

# **THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE AND THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

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## INTRODUCTION

There have been for many years vigorous cries for such an approach to English teaching as will enable the Japanese students of English to hear, speak, read and write it at the same level so as to meet the needs of the community. These cries have been pointed up, especially in recent years. It is because the interchange of persons between our country and the other countries has become increasingly striking in every field of our activities as a result of the narrowing of the world both due to the extraordinary speed-up of traffic and the mechanical devices of wider mass communication. Accordingly, increasing people of intelligence have come to advocate improving the method of teaching English from their own and the national needs. Their articles on it are too many to enumerate, some appearing in newspapers, some in magazines. Most of them convey that English should be taught as a means of communication in the early stages of foreign language teaching and at the same time that training or re-training of junior high school teachers should be commenced without delay. And "for the first two years at universities, English should be taught as a means of communication. For this purpose more Fulbright scholars should be invited." (Prof. Sanki Ichikawa, "Problems of Teaching English", *Asahi Evening News*, Thursday, September 6, 1956)

The world has had many independent nations since the end of World War II and each of them has established its own language from its national dignity, causing a new barrier to world-wide communication. Concerning national dignity and foreign language teaching, Patricia O'Connor and W. F. Twaddell wrote ("Intensive Training for an Oral Approach in Language Teaching," *The Modern Language Journal*, February 1960, Vol. XLIV, No. 2 Part 2, p. 1):

"Communication is a necessity, just as much as the satisfaction of a linguistic symbol of national dignity. The only practicable solution in the face of the social and political and technological realities of our time is a foreign language education which conserves the values of national pride and yet opens the doors to inter-national sharing of the achievements of other peoples. —There is no linguistic one-way traffic in the world of today and tomorrow: Americans must enter the doors to other peoples, and we language teachers have our responsibilities right here at home. It would be a lazy—a most disastrously and immorally lazy—policy to say that the Others can learn English to talk to us. The interpreters whose backgrounds are on the

Others' side, the bilinguals whose loyalties are other-side, cannot do entire justice to our interests or our responsibilities."

I believe these statements hold quite true of our country. It is quite natural that the circumstances at home and abroad should require a more effective method of teaching and learning a foreign language. In response to the language situation both the administrators and the scholars concerned have greatly endeavoured to improve it for the benefit of the community. Hereupon the Oral Approach advocated by Charles C. Fries, an American, has been introduced into our country in the hope that it will fulfil the above-mentioned requirements. It is the latest way of language teaching and learning, which has been developed during the last forty years of scientific study of language in the United States of America.

The problems underlying the Oral Approach are brought to light in this paper in order that it may be understood fundamentally and carried out most effectively and efficiently. I was in 1961 engaged in the studies of foreign language teaching as a home-student of the Ministry of Education under the guidance of Prof. Takashi Kuroda at the Tokyo University of Education. This paper resulted from these studies.

## CHAPTER I. THE NATURE OF LANGUAGE

In the preface of Charles C. Fries' *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language* (1956), we find the following quotations that were written by Leonard Bloomfield at the time the Linguistic Society of America was founded.

"Our schools are conducted by persons who, from professors of education down to teachers in the classroom, know nothing of the results of linguistic science, not even the relation of writing to speech or of standard language to dialect. In short, they do not know what language is, and yet must teach it, and in consequence waste years of every child's life and reach a poor result."

I think it is almost the same in the case of our country. Those who are engaged or interested in language teaching should go into the nature of language as he suggested. It will make a great difference in everything whether one traces it to its origin and knows where it comes from or not. The applied science of atom which has now attained great prosperity seems to have resulted from accurate knowledge of the nature of atom itself which had been investigated for many years.

Therefore in this chapter I will state the nature of language, the reasons why we should depend upon what is called the Oral Approach. This chapter is based chiefly upon Charles C. Fries' "On the Nature of Human Language" in *The English Teachers' Magazine*, Vol. VII. No. 11 (Feb. 1959).

### 1. The Motives of Language Study

Our language, like the air we breathe, has become so common and familiar with our life that we do not realize the essential part it plays in

every one of our activities, until something unusual interferes with our use of it. We cannot remember when or how we learned to talk, just as we cannot remember learning to walk. We often have the experience of being completely surrounded by those whose talk we cannot understand. On such an occasion we are sure to feel how completely the cooperation of human society depends upon language. It is the failures and the frictions of the language differences that thwart understanding communication. They have led men to try to grasp the essential nature of human language, and the processes of its functioning in human affairs.

## 2. Ancient Explanations of Language

Men have, for many ages, sought to discover the origin of language as a way to identify and understand its basic characteristics. The philosophers of ancient Greece as well as those of ancient India long disputed concerning the relation of the sounds of words to the meanings they represented. How did meanings become connected with the combinations of vocal sounds that we call words? Was that connection one based upon nature and necessity, or was it based upon convention and usage? These were their disputed questions. Much later men turned to what have been nick-named (a) the "bow-wow" theory, (b) the "ding-dong" theory, (c) the "pooh-pooh" theory, and (d) the "babble-babble-luck" theory. These various theories attempted to explain the early attaching of meaning to specific sequences of vocal sounds as arising out of (a) the imitation of animal cries, (b) the imitation of the intrinsic sounds of things in nature, (c) the extension of the interjections of strong and sudden emotion, and (d) the chance repetition, in the natural babbling of infants, of particular sounds in connection with meanings. However, these theories are a mere conjecture, not scientific. And much later the theory was proposed that human languages arose and developed out of man's natural inclination toward lying and falsehood.

Many have believed that the so-called "primitive" peoples of today, such as the Bushmen of Australia, the "uncivilized" tribes of New Guinea and of Central Africa, and the "savage" Indians of Central and South America, have continued to speak "primitive" languages. They have believed that these "primitive" languages must necessarily be undeveloped languages and therefore nearer to the original forms of human language.

Otto Jespersen once suggested that the methods of Indo-European grammar, by means of which nineteenth century linguists sought to reconstruct the pre-historic forms of so-called "parent" languages, might by projection provide a method of approach to the problems of language origin and the nature of the earliest forms of communicative vocal noises out of which human languages have arisen.

## 3. No "Primitive" Languages

In the light of the linguistic knowledge acquired later, all of these theories have been rejected and discredited. Many of the languages of so called "primitive" peoples have been studied, analyzed, and described. As far as

the evidence goes there are no "primitive" languages. Nowhere has any people been found without a fully developed language.....a language fully capable of adjustment to any new experiences undergone by the people themselves.

Of course, these peoples will not have special words for telephone or automobile or bicycle if they have never seen any of these things. There were no such words until about a hundred years ago. But given the experience, the words are made out of the linguistic material available. The English words for them were made out of word elements from Greek and Latin. It is said that human beings talked even at any times of antiquity. There are no records of undeveloped or "primitive" languages.

Perhaps startling is the fact that the more "primitive" or the less "civilized" the people the more complex their language is. The belief that so-called "uncivilized" peoples use a very simple language is entirely unfounded.

#### 4. Complexity and Other Characteristics of American Indian Languages

Many of these languages have complex categories and intricate classifications that do not occur in the languages we have known best. In Navaho, one of American Indian Languages, special classifier forms compel a speaker to put each thing that is mentioned into one of three categories,.....the class of "far round things", like a ball, the class of "long thin things", like a fishing pole, or the class of "floppy things", like a rag. Other American Indian languages have special "mood" markers which oblige a speaker to use one set of forms if what he is reporting has been learned from hearsay, and an entirely different set of forms if he has learned it from his own experience.

Not only has the scientific study of the languages of the "less civilized" peoples brought to light a great range of linguistic complexities that were not even dreamed of, this study has revealed a much greater number of different languages and of different language families than were given in former estimates. In the United States alone, there are, of American Indian languages, at least fifty different "families" comparable to the Indo-European family, the Semitic family, or the Sino-Thibetan family. Some of these American Indian language families have as many as thirty different languages, each with its various dialects. In Mexico there are at least twenty more different families of Indian languages. In Central and south America there are many more. And in nearly all of these languages there has existed no writing by the natives themselves. Throughout the world, even today, there are more languages in which no writing exists than there are languages which have writing and readers.

