

BOGDAN KRAKOWIAN
Łódź University

EFFICIENT TRANSITION FROM RECEPTION TO PRODUCTION IN FLT¹

Abstract

It is suggested that teaching a foreign language should start with a period of training in listening comprehension, which may be advantageous for the learners. The transition from reception to production in language learning should be via a stage of reproduction. The three stages /reception, reproduction and production/ are discussed. Simultaneous training in reading /in phonetic transcription/ is also advocated.

Recent years have brought a number of publications in foreign language methodology whose authors advocate the introduction of a prolonged period of training in listening comprehension at the start of instruction in the foreign language /Asher 1979· 1969· Davies 1976; Nord 1980; Olmsted Gary 1975; Postovsky 1975; Winitz and Reeds 1973, etc./. These authors support their views with many convincing arguments which, however, we are not going to deal with here. The interested reader is referred to the above-mentioned sources. Instead, we should first like to concentrate on just a few advantages of starting foreign language instruction with a period of comprehension training.

To avoid any misunderstanding, it must be stressed at the very beginning that in the kind of teaching that is being advocated here training in listening comprehension will be the sole object of teaching a foreign language at the beginning of a course and that no imitation or production in the target

language will be attempted. It is obvious that this sort of teaching requires the introduction of a variety of new classroom techniques whose aim would be to keep the learners active and engaged in the process of learning in spite of the "no imitation and no production" rule, and which would provide feed-back to the teacher about the learners' progress in learning. Several such techniques have been proposed. We shall have to satisfy ourselves with enumerating them here /for a more detailed discussion of them see the present author's "Techniques of Teaching in the "Pre-Speaking" Period", forthcoming/.

Here are the techniques we have in mind:

- 1/ following directions /obeying commands/
- 2/ same/different
- 3/ task solving /or multiple choice pictures/
- 4/ true/false
- 5/ responding in the native language
- 6/ translation
- 7/ matching /completing/ sentences
- 8/ dictation

One of the most important advantages of listening comprehension training is the fact that we start teaching with building the learners' competence before requiring them to produce. One might point out that this is, perhaps, the optimum way for any learner to learn a language: it is, at least, true in case of learning one's native language. It is also suspected by many methodologists that it may be very well true in learning a foreign language. One of the main tenets of cognitive teaching is the requirement that one should teach competence in the foreign language before performance. Until now nobody quite knew how this could be done. One of the solutions proposed was direct teaching of grammar rules. This was to be started as a conscious process and then, through a process of reduction this conscious knowledge was to be internalized as language competence. Without condemning this approach we should like to draw attention to an alternative way in which learners' competence may be developed - namely through training in listening

comprehension.

Training in listening comprehension, if it is to lead to the development of language competence, must, and does, provide rich linguistic environment for the learners. This is obtained by the teacher's use of the target language and by the introduction of authentic, though initially simplified, recorded and printed texts. It must also be stressed that the linguistic environment /we might call it the learner's input/ is free of all the incorrect and faulty forms of language which are so common in production oriented teaching.

Another important advantage of this kind of teaching is the fact that training in reception only, allows the learners to make quicker progress in learning. It permits the teacher to introduce greater chunks of the foreign language material than he ordinarily would in more conventional teaching. It also frees both the teacher and the textbook writer from some of the worries connected with careful gradation of the material. It is, for example, perfectly possible for the teacher to introduce two new tenses during one learning session: the learners only have to understand the differences in meaning signalled by these two tenses. They will not be required to learn the rules of use of each of these tenses but through prolonged exposure to the language they will manage, with the teacher's help, to intuitively arrive at, finally verbalize the rules of their use.

Finally, training in listening comprehension may, and must, be complemented by training in the other receptive skill - reading. Training in reading is especially important in the teaching of adults because they rely heavily on some visual support in learning to comprehend the spoken language. Early introduction of reading may, therefore, considerably facilitate learning to understand speech.

