

Concepts on The Methodology of Teaching English

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Introduction

The task of methodology is to enhance the process of teaching English by empowering and facilitating teachers to work proficiently. Teaching involves a continuous analysis of one's own work, the experiences of other teachers and the search for new means to improve teaching.

When teaching a foreign language a teacher must think about the specific qualities offered to students of a certain mother tongue. That means that the methodology of teaching English has to take into account the problems posed by the English language for the students who will learn it.

The methodology of teaching English stands in relation with several challenges or problems:

1.What to teach? That means the amount of knowledge, skills and habits that students have to obtain within the process of learning the language.

2.What are the aims of teaching? When a teacher is sure of the aim of teaching, he/she will have the easiness of reaching the intended goal.

3.How to teach? In this case one can call to mind the principles upon which teaching of English is based, the means, methods, fashion and tactics used in teaching in order to achieve the required final completion.

The answers to these questions define the echelon of methodology as a science. As a consequence it determines the nature of the problems to be dealt with.

For successful teaching, teachers are required several initiatives. The teacher has:

- To awaken and develop the potentiality and ability of students for studying.
- To help students develop habits through frequent repetition.
- To inspire, to kindle the interest of the student in studying.
- Also, the teacher should know how to go from easy stages to more difficult ones.

These area few of ideas of language teaching set forth by H.E.Palmer that have proved to be sound and effective even today. And as Robert Lado emphasized, when teaching English one should be aware of the following principles:

- Speech before writing.
- The development of habits by means of pattern practice.
- The cultural approach. This last one principle is of great importance as it means the understanding of language in terms of indigenous meaning.

A Historical Outline of Language Teaching

The history of education must have a great future. However, if we ignore the past we will not understand the present or hold a view for the future.⁽¹⁾

1. The Beginnings

The teaching of foreign languages started from the practice developed during centuries in teaching Latin and Greek in England and Europe. The textbooks used in the Middle Ages for teaching classical languages were based merely on the grammars of Donatus and Priscianus. Aelius Donatus was a Roman grammarian and teacher of rhetoric who lived in the middle of the 4th century. His well-known work the *Ars grammatica* (elements of grammar) was the standard Latin grammar during the Middle Ages. Priscianus too, was a grammarian from Mauritania who taught Latin in Constantinople in the 6th century. His *Commentari grammatici* was a standard text and it was written in 18 books, while *Aeneid*, another book was a treatise on accents and a work on the declensions of nouns. He translated into Latin precepts of the Greeks that seemed suitable. He frequently cited from Virgil Cicero, Plautus and Juvenal. His teaching of grammar was written in the form of question and answer of the first twelve lines of the Aeneid. .

In 1199 Alexander de Villa Dei, grammarian and mathematician, versified the grammar of Priscianus. He published 2645 verses called *Doctrinale*, perhaps one of the most comprehensive treatments of syntax and grammar. For centuries these 1645 verses were the only textbook. Alexander de Villa Dei clarified and made understood the direct translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Latin. This translation called *Vulgate* Bible made the scriptures available to Latin-speaking people in Europe.

During Renaissance book printing brought about new tendencies in teaching of languages. During Henry the VIIIth, for instance, grammar was taught in schools, however during his reign Roger Ascham (1515-1568) introduced a new concept in the field of teaching. He was a Yorkshire scholar and didactic writer and Princess Elisabeth's tutor of Latin and Greek. In his view, grammar was to be taught through translation and version and not in isolated paradigms. To him grammar-

translation was a means of strengthening mental attitude and discipline.

2. The Grammar -Translation Method

Modern foreign languages were studied in the grammar-based format the same way Latin had been taught previously. This method dominated foreign language studies for over 300 years.

According to the grammar-translation method the language is a synthesis of words arranged in sentences according to different rules of different languages. Students were supposed to learn words and grammatical rules and construct sentences based on these. The words were grouped in lists and the rules were memorized in a strict order. This system of learning a language was very rigid. Learning in this way students were not able to embrace the variety and richness of the spoken language. When the student was faced with the real spoken language, quite different from the artificially built sentences he had been accustomed to, he was at a complete loss.