#### 5. Talking and Writing and Reading

So far as we have any evidence, human language is as old as human beings. There exists nothing to indicate that there ever was a time when human beings did not talk. At least we have no history, no evidence of the rise of talking. In contrast with talking, however, writing is of much later origin and the research of quite recent times has given us much information concerning its rise and development. Since the invention of the printing press

such an ever-increasing attention has centered upon reading that many have come to regard the writing as the language itself, and talk, or speech, as a lesser and perhaps even a degraded form of the language.

Learning to read has become the first step in an education which depends primarily upon books, and complete literacy the educational goal of many nations. Increasingly, children have had to devote much of their early years to the process of learning to read. Learning to read is considered a difficult task, so difficult indeed that educationists have insisted that a child should not begin it before the age of six and then only after a period of careful preparation, through a "readiness" program. Learning to talk, on the other hand, is considered so easy a task that if it is not accomplished before the child has reached the age of two or three, worried parents often seek advice concerning his "retarded" development. As a matter of fact, learning to talk our first language is perhaps the greatest intellectual feat that many of us ever accomplish. In comparison with learning to talk, learning to read is a much simpler task. It is speech which contains the primary facts of language; writing and reading are secondary and subordinate. Unfortunately, although practically all of us talk a language, and many of us read our language, there is extremely little general understanding of the essential nature of human language and the processes of its functioning,.....either through talking or through reading.

#### **6. A New View of the Nature of Language**

The results of linguistic scholarship during the last one hundred and forty years, and especially the developments of the last thirty years have achieved the outlines of a new view of the nature of language, a break-through into new understanding of its material and its processes.....a break-through that has aroused tremendous enthusiasm among those who are exploring the significance of this new knowledge for a society bound together and based on language. The essential feature of this new view of the nature of human language can perhaps best be grasped in contrast with certain characteristics and achievements in the behavior of animals. Men have often asked the question "Do animals other than man talk?" And scientists have tried from time to time to find the evidence upon which to base an answer.

#### **7. Differences in Communication between Animals and Humans**

Without doubt, animals, birds, and bees do communicate. The mother hen utters a special series of sounds when she has found bits of food and the young chickens react by running to her and picking up the food. At other times, when a hawk flies overhead, she utters a different series of sounds and the young chicks run to cover and remain perfectly still. In both instances the particular distinctive sequences of sounds function as communication of some sort. Is this "talking"? Perhaps a better form of the question would be, "Does the behavior of the hen and her chicks have the same basic characteristics as that which we call language in humans?" Many have called this kind of communication "language", and some have insisted that communica-

tion through a "language" of some kind exists throughout the animal world. There are certainly, however, some important differences. With the chicks the responses to the "calls" are (as far as the evidence goes) instinctive with the species, not specially learned. Incubator hatched chicks with contact only with each other and with humans, react to the hen's calls immediately, in the same way. Chickens from various parts of the world have the same calls and make the same responses. So far as the records go, such calls of birds or of animals have had the same limited range without development, and without change or influence from contact with those of other species. A kitten raised with a dog, for example, makes no sounds which differ from those of other cats.

It is argued, however, that between man and animals the communication goes much beyond these instinctive responses to a variety of instinctive calls, and approaches that of communication between an adult and a child. A good shepherd dog, as well as a boy, can learn to respond to a considerable range of vocal signals and hand signals.....words and expressions of a particular language, (English, French, German), and achieve a high degree of cooperation with the shepherd in managing a huge flock of sheep. But even here there are great differences. With the shepherd dog the responses that have been learned have no development and no continuity—that is, the dog does not and can not, after being trained, go out and teach another dog. A boy can. The boy learns at the same time not only to respond to the signals but to imitate the signals and to give them. With a boy, it is possible to change the required responses to the signals and soon have equal proficiency in response; with the well trained shepherd dog such a shift of required responses, if pressed vigorously, produces frustration and neuroses.

To teach a dog to bark for food is not difficult. But to develop different kinds of barking for meat, for bone, for biscuit, and to specialize further the barking for meat into differences for beef, pork, chicken, lamb, rabbit, and, then a further discrimination of each of these sounds for meat that is raw, or boiled, or roasted, or fried, will demand a range of discrimination that cannot be attached to any differences of sound a dog can be trained to make. Certainly in range and complexity, in development and continuity, the talk of humans differs tremendously from anything we have found in animals. But are these differences solely those of quantity?

#### 8. What Chimpanzees Can Do in Communication

Certain attempts have been made during the last twenty five years to teach young chimpanzees to talk. Best known is the experiment and work reported by W. N. Kellogg and L. A. Kellogg in their book *The Ape and the Child*. (New York, 1933) In this case a baby chimpanzee was taken into the family and for sixteen months given exactly the same care and instruction as their own baby son of nearly the same age. In some things, that is in those dependent on greater physical strength, like turning on (or off) an electric light Gwa, the little ape, learned faster than the human child. At the end of this sixteen months period, Gwa would respond—with action,

not with sound—to some fifty eight items of human speech, such as: “Come here”, “Shake hands”, “Kiss, kiss”, “No, no”, “Bye, bye”, “Don’t bite.” Gua, however, never showed any signs of attempting to imitate these or other sounds of human speech. She did learn to respond with a type of bark to “Do you want some milk?” when food was offered; but only when the food was in plain sight.

A later experiment was that made by Dr. Kieth J. Hayes and his wife Dr. Catherine Hayes at the Yale University’s Yerkes Laboratories of Primate Biology in Orange Park, Florida. They had no children of their own as did the Kelloggs but they took into their home a baby chimpanzee, a few days after she was born. They gave it all the care and teaching (in fact greater teaching) than they would give a human child. At the age of three, Viki, this chimpanzee, would, as a result of great stimulation and always with a lump of sugar in sight as a reward, utter in imitation (but only in imitation) a not too close approximation of three sound sequences—cup [kaph], mamma [mə-mə], papa [bə-bə]. Newspaper reports and magazine articles heralded Viki as the first ape to talk.

But is this talking? Is the mere imitative pronouncing of certain sound sequences “talking”? More specifically, is the imitative production of these so-called “words” (whether by a chimpanzee or by a human child) a real start, a beginning of the language process,—a beginning that simply needs to add more items of the same kind? Is human language different from what Viki has learned only in the number of the items involved or is there a fundamental qualitative difference?

#### 9. Language Is Not “Words.”

Another form of this same question would be, “Can one measure the learning of a human language by the number or quantity of the ‘words’ that can be produced”? Or more practically still, one might ask, “If one could memorize all the ‘words’ in a large English dictionary would he be able to read English books”? Today’s linguists would answer with an emphatic negative and insist the sum of the “words” in the dictionary does not constitute the language. A language, of course, contains and uses “words” or “meaning units”, but the essential characteristic of that which is human language is not the “words” themselves, no matter how many they may be. Real talk, the language of people, is never simply an imitative production of vocabulary units. No amount of drill upon English vocabulary items alone will enable us to read English books or to translate English utterances into Japanese.

#### 10. Language Is Compared to Baseball Game.

These general statements are given more meaning through an illustration. One can enumerate the many physical acts used in such a game as baseball. The ball is thrown from player to player; the ball is hit with a piece of wood; the ball is caught; players run after the ball, and they run round a marked out square. The physical acts are throwing, catching, hitting,



running. One might assume that any one who had learned to perform these physical acts well could play the game of baseball. But that assumption would be false. It has not been especially difficult to teach an ape to throw a ball, to catch it, to hit it with a bat. He can learn to do these particular acts quite well. He can learn to perform any of the basic physical skills that occur in the course of a game of baseball. But to teach him to make even a beginning in playing a game of baseball has been impossible—i. e. to teach him to grasp any of the structural patterns that give meaning to particular throws, to catches, to hits. He cannot be made to understand the significant differences between a “strike” and a “ball”. He cannot learn just when he must run after hitting the ball and when the hitting counts as a “strike” or just a “foul ball”. He cannot count three strikes nor understand the scoring of a “run”. The set of contrasts that determine “out” in a great variety of physically different acts seems to be beyond anything an ape can be taught.