This, perhaps, lengthy introduction concerning the advantages to be found in starting instruction in a foreign language with a "pre-speaking" period devoted to the teaching of listening comprehension may be aptly summed up with a quotation from an article by Norman F. Davies /1980:462-463/: ... "we

became convinced that a revised sequence giving initial priority to receptive skills was not only sound practical sense in short courses, but also represented a possible major advance in language learning methodology as such."

It is often claimed that, just as in the case of L_1 learning, the learners will start using the language spontaneously provided they are properly saturated with the sounds and structures of the language they are learning. This appearance of spontaneous language production is certainly strongly correlated, among other factors, with the learners' motivation. It is, however, very well known to the teachers that the majority of their learners are not strongly motivated to learn another language. It is also perfectly possible that the kind of teaching advocated here may also fail to motivate the learners to learn although success in learning /and it is easier to succeed in a receptive knowledge of the language than in learning all the four skills at once/ is usually motivating. We therefore think that it is not advisable to wait for the learners' spontaneous production in the target language. Two reasons must be mentioned to support this view. First, directly connected with the problem of motivation, we cannot be sure that even all motivated learners will enter the stage of spontaneous production on their own, before the end of the course. Many immigrants living for years in a new language environment fail to produce anything but the most primitive kind of language. Many children learning another language from infancy exhibit only what may be called "unidirectional" bilingualism /Krakowian 1979/ and never start speaking spontaneously unless specifically taught to speak. Second, in institutionalized kind of teaching one cannot wait until the learners start producing language; one has to plan this moment in advance. We, therefore, suggest that the learners be gradually led from reception to production and that this be done in the following three steps: 1/reception, 2/ reproduction, 3/ production.

Reception

This stage should begin with training in sound discriminat-

ion. The learners should quickly learn to discriminate between all the sounds of the target language and they should be familiar with their phonetic representations /especially in case of languages like English/. At the same time the learners should be taught to obey gradually more complicated and longer commands in the target language. Obeying commands, or the total physical response, is the technique especially recommended by Asher /1979; 1969; Asher, Kusudo and de la Torre 1974; Kunihiro and Asher 1965/. This technique should dominate the teaching at the very beginning of a course; later on the teacher is free to use all or some of the techniques enumerated earlier. It must be noted in passing that what is called the total physical response was not invented by Asher; earlier in this century Palmer advocated the use of what he called "the imperative drill" and, as we know, this technique was used in a book "English through Actions".

Palmer also recommended a prolonged use of phonetic transcription; he claimed that after two years of learning English with the exclusive use of phonetic transcription the learners could easily be taught the conventional spelling. This idea is very appealing for it allows the teacher to teach the learners to read for information fairly early in the course. When the learners have learnt the phonetic symbols for all the sounds in the language the teacher should write all the new vocabulary items, previously introduced in the oral form, in phonetic script. This visual support is extremely necessary for adult learners especially when the teacher introduces other techniques in addition to the total physical response. The material introduced during the lesson should be recombined and assigned as homework. Reading such texts at home may serve as an additional motivating factor and it will also help to fix the newly learned elements of the language. Needless to say, that the texts should be interesting. The learners' comprehension of these texts may be checked in the native language.² If possible, the learners should also listen to recorded texts of a similar kind.

Testing is one of the essential components of all teaching.

We should like to stress its even greater importance in the approach discussed here: it is utilized, first of all, as a powerful teaching instrument, for the teaching techniques mentioned earlier had originally been designed for the purposes of testing. The learners should be regularly tested, both during the lesson and during their individual work, for instance in a language laboratory. The tests may require the learners to state whether pairs of sentences are similar or different in meaning, whether the sentences heard are true or false or to match target language sentences with their native language equivalents /printed on a sheet of paper and numbered: the learners' task is to match the numbers/.

Reproduction

It is difficult to specify when the learners should be taught to reproduce the things learnt during the reception stage. The length of time devoted solely to reception will depend on the intensity of teaching at the course, the length of the course and the amount of listening /and reading/ that the learners do outside the classroom. The personal opinion of the present author is that the "pre-speaking" period should not be shorter than the time necessary for the acquisition of a basic "mini-language" - a minimum of the language required for elementary but effective communication. The specific nature of this "mini-language" has yet to be determined.