Also in the 16th century, a first grammar of English as a foreign language appeared. It was entitled *Le Maître d'Escole Angloise* and was written by James Bellot. It contains familiar dialogues for the instruction in the English language. Another work of the same kind was *Grammaire Angloise* published in 1633 (1662 according to Albert H. Marckwardt in *Old Paths and New Directions in Teaching English* by George Mason.) These authors brought notes of modernity concerning correct pronunciation and dialogues. They no longer follow the path of synthesis.

3. The beginnings of the Analytical Methods

Next to these works new conceptions of language teaching followed. One of them was the analytical method. The supporters of this method were of the opinion that the teaching of a language should start with the written text and by its analysis to teach its words and rules. The precursor of this analytical method was Wolfgang Radke or Ratichius (1571-1635) His ideas surpassed the time he lived in. According to his concept everything had to be taught by logical sequence. The text was first presented, then the grammar. First the example was given, then the rule. There was no memorization. He did not present linguistic explanations either. Instead he presented coherent texts. These texts were first discussed. A detailed analysis followed that lead to learning of words and fundamental grammatical rules. It is obvious that the ability to talk about grammar and to recite its rules is very different from the ability to speak and understand the language. To him translation is a valuable skill in itself but not a substitute for practicing the language.

4. The Intuitive Method

Comenius (1592-1671) or Jan Amos Komensky is a name that must be absolutely not forgotten but amply and greatly presented as his ideas meant a real revolution in the domain of teaching languages. Comenius was born in Moravia in 1592 and he is known today as the father of modern education. Concerning the method of teaching, he advocated that spiritual and emotional growth were deeply connected to each other. He proposed the intuitive method grounded on direct intuition of objects and pictures. The optic and acoustic elements, the visual and auditory stimuli, the words and images should work together. According to Comenius language should be taught like the native language by thought-provoking conversation. In his book *Orbis Pictus*, Comenius laid the foundation of the intuitive teaching of a foreign language. And his intuitive method meant a transition from the obsolete ones to more interesting and effective ones.

5. Searching for New Paths

New paths in teaching a foreign language were introduced along the centuries to come. Jean Joseph Jacotot a professor who taught French introduced the procedure of bilingual texts. In his classes he used to read twice, aloud and slowly a certain text which was already translated in French. The students would follow the reading in bilingual translation. The students then were requested to divide up the text in smaller parts, then in sentences and in words and in the end in letters and sounds. To him this was the natural pattern to teach a foreign language.

But it was François Gouin, a professor of Latin who lived in France in the nineteenth century, who pointed to the insufficiencies of the teaching methods of his time. The story says that he went to Germany to study German and after several trials of memorizing, first verbs and words and then a whole book of conversations. However, he was not able to understand or converse in German at all, although he studied very hard. Disappointed he returned to France and to his great amazement he found out that his three-year-old nephew could speak in French a lot more than he could speak German. He discovered a new way of studying a foreign language and established the foundation of a new method, called the Gouin Series. He pointed out that in the teaching of foreign languages one must start with the auditory perception. That means the principal organ for learning is the ear and not the eye. So for the acquisition of a foreign language the best means is that of hearing and not reading.

People always express themselves in sentences so the basis in the study of a language cannot be

the isolated word. Also, according to Gouin teaching of abstract grammatical rules is of no use whatever. The different grammatical categories ought to be taught by series of sentences containing the respective grammatical patterns.

6. The Direct Method

In the second half of the 19th century polemics concerning the teaching of a foreign language gave birth to the *Reform Movement*, which comprised ideas of reforming the old-school systems. The teaching of English as a second language represented a main impetus. In the last decades of the 19th century as a consequence of economic problems in Europe more and more people tried to find means of living in the USA, Australia and Canada but especially in the United States of America. Naturally millions had to learn English quickly and at the same time successfully, as a means of communication in the new chosen country. As the old methods were not satisfactory anymore the problem of reforming the teaching of languages became quite important. The generic term of Direct *Method* became known and the supporters of this method stressed the importance of acquiring the spoken language. Harold.E.Palmer the well-know linguist must be mentioned, as his approach to teaching English is unique. He pinpointed that grammar is not the best way to teach a language. His structured lessons and conversations were called “oral method”. In his classes he taught English language through oral exercises. He considered that the reading material given in class should consist of dialogues and related texts. All the descriptions and narratives should be easy and natural also interesting.