The game of baseball does not consist of a huge number of physical acts which can each be photographed, but of a very limited number of contrastive structural patterns in accordance with which each individual physical act is evaluated. All “strikes” are structurally equivalent, are structurally the “same”, but the “called strike” and the “foul strike” are physically very different. It seems impossible to teach even the most intelligent animal to react to the significant physical contrasts that determine structural “sameness” in a game of baseball, and to ignore other prominent physical features that are not significant for the system, —to make same responses when the individual items are widely different but structurally equivalent. It is in this respect that human language differs from anything we have been able to find in the sounds made by animals or in the responses they can be taught.

### 11. Criticisms on “Word”-Centered View of Language

From the point of view of structural linguistics a human language is somewhat like a game such as baseball or cricket, —fundamentally a system, a hierarchy of contrastive patterns, that give meaning to an infinite variety of specific acts of speech. It is in respect to the precise nature and functioning of the structural “sames” of language that recent linguistic research has made a significant contribution. We have now a much clearer understanding of just what is involved in learning to talk and in learning to read both in its elementary phases and its more advanced progress. This new approach requires a shift in the basic thinking about language from a point of view that is “word”-centered, to one that is “structure”-centered. Practically all the considerations of language problems in the schools have in the past centered upon the words. Books are examined and rated with respect to the kind and number of the words used. Readability scales are based primarily on vocabulary items. Foreign language study usually features the number and range of the words mastered. Everywhere there is the pressure for increasing the size of one’s vocabulary. The teaching of reading often centers only on recognizing and knowing the words. Much of the formal study devoted to the reading of literature often deals primarily with the words. The central

place that words and their meanings have held in thinking about language has made it extremely difficult for many people to realize even the existence of the kind of structural base which is the essential feature of all the signals of a language code.

Examples of the continuation of word-centered thinking are abundant. In the monograph on *The Teaching of Reading and Writing* published by Unesco in 1956, Professor William S. Gray of the University of Chicago writes of what he calls "the fusion of meanings of separate words." He gives the following sentence and then attempts to account for the meaning it conveys.

*The water in our village well is good to drink.*

"As one reads the first two words in this sentence various associations are aroused. This grasp of meanings is restricted and made more definite as the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth words are recognized. The thoughts then retained are held in mind as the reader continues to the end of the sentence. When he recognizes the words 'good to drink', the meaning already acquired is greatly expanded and clarified. *The final idea is the result of the fusion of the meanings of separate words into a meaningful whole.*"

The resultant total meaning of this sentence, however, does not come from the "fusion" of the meanings of the separate words, *The water in our village well is good to drink*, but rather from the contrastive patterns of structural signals in which these particular lexical items are placed. The very same words slightly shifted in position to form other structural contrasts will give very different total meanings. As it stands, this sentence "*The water in our village well is good to drink*" is a report or statement of the fact that the water is drinkable. But simply to shift the word *is* to the beginning, as in "*Is the water in our village well good to drink*" gives us a question rather than a report of a fact. To use the same "words" in the following different contrastive positions would give us entirely different facts.

"To drink the well water in our village is good."

"To water well the drink in our village is good."

Even the very different meanings to be attached to the same word form, *well*, are definitely signalled by the contrasting structural sets in which the word appears—the *well water* and *to water well*.

The kind of experience reported recently in the *Classical Journal* by a hardworking, conscientious Latin teacher also illustrates this word-centered thinking about language teaching.

"No matter how promising the first-year class has seemed, it bogs down in the translation work of the second year.....This year.....when, after reading together a new sentence in concert, the sound of the Latin phrases brought no result from the class, I offered to them the Latin words aloud, as they were most naturally to follow one another in the desired English sentence. It was heartening to discover that all the vocabulary drill had not been in vain, for, as I spoke the words,

translation was swiftly volunteered sometimes as if from every member of the class in joyous and victorious concert.....The question arose in my mind: 'Is Latin word-order that important? Important enough to make competent translation impossible to the class as a whole?'....."

"I tried mimeographed sheets.....with the word-order altered to the closest possible resemblance to English word-order....."

"The results were so startling as to lead me to consider the possibility of completing a full text in the English word order."

Conscientious as this Latin teacher was, she just did not know that, during the first year, she had not made even the first step in teaching the Latin language. She had taught the meanings of a large number of Latin "words", but this "vocabulary drill" did not enable the students to grasp the meaning of Latin sentences, to translate actual Latin utterances into English. And *no* amount of additional "word" drill would have given the students the essential parts of the Latin language which they lacked. This teacher had no idea of the linguistic significance of her substitution of English word-order for that of Latin—that she *could* remove the Latin word-order because the Latin language did not use contrasts of position to signal any structural meanings, and that she was ignoring the real structural signals of Latin which she had not taught, and put in their place, by substituting English word-order, the highly significant signals of English structure which these English speaking students had learned as their native language.

These examples must not give the impression that the one feature of structure they illustrate constitute the total range of what is involved in the new understanding of the nature of language. The power with which the word-centered view of language grips and channels the thinking of teachers and the general public does greatly obstruct the assimilating and using of the new linguistic knowledge. But the new approach requires also a shift from an item-as-item consideration of language in every other aspect as well.

## 12. Sound System

Phonetic analysis has in the past devoted itself to distinguishing and describing minutely the details of pronunciation as used in languages. The International Phonetic Association has now adopted four hundred different characters for "sounds." In 1935 the printer of *Maître Phonétique* warned the phoneticians that "no more signs would be possible, if the output was to be printed." But the gathering and the comparing of the details of pronunciation has still continued with no end in sight and no organization of the items. It has been assumed that the ease or difficulty of pronunciation was a matter of the phonetic nature of the individual sounds themselves.

From a structural view of language, however, we are no longer satisfied with this type of phonetic analysis which centers attention upon the separate items in isolation. We know now that the child in learning his language does not learn to pronounce separately, nor to hear each of the phonetic units that occur. He learns to hear and to pronounce with speed and precision the

contrastive features that mark the structural patterns of the sound system. This speed and precision is achieved by learning to ignore the phonetic features that are not structurally significant for his particular language code. We now believe that there are no difficult language sounds intrinsically. Ease or difficulty of pronunciation turns out to be a matter of the structural patterning of the significant sound features in the characteristic sequences of a particular language. The habits we form in mastering our native language (or any language) are never habits of the producing and responding to items as items, but always habits of contrastive shapes of items in structural patterns functioning in a system.

It is this basic characteristic of structure throughout every aspect of human language that has made it capable of more than calls and commands—the kinds of utterances to which animals can learn to respond. It has given human language the amazing power to grasp and to communicate highly complicated reports. The languages of even the most “primitive” peoples have this basic structural characteristic and are also capable of grasping and communicating similarly complicated reports. Such reports have made human language the store house of man’s experience, built up and passed on from generation to generation. With language, the knowledge and the wisdom won by the most intelligent and the most courageous individual of a group can become the knowledge and the wisdom of all those to whom he can talk. And this knowledge and this wisdom can become the possession of all with whom communication by means of language is possible. Through language a man is no longer a puny individual learning only what he can from his own limited reactions to nature. Through language he becomes a “group” man, receiving a tremendous inheritance from the accumulated experiences remembered and reported by those who lived before him.

### 13. The Invention of Writing

Man has gone even farther. He has developed graphic signs to represent his language. With the invention of writing the capacity of language as the storehouse of human experience has been tremendously increased. Without writing, the storehouse of experience was limited to what was remembered by those living in the immediate circle of a group. Communication was limited by space and by time. Only those who could hear a speaker could be told of the past. With the invention of writing, however, the necessity of the physical presence of the speaker was eliminated. One could, through writing, receive direct communication from those of other places and those of other times. Written communications could have the fullness and the accuracy of the original source of the wisdom or knowledge, rather than the fragments and inaccuracy of oral tradition.