The rule to be obeyed at this stage is that the learners should be required to reproduce /imitate after the model/ the things first introduced orally during the reception stage and then follow the same sequence in which the material had originally been introduced. The main technique to be used here is the oral reading of words, sentences and longer texts written in phonetic transcription.

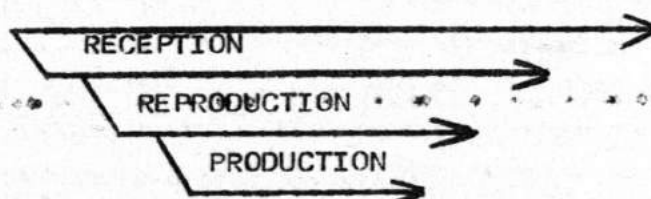
Judicious use of drills may also be recommended at this stage. The teachers must remember, however, that they cannot be purely mechanical but must be situationally oriented.

The teacher must also plan for the moment of transition from phonetic transcription to conventional spelling. Palmer's

idea of using phonetic transcription for two years without reference to conventional spelling may be effective but it remains to be seen if it can withstand the pressures of the modern world. The learners will soon want to try and read the titles of books, newspapers and magazines in the target language; in case of a language like English they will see around them words like "hot dogs", "made in Poland", etc. and they will want to be able to read them. It may be, therefore, necessary for the teacher to gradually introduce ordinary spelling some time around the start of the production phase.

Production

This phase should follow the reproduction stage after a suitable interval of time. Production should again start with the material introduced at the beginning of the reception stage. We may note in passing that this model of teaching has an in-built mechanism of repetition: each bit of the new material is repeated three times - once at each stage of teaching. The most important technique to be used here is translation from the native into the target language. Also at this stage the learners must be placed in real communicative situations and required to seek or give information. Language games may be very useful as a technique for teaching production.



As can be seen from the diagram³, we propose a kind of threelane teaching. The three phases of reception, reproduction and production should follow one another after an interval of time. With time, together with the growth of the learners' competence, this time interval may shrink until the three phases are realized during one and the same teaching period.

The model of teaching presented here is currently being tested in two informal pilot studies supervised by the author.

The aim of both the experiments is to find out whether it is possible to use the approach and techniques discussed here and to achieve as much /or less or, perhaps, more/ as could be achieved with conventional teaching. We share the opinion of Mackey /1965:IX-X/ that one should not evaluate a method of teaching by the results of teaching, and that is why we did not set up control and experimental groups but rather tried to find out how much could be taught with the use of the experimental techniques.

The first experiment was concerned with the teaching of English to a group of 26 students, all of them adults between 16 and 40 years of age. Out of those 26 persons, only 16 attended the lessons more or less regularly /these were evening classes for volunteers/. There were three classes a week, two hours each, giving the total of six hours per week. During the first two weeks the learners were given a lot of practice in sound discrimination and they were also taught phonetic transcription. At the same time the students were asked to carry out commands spoken to them in English. The commands were gradually more and more complicated as the number of vocabulary items introduced grew. Other techniques /cf. page 42/ were used later on.

The course, unfortunately, had a prescribed manual which the teacher had to follow /"First Things First" by L.G.Alexander/, and therefore drastic changes had to be made in the order and manner of introducing the material. At the time of reporting, the students managed to cover most of the grammatical material of the book and a greater part of its vocabulary. This was still the reception phase and the students were about to pass to the stage of reproduction.

The students' attitudes to this kind of teaching were favourable. One is also entitled to state that the experiment provided an affirmative answer to the question of whether it was possible to succeed in teaching anything with the proposed model of teaching. The present author is convinced that the results of teaching could have even been better if all the theoretical

recommendations had been followed. Unfortunately, for reasons which it was practically impossible to control, the learners were not provided with sufficient amounts of reading and listening practice. The amount of testing was also inadequate. In addition to this, many learners frequently had to miss their classes.