In the meantime, searching for new paths continued. Polemics concerning the teaching of foreign languages went hand in hand with the idea of reforming the old school systems. In classes mother tongue began to be excluded almost entirely when teaching of English. The conception that imitating the sounds and uttering the words and sentences as they are heard became far more important. A method that employed no mediation of the mother tongue took ground. In this case as the mother tongue was completely excluded from teaching, no translation was used. The meaning of words was explained using direct intuition, representation through drawings, pictures that were associated with the foreign word. Abstract notions were explained by paraphrasing, by synonyms or antonyms or simply by deducing the meaning from the text. Correct pronunciation was very important and grammar rules were secondary. Grammar was achieved by practice. The students were given texts and not unconnected sentences to prove certain grammatical rules. As early as 1878 a direct method was applied by M.D. Berlitz and in the 20th century the method was introduced in many schools. However, employing this method did not first, accustom students to

independent work and at the same time the meaning of the words taught this way of direct method was not always understood.

The direct method appeared under several names such as reform method, new method, and oral method.

7. New Tendencies in Teaching Foreign Languages

During the whole 20th century new theories appeared. Especially the period from second half of the 20th century, from the 50's to 80's has been known as the Age of Methods. Numerous methods in Europe and the USA came forth. They were acknowledged as Silent Way, Total Physical Response, Suggestopedia, The Natural Approach, Community Language Learning, and Audio Lingual Approach.

Total Physical Response

Among these new methods, perhaps one of the most interesting is the TPR (Total Physical Response) introduced by James J. Asher, a Professor of Psychology at San Jose State University in San Jose, California. In his book *Brainswitching* he presented an approach to stress-free language learning. Influenced by Nobel Laureate Roger Sperry, who put accent on the concept that each hemisphere of the brain can process information independently, Asher did more research on the brain and provided a background on the concept of dual brain solving problems in foreign language learning. According to Asher a problem in any practical area of human activity can be successful with brainswitching. Brainswitching is characterized by ingeniously moving some information to the other side of the brain. He says:

My hypothesis is that in acquiring a second language, we must first decode the strange noises through the right side of the brain before the left-brain is ready to talk.⁽²⁾

He illustrated a lesson of Spanish by uttering directions and acting out motions with the students. Then he invited the students to perform alone the motions while listening to the utterances in Spanish. As no talk is required but only listening to the new sounds and acting quickly first together with the instructor, later alone, the new language is thus acquired through the right brain. With the already inserted utterances in the right-side brain there is now a possibility to understand a new sentence by rearranging the parts already intercepted.

“For the linguist, Noam Chomsky, understanding novel sentences is the essence of fluency because if a human being can only understand the exact sentences one has heard, the development

of human languages, as we know them, would be non-existent.”⁽³⁾...

A very interesting example of TPR Dr Asher offers is that students learning Spanish “could understand directions in Spanish modeled by the instructor such as, “Walk to the table” and “Sit on the chair”. These were now familiar utterances that were firmly internalized through “language-body” conversations. Students could give an appropriate physical response to familiar directions, and they could understand when constituents were recombined to produce a novel, direction such as, “Walk to the table and sit on the table”? Although students had never the Spanish sentence, “Sit on the table” they usually responded with perfect comprehension by sitting on the table.”⁽⁴⁾

No doubt, that comprehension of novel sentences is maybe the most important skill when one learns a foreign language because comprehension is the essence of fluency as Noam Chomsky said.

And if the instructor has enough initiative to continually retain the students’ attention, then he can move swiftly to using the left side of the brain with traditional exercises of reading and writing and then back to TPR practices. Students are not so keen in learning and grammar and phonology, however they internalize language without analysis in artificial categories. Students may be able to understand grammar but they will not know how grammar works. That is because unlike left-side brain, which analyzes everything and so slows down the process of learning the right-side brain takes in knowledge without any analysis and speeds up the process of learning.

TPR has many published works and studies with enough evidence to support the concept of this method that creates long-term comprehension.

The work of George Lozanov

In the history of language teaching Georgi Lozanov developed another teaching approach that appears to eradicate the grammar based-left brain approach of learning a foreign language.

After many years of research looking for new methods to help his students learn faster, the renowned Bulgarian psychologist and educator achieved some prodigious results. He developed a new approach to accelerate learning. He introduced new components of suggestion techniques and relaxation to learning. He called these methods Suggestopedia or Suggestive- accelerative approaches to learning. Suggestopedya or suggestology in pedagogy accelerates language learning. It is the study of the power of suggestion in the learning circumstances. The teacher is enterprising and responsible for presenting in class a large amount of information while taking away learning obstacles and students’ inhibitions. The teacher uses the power of music, drama, dance and movement. Students listen, watch and then perform the material taught in class.