### 14. Two Contributions of Language to Man

In this great storehouse of man’s experience grasped in language there are two major types of material.

- (1) There is first of all the great collection of information—the knowl-

edge of how to do things and of the physical properties of all that has been explored. In other words, all that we call science is reported and communicated through language. Here is collected the understanding through which man can control a large portion of his environment.

(2) Man's storehouse has a second type of material—the great body of literature. The literary purpose is the use of language to communicate not facts and information, but vivid imaginative realizations of action, of emotions, of ideas. A history may, of course, have literary value. It has literary merit, the essential quality of literature, in so far as it is so written that we who read it vividly realize and experience the life there revealed. The literary artist carries a capacity for vivid impressions into every part of man's experience and we share the sensitiveness of his keener insight through his power to communicate vivid realizations of his experience.

We are not satisfied simply to know about life,—to understand and to grasp the facts intellectually. We want to live and experience all of life. Physically we are bound to a narrow range of activities and a short span of years. Through the artistic treasures of literature in the storehouse of man's experience we can learn to enter vividly into the life of medieval England or ancient Greece or experience through imaginative realization a wide range of present-day living. Through these creations of language we are no longer *a* man, a tiny individual trying to touch life at a few points; we become part of MAN and can partake of his whole experience of life through a long period of time.

#### 15. The Power of Language Lies in its Structural Base.

The power and capability of language to perform these services for man lies not in the words as such, no matter how many or how few they may be. Nor does this power and capability of language rest in any of the separate items of which it is made. The great resources of human languages arise out of its structural base by which the contrastive patterns in each of the various aspects of the language material provide the frames for infinite variation in the content of utterances—a variation and a fullness that makes language the carrier of all our science and all our literature. Herein lies the miracle that is human language.

### CHAPTER II. DEFINITION OF LANGUAGE

#### 1. Communication and Language

To begin with, I should like to make clear a connection between communication and language, for it is dealt with in this paper. Although we form an idea of it from the previous chapter, especially Section 7, we can understand it still better by reading the following quotation from *A Linguistic Approach to English* (1961, p. 1) by Thurston Womack and Shin-ichi Miura.

"Ants, apes, and most other creatures communicate, but they do not have language. Parrots and other birds "talk," but they are entirely imitative and

have no idea of what they are saying. When a dog scratches at the door and barks his demand to be let in, he is communicating. But he is not using language. Dogs and other animals do communicate, but their communication is very far from the complicated machinery of human speech. We humans communicate in a complex variety of ways, by speech, gesture, tone and inflection of voice, writing, or a combination of these. Of all the creatures on earth, however, man alone uses articulate speech for communication, and this is his most important form of communication, and when modern linguists study language, they study it as it is spoken by all kinds of people. We can define language as an arbitrary system of vocal symbols by means of which human beings in a given speech community communicate."

It would be well again to make clear what is meant by system, vocal, symbols, and arbitrary, which are significant words in this kind of discussion.

(1) System. Language is not random behavior; it is a system. A system is an organization of units into general classes of similar items. Each language has its own unique system of patterns.

(2) Vocal and symbol. A symbol is something that stands for something else. In language, the symbols are speech sounds, that is, vocal symbols. They stand for objects and ideas directly. Writing stands for, or symbolizes, these speech sounds. Thus speech (language) is a primary symbolization of reality, while writing is a secondary symbolization—a symbol of a symbol.

(3) Arbitrary. "Arbitrary" here means only that there is no inherent relationship between the symbol and the concept, thing, or idea that the symbol stands for. We cannot say that *pferd* (German) is a better symbol than *cheval* (French) or horse for the animal these symbols stand for.

## 2. Definition of Language

From the above description we can well understand what language is, but here I should like to introduce its definitions found in the other literature. Complete grasp of the real meaning of "language" would lead us to realize how we should teach or learn a foreign language. First let me try to quote some of them from Edward Sapir's *Language* (1921, p. 8).

"Language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. These symbols are, in the first instance, auditory and they are produced by the so-called "organs of speech." There is no discernible instinctive basis in human speech as such, however much instinctive expressions and the natural environment may serve as a stimulus for the development of certain elements of speech, however much instinctive tendencies, motor and other, may give a predetermined range or mold to linguistic expression. Such human or animal communication, if "communication" it may be called, as is brought about by involuntary, instinctive cries is not, in our sense, language at all."

"Our study of language is not to be one of the genesis and operation of a concrete mechanism; it is, rather, to be an inquiry into the function and form of the arbitrary systems of symbolism that we term languages.

I have already pointed out that the essence of language consists in the assigning of conventional, voluntarily articulated, sounds, or of their equivalents, to the diverse elements of experience." (*op. cit.*, p. 11)

Next we find its description in Archibald A. Hill's paper titled "The Nature of Language." (*ELEC BULLETIN* Vol. 1, No. 1, 1961)

"Broadly, language can be described as a large number of items arranged in complicated sets. To describe and identify language, therefore, we must describe both the items and the sets. In terms as generalized as possible, this is what we shall try to do. First then, language consists of sounds, which are made with tongue, lips, mouth, nose, and vocal cords, and the stream of air sent upward through mouth and nose by the lungs. A more flippant way of saying the same thing is that language is the noises you make with your face." (p. 13)

"Language is a collection of sounds and meanings so elaborated and so large that it covers the whole range of things that may happen to the members of any given social community." (p. 15)

"Up to this point I have been concerned primarily with the items which are found in language—what they are made of, their relation to objects outside language, and the implications of the fact that the items are so numerous. At the start of this paper I said, however, that these items were arranged in complicated sets. To define and describe language, therefore, it is as necessary to describe the nature of the sets as it is to describe the items which occur in them. In describing the sets of language, or the patterns of language as I shall hereafter call them, the first statement is that they are regular and characterized by symmetry. Such a statement is obvious enough, since we could scarcely speak of set, pattern, or even class unless there was recurrent regularity. This symmetry and regularity manifests itself on all levels, whether that of sound or some relatively higher level, such as grammar." (p. 16)

"Language possesses patterns, then, because there are symmetries and repeated occurrences. These patterns occur always on a complicated series of levels and strata. I have mentioned how the sounds of language pattern because the qualities that distinguish sounds from each other are repeated." (p. 17)

Here we have a clear idea of "patterns" incidentally.

Lastly I would like to quote Charles C. Fries' definition of language from his paper "Meaning and Linguistic Analysis," in *Language*, XXX, 1954, p. 64. (*American Linguistics and the Teaching of English* by Charles C. Fries, and Translated and Annotated by Minoru Yasui, Taishukan, 1960, p. 66)

"A language is a system of recurring sequences or patterns of 'sames' of vocal sounds (or, of course, representation of them in writing) which correlate with recurring 'sames' of stimulus-situation features, and which elicit recurring 'sames' of response features. The language function is fulfilled only in so far as it is possible to predict the response features that will regularly be elicited by the patterns of linguistic forms."

