds of pages in a foreign language and yet have to look up dozens of the commonest words in any page of a new text — or even of the old, if they are asked to re-read.

Instead of translation the work with a text should consist of repeated use of its contents in hearing, reading, speaking, and writing. The beginning is best made before the pupil has even seen the text. The teacher explains in the foreign language the new expressions which are to occur and leads the pupils to use them in speech over and over again. Then the pupils are required, first, to read the new selection correctly after the teacher, later, to answer, with the book, then without it, simple questions about it, to converse about its subject-matter, and to retell it in speech and in writing. The text should not be left until every phase of it has been thoroughly assimilated: no text should in the beginning be used whose linguistic contents are not important and common enough to deserve such assimilation.

The range of work that the pupil can do outside the classroom is here very small. The danger that he will practise false pronunciation or usage must make the teacher very cautious in the assignment of outside lessons. Copying the text and preparation of lists of words and sentences taken directly from it are least dangerous. As the work must thus be done almost entirely in the classroom, eight hours a week of class-work are not too much in the first year or two.

It is only after the pupil has mastered for speaking and writing as well as reading a good central stock of words, forms and constructions, that more rapid reading should be undertaken. Without a nucleus of expressive material over which the pupil has full and accurate control, the necessary analogies even for that degree of understanding which we call a reading-knowledge are lacking.

The amount of text covered in the first year or two cannot be large. It is to be measured not by the page, but by the amount of new material introduced. Beginners will do well, if they learn a thousand words in the first year of the first foreign



language. A hundred pages of carefully prepared easy text will contain this amount of material.

The texts need not be arranged in terror of introducing new grammatical features before they have been systematically — i.e. theoretically, — explained. Grammar, as such, is not necessary for the use or understanding of a language: the normal speaker or reader is not conscious of the grammatical abstractions. In foreign-language teaching grammar is of use only where it definitely contributes to the ease of learning. Now, when he meets, let us say, a new inflectional form of a known word, the differences in the use of the two forms should be carefully illustrated and practised. After a time, when a considerable number of such collocations has been made, — when a number of singulars and plurals, for instance, have been compared as to use and form, — the grammatical statement, if simple enough to be of help, may be given. The grammatical features of a new text are of secondary importance, provided that it is easily explained and understood. Grammar should be used only as a summary and mnemonic aid for the retention of what has been already learned. Where it cannot be so used, it should be omitted.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

Selections of literary value should not be introduced before the pupil can understand them: if he cannot, their literary qualities are lost to him. The transition from the mere learning of the foreign language to the study of its literature and culture must be gradual, especially in the case of the first language studied. This language, however, should by the end of the secondary-school period, have become so familiar that the last years are spent entirely in the study of works of ethical, artistic, and generally cultural interest. All reading, no matter of what nature, should be within the pupil's immediate range of understanding of the foreign language. The premature reading, or rather pottering through foreign literature in our schools is a mere working-out of senseless puzzles.

The interpretation of what is read must always be pedagogic rather than scientific in purpose. The aim of foreign-language instruction is to acquaint the pupil with the foreign language, through it with the foreign culture, and generally, as in all other school studies, to train him to a higher mentality, in every sense of the word. The scientific study of the foreign-language or literature is entirely inappropriate for a school foreign-language course. These studies belong to a later stage of education. The texts, then, as the pupil grows familiar with the language and at the same time progresses towards maturity, should be selected more and more for their inner content. From the simplest elementary selections we may proceed to easy short stories, then to more serious historic, descriptive, and narrative prose and to drama

and poetry. Toward the end of the course summaries of the literary, cultural, and political history, — preparing for possible college courses in these subjects, — should be read.

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