Together with G.Lozanov, E. Gateva, another Bulgarian educator played an important role in

consolidating the new way of teaching. Dr. E. Gateva had a profound understanding of learning and what she did was to combine theories of intelligence together with art. To her, learning was much more than rote learning. Her work was based on the method of how students could internalize material much faster and remember it longer.

Her lessons started with classical music such as Mozart and Brahms and then the teacher read the text emphatically and dramatically. The text was written in a rhythmical manner so that the impact of hearing it could be very powerful. Then the reading of a dialogue or sentence was done in chorus. Phonetic explanation was done on the spot. Then students would assume different roles, perform them while taking a look at the translation of the text and then pass them on to one another, so that each one in class gets the chance to read each role. Mistakes of pronunciation would be tactfully corrected. After finishing reading the text or dialogues the teacher takes away all the translation but asks the students to translate that very part. In some advanced classes not all reading is translated; the teacher decides which passage should be translated. In the last lessons only a few words are explained and that is done by means of synonyms.

This method I think, involves an act of evaluating one's intuition because sometimes intuition can help the students be bolder when translating. So called 'play it by ear' means in fact an act according to circumstances and there are not few times when improvising gives the student the capacity to exercise choice and also allows to him to build self-confidence.

A very important factor should be mentioned about E. Gateva's method and that is the power of analogy: for example when reading a sentence the verb was conjugated on the spot in chorus. Also its relation to other verbs was explained through new sentences. Always the teacher chose a text that provided a basis for the students to tell a story of their own.

It is interesting how Lozanov developed his approach to teaching a foreign language. He began studying the fact that information was exploding at such a rate that nobody could keep current on the field anymore, that no matter what fields you were in, thousands of articles and books were written every year and so people could not absorb the vast information. He became preoccupied with the need to create a new way for people to learn rapidly. He discovered that the two hemispheres of the brain perform different functions. He understood that people who could learn fast were those who could harmonize using both hemispheres of the brain. The left and right hemispheres are responsible for certain functions. He discovered that children up to the age of five learn 25 times the adult rate.

In his studies he found out that the left hemisphere of the brain is verbal, analytical, pragmatic, concrete, linear, while the right hemisphere is holistic, artistic, intuitive, abstract, musical. These two hemisphere in order to work properly they have to be harmonized, Lozanov also found out that

people learned at different levels of brain-wave activity. The brain functions at four different levels.

a) Beta level, b) Alpha level, c) Theta level d) Delta level.

a) The Beta level is normal waking it is when we are active and the brain is intense. It is also the time when people learn the least efficiently.

b) The Alpha level is the deep relaxation state, when we daydream or prior going to sleep.

c) The Theta level is where we just drop into dreaming is the hallucinatory. Lozanov found that this alpha-theta level is the best wave for learning. So the best method was to get people into the Alpha-Theta level and combine both hemispheres. For that the best was to use music. According to Lozanov, the rhythm of music energizes and brings order. Music relaxes learners and at the same time marks the presentation of linguistic material. The type of music is of great importance. After doing various studies Lozanov found out that Baroque music with its specific rhythm creates relaxation that can lead to good memorization. While listening to Baroque music one can retain great quantities of material. He found out that from the first session using this technique the retention of a great number of words was quite high.

There has been criticism concerning this method, as Lozanov did not state the theory of language explicitly. His emphasis was on memorization of vocabulary only. Also, some have said that there are dangers in suggesting, that there might be manipulation on one's personality and that this kind of accelerating learning must have an ethical and a moral purpose. In spite of this criticism, we all somehow know that the brain absorbs new information best when there is a variety of stimulation, when we use spaced repetition and when we study with classical music.

Types of English Lessons

The fundamental form of instruction in class is the lesson. Each lesson has its own function. It helps the students with acquiring habits and abilities, with the capacity of understanding, speaking, reading and writing English.

There are lessons that communicate new knowledge (1), lessons of developing skills, and reinforcing the knowledge (2), combined lessons (3) lessons of revision (4) and lessons of verification the knowledge and appreciation of the effort (5) done by the students.