### CHAPTER III. AMERICAN STRUCTURAL LINGUISTICS

This and the following chapter are based chiefly upon *American Linguistics and the Teaching of English on the Development of the Structural Use of Word-Order in Modern English* by Charles C. Fries and Translated and Annotated by Minoru Yasui, the Taishukan Eigo Kyoiku Series No. 2. (1960)

#### 1. Start of American Structural Linguistics

In general the scientific study of language as practiced in the United States throughout the 19th century was based upon and did not depart greatly from that of the long line of European scholars in historical-comparative linguistics, in phonetics, and in linguistic geography. In contrast with these linguistic activities, however, much of American structural linguistics, with its beginnings just after the first World War seems to have had a somewhat independent development and differs in some respects from the structuralism of the Cercle linguistique de Prague and from that later developed in the Cercle linguistique de Copenhagen. Certain beginnings of the views that characterize American structural linguistics appear in statements from Edward Sapir, in his book *Language*, published in 1921. They are statements concerning his experience when he was trying to record, analyze, and describe some of the American Indian languages. Structural linguistics in the United States differs markedly from the somewhat parallel developments in Europe because it arose out of and has always been closely connected with the effort to analyze and describe completely the many diverse and complex American Indian languages still spoken in the United States and neighboring countries—languages whose structures differ remarkably from those of the languages of the Indo-European and other well-known language families. The technical terminology now used in American structural linguistics came slowly into use after the publication of Bloomfield's *Language* in 1933. The word phoneme is but one of these technical words that follow a pattern—morpheme, taxeme, sememe, tagmeme, kineme, grameme, behavioreme, uttereme,—and derives its meaning, for American linguists not from its former European use, but from their particular experience in the structural analysis of languages. Many of those who have contributed most to the development of American structural linguistics have been either linguistic-anthropologists as was Sapir or have been linguists as was Bloomfield who spent much time among the Indians studying their languages. The one particular publication which could be said to mark especially the beginning of the recent structuralism in the United States is Edward Sapir's "Sound Patterns in Language," which appeared in *Language*, the quarterly journal of the Linguistic Society, in its first volume, in 1925.

#### 2. Structuralism of American Linguistics

This structuralism of American linguistics has resulted in a changed view of the nature of human language—a changed view of what constitutes the



basic functioning units of a language. Consequently it has led to a new understanding of the precise problems involved in learning and in teaching a foreign language. Two important facts that came out of Sapir's early experience form part of the very foundation of this new view of language.

(a) The same phonetic differences may have (and probably will have) entirely different structural values from language to language.

(b) There is power or force in the structural system itself. (The habits that constitute the control of one's native language are not habits concerning items as items, but habits concerning an ordered system of structural patterns.)

The following examples help to clarify these two statements. In English we have the sound of "k" at the beginnings of each of the following words *kill*, *coal*, *call*. But these three "k" sounds are phonetically quite different, i. e. the position at which the top of the tongue touches the roof of the mouth as it stops and then releases the flow of air through the mouth is much farther forward in pronouncing *kill* than it is in pronouncing *coal*. In pronouncing *call* it is still farther back. In English this phonetic difference in the three "k" sounds is mechanically bound with the particular vowel that follows the "k", and is a phonetic difference that is never used to separate words. English speakers find it very difficult to make and even to hear these differences in the "k" sound without attaching it to the different vowels. On the other hand in a number of Dravidian languages these differences of position in making "k" sounds are not attached to particular vowels, and are used to distinguish different words. The same phonetic differences of the three positions of forming these "k" sounds have entirely different structural values in English and in Tamil. More than that, the power or force of the structural arrangement of these phonetic differences of "k" in English is so strong that it is exceedingly hard for a native speaker of English, as an adult, to learn not only to make these differences for "k" without connection with their particular vowels but even to hear these differences in the stream of speech.

On the other hand, many words in English are separated solely by means of the phonetic difference of "voicing" a consonant, e. g. [s]—[z], or [k]—[g]; race—raise; rice—rise; mace—maize; tack—tag; back—bag; rack—rag. Spanish speakers, trying to learn English, at first find it very difficult to hear and distinguish, in the stream of speech, the words separated solely by the phonetic difference between [s] and [z] and German speakers those separated solely by the phonetic difference between [k] and [g], because for these languages these phonetic differences are not "points on their pattern" as they are for English. Japanese speakers find it difficult to hear and distinguish pairs of words like the following live—leave; right—light; heal—feel; fail—vail.

From the point of view of American structural linguistics, the phonetic difference between [r] and [l] is only phonetic in Japanese, but in English this phonetic difference is also phonemic (structurally significant). In similar fashion the phonetic difference between the kinds of "k" indicated above are only phonetic in English but are phonemic in Tamil. Phonetic differences are always phonetic differences in any and every language. When phonetic

differences are structurally significant in a particular language (e. g. used in the language to mark or distinguish one meaning unit from another) then they are phonemic for that language.

The differentiation of those items of a language that have structural significance from those that have not is not limited to a consideration of the sound system only, but runs through an analysis of all the other levels of linguistic phenomena. In other words, the views that first grew up in connection with dealing with language sounds have been generalized and the principles have been applied to the analysis of intonation, of grammar, of context, and even of non-linguistic behavior. This extending of the same principles to other linguistic matters shows itself in the creation of two new words by cutting off the portions of the words phonetic and phonemic that have to do with "sounds", leaving simply *etic* and *emic*. Every aspect of human behavior can thus be approached from an *etic* point of view, i. e. considering the items as items, or from an *emic* point of view, structurally, i. e. seeking the functioning patterns in a particular society.

### 3. Constitution of Meaning

This structural approach to language does not ignore meaning of any kind. It attempts to sort out the various kinds of levels of meanings and to discover how, in any particular language, each kind or level is communicated from one individual to another.

From the viewpoint of American structural linguistics in connection with the practical matters of language teaching, it will be necessary to limit our consideration of the problems of meaning and to put emphasis upon those matters that have especial significance for the stages of language learning covered by the schools. Here then we are primarily concerned with language in its social role of making possible the sharing of experience, of procuring cooperation between the members of a group. It is language as sets of signals which, consciously given by one individual, produce predictable responses of recognition or action in another individual or individuals. Three layers or kinds of meaning signals are of especial importance for our purpose here.

(A) The signals by which one lexical item is distinguished from another.

Phonemes are one set of functioning markers by which differing lexical items are recognized.

- (1) The top of this pen was bent over
- (2) The top of this pin was bent over
- (3) The top of this pan was bent over
- (4) The top of this pan was sent over

The differences of meaning of sentences (1), (2), (3), above depend on the different lexical items *pen*, *pin*, and *pan*, in each. Here the different lexical items are identified by the contrast of the single functioning markers, [e] [i] [æ].

The difference of meaning of sentence (3) and sentence (4) depends on the difference of the lexical items *bent* in (3) and *sent* in (4). These lexical items are separated by the contrast of the single functioning marking units [b] and

[s].

(B) The signals by which certain structural meanings are distinguished.

Sometimes the signals of structural meanings are intonation (contrastive pitch sequences), sometimes contrastive order or position, sometimes contrastive word forms, sometimes function words.

The difference of structural meaning in the following pair of sentences—that sentence (a) is a statement, and sentence (b) a question—is signalled by the contrast of position or order.

(a) Mr. Smith is a young man (b) Is Mr. Smith a young man

The difference of structural meaning in the following pair of sentences—that sentence (a) is a statement, and sentence (b) is a question—is signalled by the function-word do.

(a) The students swim here every Tuesday

(b) Do the students swim here every Tuesday

In sentence (a) of the following pair, the clause *which is there* is a “modifier” of the word *class*; in sentence (b) the clause *which are there* “modifies” the word *books*. The position of these clauses is the same in both expressions. The difference in structural significance is signalled by the difference in the forms *is* and *are*.

(a) The books for the class which is there are ready for distribution

(b) The books for the class which are there are ready for distribution

The difference between the meaning of the following phrases is signalled by the ending *-ing* in (a) as contrasted with the ending *-ed* in (b).

(a) a water softening solution (b) a water softened solution

In both phrases the word *solution* is the “head” and the other words are “modifiers.” But in the first phrase, with the *-ing* ending on the word *soften*, the meaning is that the *solution* acts upon the *water*, in the second phrase, with the *-ed* ending on the word *soften* the meaning is that the *water* acts upon the *solution*.

The difference in the intonation pattern in the following phrases signals the difference in meaning.