The other experiment, concerned with the teaching of French, was conducted in more favourable conditions. The subjects were 24 secondary school pupils whose attendance was obligatory. The pupils had classes five times a week, seven 45-minute periods in all. As in the other experiment, the teaching began with sound discrimination exercises and commands in the target language. The teaching of phonetics was so successful that in several weeks the pupils wrote phonetic dictations correctly and, with some help and encouragement from the teacher, quickly generalized rules of equivalence between phonetic transcription and ordinary spelling. This enabled the teacher to pass on to the stage of reproduction more quickly.

In this experiment, too, the teacher was obliged to make a compromise with the course book /"La France en direct" by J and G. Capelle/. At the time of reporting he managed to complete the first ten units of the book, which is a lot more than what is required by the programme. The pupils have very good pronunciation and, what was to be expected, good listening comprehension. The experiment is still in progress.

We are not entitled to draw any general conclusions from the results of these two experiments. We could only be justified in concluding that the proposed model of teaching is certainly feasible and viable. It is, however, encouraging to think that more and more reports from different parts of the world indicate positive results of experiments devoted to listening comprehension training. This is especially true of the total physical response approach.

It is hoped that the model of teaching under discussion, which tries to integrate various approaches and techniques into one uniform whole, may, with some further modifications and

refinements, become an effective tool in teaching foreign languages.

NOTES

- ¹ This is a slightly revised version of a paper delivered at the 1981 IATEFL Congress in Athens.
- ² It may also be checked by true/false statements, multiple choice tests, etc., but the important thing to remember is that the learners must not be required to show that they understand a text by producing FL utterances.
- ³ The diagram representing an inverted triangle is an improvement of the original diagramme, which is something I owe to Peter Hill.

REFERENCES

- Asher James J. 1979. Learning Another Language through Commands: The Complete Teacher's Guidebook. SKY Oaks Productions. California.
- Asher James J. 1969. The Total Physical Response Approach to Second Language Learning. The Modern Language Journal. Vol. LIII, No 1. 3-17
- Asher James J., Jo Anne Kusudo and Rita de la Torre. 1974. Learning a Second Language through Commands: The Second Field Test. The Modern Language Journal. Vol. LVIII, No 1. 24-32
- Davies, Norman F. 1976. Receptive versus Productive Skills in Foreign Language Learning. The Modern Language Journal. Vol. LX, No 8. 440-443
- Davies Norman F. 1980. Putting Receptive Skills First: An Experiment in Sequencing. The Canadian Modern Language Review. Vol. 36, No 3. 461-467
- Krakowian, Bogdan. 1979. Techniques of Teaching in the "Pre-Speaking" Period. A paper delivered at an international IATEFL Congress in London in December, 1979. To be pub-

- lished in the System.
- Kunihira Shirou and James J. Asher. 1965. The Strategy of the Total Physical Response; An Application to Learning Japanese. IRAL. Vol. III/4. 277-289
- Mackey W.F. 1965. Language Teaching Analysis. Longmans.
- Nord James R. 1980. Developing Linguistic Fluency before Speaking; An Alternative Paradigm. The System. Vol.8.1-22
- Olsted Gary Judith. 1975. Delayed Oral Practice in Initial Stages of Second Language Learning. A paper delivered at the 1975 TESOL Convention in Los Angeles, California.
- Postovsky Valerian A. 1975. The Priority of Oral Comprehension in the Language Acquisition Process. A paper delivered at the 4th AILA World Congress at Stuttgart.
- Winitz Harris and James A. Reeds. 1973. Rapid Acquisition of a Foreign Language /German/ by the Avoidance of Speaking. IRAL. Vol. XI/4. 295-317

EFEKTYWNE PRZEJŚCIE OD RECEPCJI DO PRODUKCJI
W NAUCZANIU JEZYKÓW OBCYCH

Streszczenie

Artykuł sugeruje, że nauczanie języka obcego winno zaczynać się od okresu poświęconego wyłącznie na ćwiczenie sprawności rozumienia mowy. Takie receptywne nauczanie języka winno następnie objąć ćwiczenia w czytaniu z użyciem transkrypcji fonetycznej /w wypadku takiego języka jak, na przykład, angielski/. Przechodzenie od recepcji do mówienia /produkcji/ winno odbywać się poprzez etap ćwiczeń w reprodukcji.