1. Lessons of communication the knowledge.

Communication of the new material is the main task in such a lesson. In case of such a lesson the teacher should be aware and take in consideration the fact that there are difficulties the language presents to the student. Also the teacher has to develop the students' ability to speak the language and the presentation ought to be done in English. The way to communicate the new knowledge should be done in simple sentences. The new words should be presented with their phonetic transcription and on the way the knowledge should be interwoven with questions by which new facts are re-enforced.

I believe that the study of a foreign language also contributes to the understanding of the culture of that country. Studying literature, customs and traditions of the people who speak that language can attain cultural background. Let us apply the former considerations to a lesson with a theme plan on William Shakespeare. The following example is reconstructed from a manual of English language for grade 10 in Romania in the 60's. This kind of lesson was especially popular and much emphasis was made on it.

The subject: William Shakespeare (general considerations)

The aim: To make known Shakespeare's life and also his work.

To arise students' interest in order to read them in Romanian translation.

Type: Lesson of communication the knowledge.

Methods: exposition, conversation

Aids: Map of Great Britain, pictures.

Formulation of the subject:

Today we are going to learn about the great English dramatist and poet William Shakespeare whose name and fame is familiar to all of you.

Communication of knowledge

Shakespeare is one of the most outstanding representative of English Literature.

Despite – in spite of

He is England's greatest dramatist and the glory of the world drama. *Despite* his fame little is known about his life.

The town is shown on the map.

Shakespeare was born at Stratford-upon Avon on April 23rd.

Where was Shakespeare born?

When was he born?

Derive- to get, to receive

His father was a tradesman. We know that his mother's name was Mary Arden. The Ardens *derived* their name from the forest of Arden.

A grammar school- a secondary school in which great stress is put on teaching Latin and Greek.

William attended the *grammar school* in his native town. He left school at an early age to help his father in trade. He married Ann Hathaway at the age of eighteen and they had three children. He then left Stratford for London where he became an actor. Later he improved the existing dramas and wrote plays of his own. At the age of fifty he retired to Stratford where he died on April 23rd 1616. when he was fifty-two. His house where he was born *shelters* a Shakespeare museum, which is visited every year by thousands of people. The Memorial Building at Stratford includes a theatre where his plays are performed.

*To shelter- to provide a place for
The teacher shows a picture of the Memorial Building.*

- Where and when was Shakespeare born?
- Speak about his life in Stratford.
- What did Shakespeare do in Stratford?
- When did he return to Stratford?
- What reminds us of Shakespeare at Stratford?

Fixation

Material continued

Shakespeare composed a form of poetry called sonnets. These sonnets express the emotion and reflection of the poet's inner world. Shakespeare's dramatic work includes thirty-seven plays, comedies, tragedies and historical dramas.

The demonstration and explanation on Shakespeare can go on and on. It is important that at the end of the lesson the teacher should review it by asking questions. Asking questions while making the presentation and at the end of the lesson does not mean only a verification or testing of the knowledge but it means actual learning on the part of the student. At the end of the lesson homework will be given. The homework will consist of reading the text from which the teacher delivered his talk. Since the spoken language is primary, the character of the English class was

predominantly oral. As a consequence of this principle the teacher used almost exclusively English during the class. A consequence of this principle is that oral activities always precede written ones and that the teacher begins teaching with a purely oral delivery of the prepared lesson.

Since the skill of understanding and speaking implies a good command of the sound system, great emphasis is given to the acquisition of sounds. Correct pronunciation remains a permanent concern throughout the whole period of instruction. Sounds are taught in isolation and then immediately inserted in words, phrases or sentences by means of which stress, rhythm, pauses and intonation are practiced.

2. Lessons of reinforcing of knowledge and of developing skills and abilities

Such lessons are of special importance. They differ from other types of lessons both in content and structure. No new knowledge is given, yet new skills might be fixed on previously acquired knowledge. The lessons of reinforcing of knowledge stand closest to lessons of revision of knowledge. They are mainly practical and the greatest stress should be laid on drills. Drills contribute to the development of abilities and skills in an easy and enjoyable way. Drills are useful because they can be done in chorus and in repeating the response a correct rhythm pattern will be accomplished. Here is an example of a drill on grammar:

a) Have you ever eaten brown bread?

Oh, yes I have. I ate some last week.

b) Has your mother ever baked bread?