(a) <sup>1</sup><sub>2</sub> a moving van—a van for moving (furniture, household effects, etc.)  
<sub>3</sub>  
<sub>4</sub>

(b) <sup>1</sup><sub>2</sub> a moving van—a van that is moving  
<sub>3</sub>  
<sub>4</sub>

In similar fashion,

(a) <sup>1</sup><sub>2</sub> the white house—the White House  
<sub>3</sub>  
<sub>4</sub>

(b) <sup>1</sup><sub>2</sub> the white house—the house that is white  
<sub>3</sub>  
<sub>4</sub>

(a) <sup>1</sup><sub>2</sub> a dancing girl—a girl whose profession is dancing  
<sub>3</sub>  
<sub>4</sub>

(b) <sup>1</sup><sub>2</sub> a dancing girl—a girl performing the act of dancing  
<sub>3</sub>  
<sub>4</sub>

In this marking of "emic" intonation (i. e. pitch sequences that signal certain structural meanings) four contrastive levels serve to indicate all the essential patterns. These are relative pitch levels, not absolute intervals.

Number 3 represents the usual voice level.

Number 2 represents one step above the usual voice level.

Number 4 represents one step below the usual voice level.

Number 1 (not used here) represents two steps above the usual voice level.

(c) The signals by which various kinds of social-cultural meanings are communicated.

The linguistic meanings of our utterances—the lexical meanings and the structural meanings, to which we give great attention—constitute only part of the total meaning of these utterances as they function practically in a society. In addition to the regularly recurring responses to the lexical items and to the structural arrangements, there are also throughout a linguistic community recurring responses to unique whole utterances or sequences of utterances. Rip Van Winkle's simple utterance "I am a poor quiet man, a native of the place, and a loyal subject of the king, God bless him!" (Washington Irving's *Sketch-Book*, Longmans, 1927, p. 50) almost caused a riot, not because of the linguistic meaning signalled by the lexical items and the structures, but because the unique utterance as a whole, now, after the American Revolution, meant to the group that he was a confessed enemy of the newly established government. Twenty years before, this statement would have caused no such reaction. It would have meant simply that he was a "good" citizen. The linguistic meaning was the same as it would have been twenty years earlier; only its "social" or "cultural" meaning had changed. The utterances of a language that function practically in a society therefore always have both linguistic meaning and social-cultural meaning.

To sum up, it is as follows:

Total meaning:

Linguistic meaning

Lexical meaning

Structural meaning

Social-cultural meaning

#### 4. New Phonetic and Grammatical Ideas Established

This structural descriptive analysis of language as discussed here is not a matter of just different terminology for older phonetic and grammatical ideas or meanings. The new technical terms that are used have no equivalents in the older terminology. "Phoneme" is not just another word for so called "broad" or "gross" phonetic differences as against "narrow" and "fine" phonetic distinction. A "phonemic" transcription operates on an entirely different basic principle than does a "broad phonetic" transcription. "Function words," as used in "The Structure of English," are not the same as "empty words" in contrast with "full words" as used by Henry Sweet and others. Many "function words" do have lexical meaning. The defining characteristics by which the words of authentic living utterances are recognized as belonging to Classes

I, II, III, IV are not those of the usual definitions of the "parts of speech." Class III cannot be equated with "adjective" nor Class IV with "adverb" as these older terms are usually employed.

## CHAPTER IV. LINGUISTICS AND LANGUAGE TEACHING

### 1. New Approach to Language Teaching

The new approach to language teaching which has been derived from this new approach to language analysis and description is not in any way limited to the mechanical aspects of language.

(A) This approach to language teaching does not in any way narrow our view of what has to be done in order to learn a language well. It assumes that the fundamental purpose or objective of language teaching is to achieve an understanding, as complete as possible, between people of different linguistic backgrounds. It furnishes a systematic method of finding out the functioning patterns of not only the sound segments of a language, but also of its rhythm and intonation, its grammatical system, its lexical sets (i. e., the functioning verbal contexts), as well as its whole range of social and cultural meanings.

(B) This approach to language teaching uses the "oral approach" primarily in the first stage of language learning and does not reject reading and writing in any stage of language learning. This "oral approach" is not the same thing as the "direct method," and must not be confused with the limitations of the "direct method." The name "oral approach" is primarily a name to describe the end to be attained in the first stage of language learning rather than a descriptive limitation of the permissible devices to attain that end. In the first stage of learning a new language, the end is that the basic structural patterns, with a limited vocabulary, are to be learned so well that they can be produced orally, automatically, and without hesitation, when the learner is confronted with the appropriate situation. To the accomplishment of this end, not only oral practice is used but also every other means of learning, including writing and reading. After the first stage of language learning in accord with this approach the teacher or the student may devote himself entirely to reading and writing.

A full detail of the "oral approach" will be given separately in the chapter V.

(C) This approach to language teaching is not just a new set of classroom procedures or devices for teaching—it is not primarily a new method as such. It is not confined to mechanical matters and limited to narrow utilitarian purposes. The fundamental feature of the "new approach" to language teaching is not a greater allotment of time, is not smaller classes, is not even a greater emphasis on oral practice. The fundamental feature of this new approach to language teaching is a new basis upon which to build the teaching materials. This new approach to the selection and ordering of the materials for teaching rests upon

- (a) a scientific descriptive analysis of the language to be learned;

- (b) a similar scientific descriptive analysis of the language of the learner;
- (c) a systematic comparison of these two descriptive analyses in order to bring out completely the differences of structural patterning of the two language systems.

But these descriptions and this systematic comparison of the native language of the student with that of the language to be learned is not the material to be taught. It constitutes rather the basic matter upon which to build satisfactory classroom exercises which will contain the significant contrasts that must be mastered as new molds or patterns for the new language material. The first step is to learn to use the new language rather than to acquire detailed information about that language. The structural analyses and the systematic comparison indicated above are matters not for the ordinary student but for the makers of the textbooks and for the training of the teachers. Good teachers of a foreign language have often, from their experience, hit upon many of the special difficulties of their students. But such good results from practical teaching experience alone are unsystematic and uneven because they are not related to any principle which would provide a thorough and consistent check of the complete language material itself and reveal the essential nature of the difficulties. Learning a foreign language is always a matter of acquiring a new set of language habits against a background of an older set of language habits. The problems of the Spanish speaker in learning English differ from those of the Portuguese speaker; and those of the Japanese speaker differ from those of both the Spanish and the Portuguese. The procedures of a sound structural analysis can provide for the teacher a whole range of new insights into the nature and content of the precise problems with which his pupils must struggle.

## 2. Principles of Method

This new approach to the analysis of the linguistic material itself, based upon a new view of the nature of the functioning signals of a language, does furnish the basis also for some principles of method.

(A) Accuracy comes first, not the learning of an extensive vocabulary. The accuracy to be achieved here, is first, the mastery of the sound system—to hear and to produce the distinctive sound contrasts in the stream of speech. It is, second, the mastery of the features of arrangement (forms, intonation, position) that constitute the signals of structural meanings. These are the matters that the native speaker as a very young child has acquired as unconscious habits, so early that, like learning to walk, he cannot remember the learning process. These matters must become automatic habits for the learner of a new language. Of course they cannot be learned in a vacuum. There must be sufficient vocabulary to operate the structures and represent the sound system in actual use, but the learner is not ready to devote his chief attention to expanding his vocabulary until accuracy of the patterns of contrast of sound segments, of intonation, of forms, of position, within a limited range of expression, has become largely automatic habit.

(B) All aspects of the teaching must proceed by contrasts of items in

structure not by isolated items as items. Practice with significant sound features for example, must always deal with these features in contrastive sequences, first in pairs or groups of words with minimum contrasts (bed—bad; luck—lock—look; insight—inside); then with such words in contrastive sentences (It was only a little red—It was only a little raid); and finally with such contrasts in paragraphs representative of the stream of speech.

(C) The pattern practice to make automatic the control of the significant contrasts of the various sets of signals a language uses must not be simply repetitive drill. Imitation and repetition is of course the first step. The next step involves productive conscious choice among several patterns—with the selection of the pattern as the point of attention. The third step aims at an automatic, spontaneous selection of a pattern with the attention centered not on the structural patterns themselves but on changing situations and shifted meanings, introduced by a variety of differing vocabulary items.

