

RECYCLING GT *

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The second half of this century has seen the rise and fall of several theoretical giants, among them the stimulus-response-reinforcement theory of learning and classical, Bloomfieldian, linguistics. It has also seen the rise and fall of one of their offspring, audiolingualism. The audio-lingual method of teaching (AL), originally a revolt against the grammar-translation method of teaching (GT), finds itself the object of revolt these days. Judging by the literature against GT in the past and against AL in the present, the proverbial Mexican only-two sopas have finally become only one, and that one not fideos. To put it in a less cryptic way, with both GT and AL fallen into theoretical disrepute, we are between the devil and the deep blue sea. It is our problem to fill the methodological vacuum that now exists where AL used to stand. Although the question of syllabus design is still unresolved (Bravo, 1979), the advent of the vigorous and imaginative theory of notional syllabuses makes theoretical speculation possible on the question: "Given a non-structural syllabus, how shall we teach it?" Now that prejudice against GT and for AL has finally subsided it is possible to re-examine the question and attempt an answer.

It is obvious that all of us are working for a communicative goal and this should require no further comments, except perhaps that such a goal is imposed on us from the outside by the hypothetical but quite concrete students who want "to learn (unqualified) English."

Next we want to make up our minds about what language is and what it is like. This is important because our teaching materials will have to be designed or selected according to our chosen view. That language is rule-governed behaviour and not merely a set of habits should be conceded without much further ado except for the obvious comment that the learner must, one way or another, apprehend the rules that govern such behaviour. The view that language consists of its "basic structures" and that teaching materials should be designed to teach them has been theoretically defeated and gradually abandoned in the last ten years. Notional syllabuses seem to be establishing themselves as the most likely alternative.

* This paper was presented at the Bi-national Center Symposium on October 30, 1979 in the City of Oaxaca.

The Chomskyan revolution in linguistics, followed by the semanticists' rebellion, brought about a new conception of language in which semantics, is the notional component of language, came to be considered the generative element and stopped being the interpretive lame duck of transformational grammar (Best, 1979). Sociolinguistics added a new dimension to the study of language by making scientifically acceptable the proposition that language cannot be separated from its social context, a position contrary to that of structural linguistics, which was held even up to more recent times (i. e. Chomsky's "ideal hearer-speaker"). A consequence of all this is that we must see language as the full-blooded body it is and not as the X-ray it is not. Noticing the obvious differences, we must also notice at least two similarities between this modern point of view and that implied by the texts chosen for translation in GT theory which were not only whole units of discourse in themselves, but also provided their own context as well. In other words, they agreed with what was considered to be real language in those days. Consistently with this view, one's teaching materials should not consist of sentences, whether isolated, connected or contextualised; they should go above the sentence into discourse where the unit is the text, i. e. any stretch of discourse which is a self-contained whole. Here we must choose to reject audiolingualism's conception of language.

If our conception of language is such that we must present texts to the learner, then our teaching method must be ad hoc, for the materials resulting thereby. Here we must choose between inductive and deductive ways of presenting the language to the learner; we use presentation as the first teaching act, which is to be followed by various other activities. Induction is a learning strategy by which the learner, in making hypotheses about the situations presented to him, abstracts or discovers the rules governing them. Teaching by induction would be no more than a facilitation process and would consist in creating the right conditions for concepts or rules to be formed, abstracted or discovered. Deduction is a teaching strategy which consists in explicitly explaining the rules to the learner and then creating the right conditions for them to be applied and learned. Notice that, ideally, the final product is, in both cases, learning of the rules and acquisition of new rule-governed behaviour. Language learning is by no means different from any other kind of concept learning, but the difference must be made between those concepts which the student has already learned in his own language and culture and so need not be learned again (time, number, quantity, politeness, negation, invitation, etc.) and those concepts which the learner must learn because they are the rules governing the phonological, grammatical and semantic structure of the language as well as the corresponding conventions of usage. In other words, the learner does not need to learn new semantic concepts; what he does need is to attach to those concepts a different code. And this is our teaching problem, how to teach him the grammatical means to express his conceptual world.

Despite findings that seem to suggest that deduction is better for mature speakers of their mother tongue (i. e. those above age 12), the issue

is not which is better, induction or deduction. The real issue is which suits our particular concept of language better, and here deduction seems to be the answer. For example, it would be foolish to spend time making the student discover that the allophones corresponding to /t/, /d/ and /id/ stand for the concept 'past time' which he already possesses in his own language; that they are not interchangeable but have a very rigorous distribution; that they are productive, etc. Given his lack of familiarity with the language, he might spend the rest of his (school) life trying, in vain, to discover the rules which make it necessary that he consciously disobeys the Spanish rules which, on the one hand, oblige him to a dental articulation, and on the other forbid him from pronouncing sequences like /kt/, /st/, /nd/, etc. It seems unfair to expect the student to induce all these rules and it seems preferable to explain them and then by exexplicitation and practice to help him to master them. The complications of a text are, of course, much greater. A text is usually made up of a number of sentences, each with a different structure, perhaps, each with a different grammatical meaning. The sentences are related to each other by various means such as conjunctions, anaphoric and cataphoric reference, spatio-temporal succession, etc. Their function is likely varied: to express familiarity or formality, to establish phatic communion, to persuade, to inform, to request, etc. All of these things need to be apprehended by the student. To expect him to discover them by induction seems too hard a task.

Maligned for so long (but nevertheless practiced underground), deduction, GT's way of presentation of language, seems not only preferable to AL's induction here, but also necessary throughout the whole teaching and learning process.

In summary, a non-structural approach to language imposes the text as the means of presentation of the language to be taught, and this in turn imposes deduction as a necessary teaching strategy. GT is recyclable, after all.

What is left is a number of problems and puzzles to be solved and decisions to be made. Some of them require a theoretical stance, i. e. what sort of language behaviour are errors and what should be done about them. Some require experimental research, i. e. if deduction is a teaching strategy but induction a learning strategy, are we not wrong in selecting the former? Still other decisions are taken by reference to our teaching reality, i. e. if explanations are necessary, in what language should they be given? But the most important decisions are still in the teacher's hands and depend on his individual ability, knowledge, experience and sensibility to his student's ability, knowledge, experience, interests, needs, etc. For example, the text is presented as a whole to be analysed in order to focus on the teaching points the learner must master: specific notions, functions and even structures. But, how long must or can the text be, how easy? Must the learner learn all of it, part of it, or none of it? How is the learner to acquire

motor skills in the language? How is he to learn and learn to use the rules of grammar and of usage? Techniques are chameleonic, they belong to everybody, and like the salt of the earth (Mat 5:13), they are the salt of teaching. And it is for the teacher to season his teaching.

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THE EDITOR WISHES TO THANK JOAN MOIR WHO TYPED THIS ISSUE OF THE
MEXTESOL JOURNAL.