Oh, yes she has. She baked some last week.

c) Have you and your brother ever had sushi?

Oh, yes we have. We had some last week.⁽⁵⁾

In the case of such a drill grammar rules of how to use have + past participle can be reinforced in an easy manner. The students are required to practice through drilling grammatical rules learned previously and also to practice thinking and speaking in English.

No doubt, such pattern practice can go on and on and the longer the drills the more chances for building fluency when speaking English. After all students are required to know how to say in an easy way a certain statement and oral repetitions like these are of great help. I also believe that such kind of drilling is more important than for example revisions of theoretical parts of grammar. Instead of asking or again explaining to students "How is have + participle formed? Give Examples", drilling the have + past participle is more practical and enjoyable. The teacher indicates the cue and the students place it in sentences.

3. Combined lessons

A frequently used lesson is the combined lesson. Within such a lesson several educative assignments are achieved. For example:

- Checking the knowledge
- Teaching new material
- Developing skills and abilities

A combined lesson offers possibilities of varying the activities in class. However, such lessons because of the conventional sequence are not expected to give good results. Students become bored by the three stages, as they know exactly what would follow next. Knowledge cannot be acquired without stirring the attention and imagination of the students present in class. Skills cannot be developed without active training done in an interesting way. A successful class is that in which all students work assiduously. In this case verification is no longer a separate part of the lesson; it lasts throughout the whole period and it is blended with the acquisition of new knowledge. Fixation becomes the main element of the lesson and it is closely connected with the communication of the new knowledge. Students are actively involved in the class work instead of being passive in class. (Such kind of combined classes were popular in the sixties in an English class in Romania.)

4. Lessons of revision

Repetition is the essential condition that assures the reinforcement of knowledge and the developing the skills that will eventually transform into habit. Without repetition there is no knowledge, without knowledge no skills can be formed. Each foreign language class must offer possibilities for repetition.

Within such classes teachers will repeat the material, which has been consolidated, and then it is practiced intensely. Lessons of revision are more or less lessons of verification. Their purpose is to test the students' knowledge and to find solutions to shortcomings.

I believe there are three types of repetition :

- a) Repetition at the beginning of a school year or semester, which is meant to refresh the material acquired in previous years or semester.
- b) A periodical repetition at every two three weeks during the presenting of material.
- c) Repetition at the end of a great chapter or semester that systemize the knowledge acquired within the analysis.

Repetitions of these kind before the tests are meant to consolidate and deepen the students' knowledge and skills. Students should know in advance what they have to repeat. Methods for repetitions can be presented under the forms of conversations, questions-answers and exercises. For example students have to repeat Word Order- Adverbs chapter.

Teacher: Question

We shall deal today with adverbs and word order. Do you know the basic word order in English?

Teacher: Answer

“Subject	Verb	Object	Adverb
I	dislike	sweets	intensely.

This order should not be varied unless there are very good reasons for doing so. The most important rule of all is that NOTHING must be put between the VERB and its OBJECT. If there is an adverb or adverbial phrases, it usually goes at the end of the sentence, AFTER the object.

She speaks English well.

I like traveling very much

The sun seemed to shine constantly

The last sentence *to shine* belongs to *seemed* in much the same way as an object to its verb, and so *constantly* must not be put between *seemed* and to shine.

Similarly, in

I want to live here forever,

here belongs to *live*

He went to bed early

to bed belongs to *went*.

Teacher: Question

Do you know how to put more than one adverb at the end of a sentence?

Teacher: Answer,

“If you want to put more than one adverb or adverbial phrase at the end of the sentence, the usual order is Manner, Place, Time.

He played beautifully at the Festival Hall last night.”⁽⁶⁾

I believe it is important that the teacher both asks and answers the questions when revising the

material, however such kind of repetition ought to be done with dynamism as this is an essential part for a lesson of revision. If the students can be stirred to a conscious participation they can also take part in the question-answer practice even if their participation is without force or short. Also during these revision lessons new elements can be introduced. For example a new text or a paragraph, even a very short story that is presented orally by the teacher in such a way that it can catch successfully the students' attention.