It is the practical use of the linguistic scientist's techniques of language analysis and description in the choice and sequence of materials and the principles of method that grow out of these materials that lies at the heart of the "new approach to language learning."

## CHAPTER V. ORAL APPROACH

The "oral approach", of which fundamentals were described in the preceding chapters, has been advocated by Charles C. Fries (1887-) who was professor of English and director of the English Language Institute at the University of Michigan in the United States of America from 1941 to 1956 and now is honorary director of the Institute. It was introduced into our country several years ago (in the Nineteen Fifties) and has made its way as a new approach to English teaching in the early stages. It will be described in more detail in this chapter based on his lecture ELEC pamphlet, *On the Oral Approach* (Taishukan Publishing Co., Ltd., 1959) and his book, *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language* (University of Michigan Press, Twelfth Printing, 1956).

### 1. Definition of Oral Approach

The word "oral" in the name "oral approach" expresses what we want the pupil to be able to do. It does not state a limitation upon what the teacher should do. The "oral" here is not a restriction of the teacher's procedures, but stresses the particular goal for the pupil's mastery of the language materials of the first stage, which covers the period of the three years of the lower secondary school.

The word "approach" rather than "method" has been chosen deliberately. It has been chosen in order to stress the fact that we are concerned with a path to a goal—a path or a road that includes everything necessary to reach that goal. We are concerned with such a path rather than with a method of teaching. A method of teaching often implies the limitation of what the teacher does—the limitation to a particular set of classroom procedures. The "oral

approach" is not the same thing as the old "direct method", nor the "conventional method". It is not the same as either of these, although some features of these methods appear in the "oral approach".

Charles C. Fries wrote about it in *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language* (p. 8) as follows:

"The "oral approach" centers attention fundamentally upon learning a language as a set of symbols to be spoken and understood when heard, but it uses without limitation every means which can be made to contribute to that end—the living voice, mechanical records, sound films, manuals, textbooks, written notes, written exercises. "Oral approach" is a name primarily for the end to be attained in the first stage of language learning rather than a descriptive limitation of the permissible devices to attain that end. That end is the building up of a set of habits for the oral production of a language and for the receptive understanding of the language when it is spoken."

## 2. Final Goal of Oral Approach

The final goal toward which the "oral approach" is the path or road or way, is the full mastery of English for any of the purposes for which one seeks to learn a foreign language. The final goal of the learner may be the full control of English for speaking and understanding spoken English in meetings, or in college and university classes. Or the learner's final goal may be the limited one of reading scientific books and articles. Or his final goal may be the reading of English literature with real understanding. Or his final goal may be merely the passing of an examination for a university, — an examination in which translation is the only requirement. No matter what the final goal of the person who starts to learn English, the "oral approach" is the most efficient, the most time-saving way to begin the study of English, and throughout the first stage of English learning.

Concerning this problem, Charles C. Fries wrote in *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language* (pp. 6-7) as follows:

"More than that, the oral approach—the basic drill, the repeated repetitions of the patterns produced by a native speaker of the foreign language—is the most economical way of thoroughly learning, for use even in reading, the structural methods of a language. Only when one has such a thorough control of the fundamentals of a language that he can almost automatically produce utterances in accord with the usual patterns of that language is he ready to proceed to the process of reading. With such a control the grasp of new words will come easily and speedily with increasing experience with the language, and reading will be profitable. .... Even if one wishes to learn the foreign language solely for reading, the most economical and most effective way of beginning is the oral approach. This oral approach for reading should be continued throughout at least the first stage of the language learning—that is, until the learner can within a limited vocabulary manipulate the structural devices of the language and has grasped the sound system."

Hereupon I should like to summarize the preceding statements as follows:

The immediate goal of Oral Approach: oral mastery or automatic oral



production of fundamental language materials by using every possible means. (to build up a set of language habits)

The final goal of Oral Approach: full capacity of hearing, speaking, reading and writing at high levels in any case. (to meet any needs of a learner)

### 3. Contrast

We have learned that all the significant matters of language are features in contrast. The significant matters of a language are those that make a difference in the meaning. In pronunciation they are the bundles of sound features that separate one word from another. In grammatical structure they are the forms and arrangements that separate one structural meaning from another. It is the language features in contrast that make these separations and, thus, constitute the signals of the various meanings which a language communicates.

Concerning the contrastive features of the sound system of a language, we know now that the human vocal apparatus can make thousands of different sounds. Of the thousands of differences of sound, a single language usually uses only from 20 to 50 to separate its meaning units, and no two languages use the same set. The differences that a language uses to separate meanings, that are thus in contrast or opposition, are the important contrasts which a learner must learn to hear and to make in the first stage of his work, if he is to progress most efficiently.

There are such phonemic contrasts in English which are not used by the Japanese language and are, therefore, very difficult for the Japanese not only to make, but also to hear. The following, for example, are all special problems for Japanese speakers. But every native speaker of English can hear immediately when they are spoken.

leave—live; could—couldn't; sung—some—son; long—wrong; collection—correction; long road—wrong road—wrong load

These are a few of the thirty highly significant pairs of contrastive features of English sound segments that are especially important for us Japanese. It is features such as these that provide the distinguishing marks of the meaning units, —the words of English. To speak English, Japanese pupils must learn to hear these distinctive features of the words in the stream of speech and to produce them easily and rapidly, even when their attention is centered solely upon the meanings of the discourse.

But the significant contrastive features of a language are not matters of the sound system alone. The significant features of the sentence patterns are also all similarly matters of contrast and opposition. The difference in meaning between "The hunter killed the wolf" and "The wolf killed the hunter", is signalled solely by a contrast in the structural position, the order of the two words *hunter* and *wolf*. The ordinary English child learns to respond to such structural contrasts very early, —usually by the age of three. The important structural contrasts of one's native language are usually learned so early that an adult is seldom aware that there is anything of this

kind that had to be learned.

#### 4. Structural Signals

The word-centered view of language and the vocabulary-centered teaching of language have, in the past, so dominated even the first stage of language teaching that it is extremely hard to have teachers understand the necessity of a basic mastery of what has been called the structural signals. Modern English has developed a structural use of contrastive positions (of so-called word order) that is quite different from any type of structural signal that existed in classical Latin or even in Old English. The structural signals of Latin are the inflected forms of the words, as stated in the section 11 of Chapter 1. The following are some examples in English illustrating different types of signal.

##### (A) Contrast in position

- (a) station bus                      bus station
- (b) chocolate milk                milk chocolate

A station bus is very different from a bus station, and chocolate milk is very different from milk chocolate.

##### (c) The falling intonation is used in each of the two sentences.

Shall we get some apples then? (some statement or invitation)

We shall get some apples then.

##### (d) The falling intonation is used in each of the two sentences.

It's going to be fine today.

Is it going to be fine today? (some statement or invitation)

##### (B) Contrast in stress or in suprasegmental phoneme

##### (e)

You'll be able to get a shovel at the green house across the road.

You'll be able to get a shovel at the green house across the road.

green house.....a house for the cultivation of plants.

green house .....a house that is green.

#### 5. Production and Recognition

We want the pupil to learn the basic material of the language so thoroughly that he can produce it orally with the speed of ordinary speech, and to understand these fundamental materials when they are spoken with the same speed. In other words, the easy, smooth, oral production of the basic sentence patterns of English becomes the test of whether they have been sufficiently learned. The basic materials have not been learned well enough if they can not be thus used in speech to communicate meanings, and understood at once when they are spoken.

In reading, one can take time to go back and try to recall the meanings of words, and puzzle out the structures; in listening to speech, however, he must be able to understand instantly, for the speaking goes rapidly on. In speaking, the pressure to remember in order to use the words and structures

is even greater. Unless he has learned the basic words and structures very well, he cannot do it. The "oral approach" to the teaching of English sets this standard of thorough "oral" mastery by the pupil of the basic structure patterns and their content. When this is accomplished, the reading, even the reading of literature, can proceed much more effectively.