5. Lessons of verification and testing

Testing is an important thing in the process of teaching. Verification of knowledge is more or less a part of each English lesson. As a rule, in order to make sure of the degree in which skills are mastered and to realize the incompleteness and insufficiency certain lessons are required in order to draw attention to the shortcomings students might have. Lessons of verification play an important role and have an educative value if they help develop a conscious attitude on the part of the student concerning the gaps and shortcomings in their process of earning knowledge. These kinds of lessons can help students get a higher responsibility towards their duties. . The verification lesson also plays an important role in the work of the teacher. It enables the teacher to understand how students are progressing in their studies and realize the difficulties the students encounter in the process of learning.

There are two types of lessons of verification:

- a) The written test-paper
- b) The oral examination.

A written test paper is an important form of testing. A lesson that precedes the real test clears and opens the way for the students to systemize the material that is to be tested. Indications considering the way in which the test is carried out also precede the written test. By grouping the typical mistakes and discussing them in class the teacher can be of additional and great help to students in a lesson of verification.

Testing Oral English classes

Speaking is usually the poorest for all the students who study English, but especially poor for the Japanese students. This is the result of the lack of speaking practices and listening practices as well. Listening is always very much connected to speaking. From my own experience in lessons of Oral Testing I have come to the conclusion that a first factor should be easing the anxiety the students have when they listen to a question and especially when they answer. Generally, they do not like to listen to what they say because they believe they are not correct. Secondly, it is very

difficult for them to find the words to express themselves.

So, as a lesson of verification and testing, conversations comprising questions are prepared and developed. Guidance is necessary. This is to make an environment that will help the students to speak. A good environment means also to remove their anxiety with encouraging words. In a lesson of verification I make clear to the students that fluency is more important than accuracy. I do this because of their reluctance to speak. After all, reluctance is fear of not being competent and efficient enough. Nevertheless, for a satisfactory outcome, knowing that there is no correction from my part gradually students eventually will talk. A student normally will hold or estimate the grammatical rule(s) he/she learnt and will try to translate the Japanese thought/sentence into English. However, thinking of grammatical rules and translating sentences from Japanese into English is a tiring job that nobody would like. I remind the students not to mind their mistakes and to guess the answer instead of just sitting quietly.

The importance of pronunciation in English

Language cannot be separated from sound. I can even say that language is sound. When we talk or when we sing we use our throats to make sounds. The throat is the center of creating the sound. Unless we are able to make sounds and to hear them properly we cannot communicate in a language, even if that is the mother tongue or a foreign tongue.

The pronunciation of the sounds in a language includes stress, rhythm and intonation. Each language has its own specific pronunciation system. In early childhood it is not difficult for us to acquire the specific intonation and pronunciation of our native tongues. We need no formal instruction. However, it is quite different with a foreign language we want to master. The difficulty starts when the learner of a second language unconsciously passes the sounds the rhythm and intonation of his native language to the new language he/she is learning.

Some sounds are similar in two languages and so they will be easily acquired. Other sounds will need more attention and so they will have to be extensively practiced until they become habits. The proper learning of pronunciation forms the basis for further success in mastering English.

The teaching of pronunciation requires on the part of the teacher several examinations and analysis.

First, pronunciation cannot be learned by mere imitation by everyone. There are exceptionally talented pupils who can acquire a good pronunciation by nothing more than listening to the sound of English. But not all are that gifted. The majority of students need additional aid. They must be taught how sounds are produced. In this way, to the checking power of the ear is added the

constructive power of placing the vocal organs in certain positions, so as to produce certain sounds. The movement of the tongue cannot be seen, it is almost all the time hidden from sight. The complex and difficult utterances that make up speech sounds can be properly reproduced by listening, imitation and especially by giving descriptions as to their formation.

Laborious theoretical explanations should not be extensively used. Instead, short practical advice for the position of lips, tongue, the opening between the jaws etc. should be given. Diagrams together with indications of the position of the tongue or opening of the mouth are important. These diagrams or descriptions are such as to show the exact relations of the foreign sound to certain known sounds in the mother tongue. In the teaching of sounds comparing them to the sounds of the mother tongue will help students realize what is similar or what is different and also what is peculiar in the English sounds. Dictionaries of English pronunciation are of great help to the teacher and student alike in learning the sounds. Explanations on the pronunciation with diagrams and phonetic transcriptions are to be found in such dictionaries. Perhaps one of the best is Daniel Jones' *English Pronouncing Dictionary*, which records with great accuracy the pronunciation. However, the pronunciation represented in this dictionary is that used in Southern England or that heard on BBC.

Also the most comprehensive and detailed work concerning pronunciation significantly from the point of view of the foreign learner is Daniel Jones' *An Outline Of English Phonetics*. This extensive work covers in detail every item concerning pronunciation, the organs of speech, experimental methods, breath and voice, stress, intonation. It contains a minute description on how to learn vowels and consonants along with a list of illustrations on organs of speech, tongue position and lip-position. That can be of a great help to the teacher.

As it concerns the phonetic transcription, Jones defines it as a clear and simple system of representing pronunciation by means of writing. The phonetic symbols will be a precious aid for the pupils in the correct pronunciation of the words. The students should acquire the phonetic transcription to the extent that it helps them to use dictionaries. In class when the students are able to utter the sound and know its phonetic representation the sound, the teacher then arranges and presents the sounds in simple monosyllabic words and uttered repeatedly in unison and also individually. In some schools half of a century ago in Romania English class-training courses were held for acquisition of sounds before starting the language teaching. Such courses had very good results because the method used for training the auditory memory consisted in "nonsense dictation". First, the teacher teaches the phonetic transcription and practices the sounds. Then, he dictates meaningless words with sounds he wants to train. The pupils write what they think they hear by means of phonetic system. When they make a mistake the teacher repeats the word as he

originally pronounced it and then in the way written by the pupils. He repeats the two pronunciations a number of times until the pupils hear clearly the nature of the mistake. Such ear-training classes were meant to help students in hearing the language and have impact on the acoustic impression in their memory by means of repetition.

The importance of extra-curricular activities

The extra-curricular work is an important aid in the instruction and education of students. It is closely connected with the work in class and it supplements it. It offers numerous possibilities for instruction and education.

I think there are three types of extra-curricular work with foreign languages:

- 1.) Individual work
- 2.) Group work
- 3.) Mass work

These three types of work are closely connected with one-another.

1. In individual work the teacher appoints a student to make a short report on a certain subject, or to prepare some visual material for the English classes (pictures, schemes, tables) also to check on the Internet information on different subjects.
2. Group work includes circles created for a special task. Such tasks may be:
 - The organization of reading, or speech competitions
 - The organization of literary soiree
 - The organization of a foreign language corner with exhibitions of written papers with a collection of pictures, cards etc. that can be changed from time to time, for example, every week.
 - Conversations circles that consist on discussions of films or music, rock or pop.
3. The mass form of extra-curricular activities in the field of foreign languages can take the form of school festivals. On such occasions the students may perform scenes or acts from movie, a play or even puppet-shows. Competitions may be organized, for example speech competitions or interpretations of literary fragments, or even making a short movie in English.

Conclusion

The desire and pleasure of sharing knowledge with people is of prime importance. This desire to share can inspire the teacher to make himself/herself the best method of teaching in class. The passion of teaching (on my part) comes from my appreciation of the richness of languages my mother tongue first and the other two languages I speak. Without being able to learn and teach a foreign language I maybe should have not been able to realize the richness of my mother tongue. Being aware of the wisdom of languages made me be more passionate for teaching. Interacting with my students is of tremendous fulfillment because it bears the mark of learning social aspects of human wisdom and understanding, it opens my eyes toward cultural and linguistic cognition. In teaching the students the actual learning of a foreign language opens the mind to the knowledge of new worlds. I myself as a teacher appreciate the richness and magnitude for the languages that I am granted.

Concerning teaching methods, I believe that a variety of approaches makes up the most successful practice, it assists to maintain the whole attention of the students present in class, it encourages them and offers an attractive atmosphere and diminishes anxiety, shyness, etc. In the end I would like to add the following fact: not all students share the same desire for studying a foreign language and it is sometimes a bit too hard for a teacher to teach a class even if he/she is very enthusiastic when teaching the lesson. It has happened to me, it has happened to others. As there are many kinds of students and each of them have their own character and learning rhythms and styles it is not easy to keep everyone's attention. Some students might assimilate the information at once; others cannot do that, though. The learning style that fits one student doesn't fit another one. Also, only a few students are more willing to participate in class while most are passive participants. I have learned all these along the many years of teaching. I now realize that the best thing to do in class with my students is not to ask them for rote memorization but to always look for new methods that have more significant tasks, which are suggestive and informative.

Above all, a grain of patience and humor is needed every time I go to teach a class.

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