Concerning production and recognition, let me quote from Charles C. Fries' *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language*, (p. 8) as follows:

"It seems important to recognize the fact that one's mastery of any language—even of one's own native language—is always on two major levels, production and recognition. These two levels are practically never equal. The range of "words" that we can recognize and understand exceeds that of the "words" we actually use in speech or even in writing. Many can read appreciatively a poem, a play, or a novel, who cannot write one. In the use of a foreign language the difference between the ability to recognize or understand and the ability to produce or speak stands out even more noticeably. It is true that the two interact and condition one another and in the actual practice of the language can hardly be separated. As one advances in the ability to produce or use the language he increases the range and depth of his understanding; and an increase in understanding shows itself in a greater ability to produce. But in spite of the fact that these two abilities are so closely interwoven, from the point of view of teaching and of learning in the early stages, they constitute two distinct even if complementary aspects of language control, and it has proved helpful to consider them separately.

This recognition of the difference between the productive and the receptive controls of language does not imply a mechanical separation of the materials into "practices" in producing for the sake of production only and "practices" in recognition for the sake of receiving only. As a matter of fact practice in production is one of the best means of developing recognition."

In this connection, he once used the "oral approach" in the teaching of elementary Anglo-Saxon, and in the teaching of classical Greek to beginners, with the result that the students thus trained read more than twice the amount in the following period, than ever before, and with much more satisfaction in their reading.

## 6. Materials for Oral Approach

The materials that must be so thoroughly learned in the first stage that they can be produced orally with satisfactory speed, and understood accurately in the stream of speech, are:

(1) these important contrastive sound features that distinguish the meaning units, the words;

(2) the contrastive arrangements and forms that identify the structural signals.

This material that must be thoroughly mastered will not be the same for Japanese learners of English and for Spanish, for German and for Chinese learners. For each different linguistic background the teaching and the learning problems differ greatly; they arise out of the particular character of the

structural contrasts of the native language of the pupils.

The "oral approach", then, as already stated before, is more than a method and more than a set of methods. It is, first, a special goal to be achieved in the first stage of language learning, and, second, a special set of materials that must be mastered in the first stage.

Concerning materials, let me quote from Charles C. Fries' *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language* (p. 7) as follows:

"—the "oral approach" as here advocated depends for its effectiveness not solely upon the fact that there is much oral practice in hearing and in speaking the foreign language, but also and fundamentally upon having satisfactory materials selected and arranged in accord with sound linguistic principles. It is the practical use of the linguistic scientist's technique of language description in the choice and sequence of materials and the principles of method that grow out of these materials that is at the heart of the so-called "new approach to language learning." "

### 7. Detailed Principles of Method

The special goal of the "oral approach" and the special set of materials to be mastered, do necessitate certain special principles of method.

(a) Inasmuch as all the significant basic materials of language are features in contrast, much of the teaching is based on the use of contrast. Exercises are devoted to recognizing and producing the contrastive features of sound segments, of intonation and stress, of structural arrangement and form. For example, the mastery of such important contrasts as the significant use of *r* and *l* are developed through the use of minimum pairs of words with these special items as initial sounds (lace-race), in final syllables (gently-gentry), as medial sounds (collection-correction), consonant clusters (play-pray), and with pairs and groups of minimumly different sentences.

(b) As a principle, the development of accuracy comes first—accuracy of sound pattern, accuracy of structure pattern, accuracy of response, accuracy of production. The aim, at first, is not to stress the teaching of a great many different words, but rather to emphasize the thorough mastery of a selected range of the most important basic structures, using a definitely limited but sufficient vocabulary based upon the environment in which the language is being learned. After the control of a basic range of structure has been achieved the use of new items of "content" words in these familiar structures presents a much simpler problem.

Concerning "content" words, Fries explains in *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language* (p. 46) as follows:

"The large body of "content" words constitutes the fourth group of vocabulary items and the chief material usually considered when the vocabulary of a language is discussed. These are the words that function as symbols for the phenomena which we react upon as the world of reality about us—symbols for "things," for "actions," for "qualities." "

(c) The goal set up in the "oral approach" is the ability to use the language. "Knowing" a language in such a way that one can use it freely in

the getting and giving of meaning is a very different matter from knowing about the language. To use a new language one must develop a new set of habits. And habits can only be developed by practice. In the classes, even in large classes, much more practice can be done by carefully designed oral exercises than by any other device, — much more practice than by writing with its many problems of adequate and prompt correction, and much more practice than by reading which must be checked thoroughly to make sure that it is being accurately understood. Oral exercises, however, should give the bulk of the practice to the pupil, not to the teacher. Some teacher-pupil dialogs are necessary but pupil-pupil dialogs make much more effective progress for the pupils. Pattern-practice can achieve the productive practice by the pupils of a considerable range of sentence patterns within a minimum of time. On the whole the classes using the "oral approach" are thought of and planned in terms of opportunities for pupil practice.

(d) But the opportunities for pupil practice must not be solely opportunities for the pupil to imitate and to repeat from memory fixed sentences with no variation. Repetition, and exact repetition is, of course, necessary. But oral practice is more than accurate repetition. Repetition alone will not develop the kind of habits necessary to speak and understand a language. Practice exercises to be most effective must proceed through at least three important steps.

The first step is, of course, the accurate imitation of the pattern in the sentence as presented by the teacher; and then enough repetition of the complete sentence to make the oral production by the pupil easy, smooth, and in a proper English tempo. This is the well known "mim-mem" procedure —mimic (i. e. imitate) and memorize. But even here there must be some diversity of vocabulary inserted in the frame, in order to make the pattern, rather than the specific sentence, the memorized habit.

The second step must provide for practice by the pupil in choosing the proper item of a contrastive pair in accordance with significant lexical or structural clues within the utterance of which that item is a part.

The third step must lead to the automatic unconscious use of the appropriate item or structure, when the attention is centered upon the meaning of the whole utterance and is thus drawn away from the particular necessity of making a selection. This is the degree of mastery that constitutes a real using of the language.

Concerning the problem of practice exercises, Patricia O'Connor and W. F. Twaddell state in *Intensive Training for an Oral Approach in Language Teaching* (p. 4) that "the formation of language habits is the same for FL as for NL: practice, correction, practice; and it is through stages of recognition, imitation, repetition, variation, and selection."

Again I quote the explanation of these five stages from ELEC Bulletin Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 10 as W. F. Twaddell's remarks in "Preface to the First-Year Seminar Script" in ELEC PUBLICATIONS Vol. 111 (1958) as follows:

"1. Recognition: hearing the sounds clearly and unmistakably, perceiving the familiar known words or patterns to isolate the new and unfamiliar;

associating the new feature with its meaning or signal-value.

2. Imitation: producing under the guidance of a preceding model given by the teacher; the imitation is an increasingly accurate echo of the model as the pupil's control increases.

3. Repetition: production by the pupil under the guidance of his own memory, which has been established through imitation of a model.

4. Variation: meaningful partial changes in a familiar pattern or in a combination of familiar words to increase the useful versatility of the pupil's control of some aspects of the language, and to add flexibility to the firmness of his new habits.

5. Selection: choosing, from the entire range of well-learned words and patterns, the appropriate one for a particular meaning or situation, thereby completing the meaningful association of the new language habits and the practical uses of language."

All practice should lead to the stage of learning in which the language forms themselves sink below the threshold of attention and the speaker becomes conscious only of the meaning or the behavior frame which stimulated the utterances.

A satisfactory control of a language can not be achieved through a process of memorizing rules and trying to remember and apply them. It is just as impossible to become a good speaker of English by studying a book of grammar as it is to become a highly skilled baseball player by memorizing the rule book.

We have no magic method, no effortless way to learn a foreign language. The "oral approach", however, with its carefully directed practice, with its greater amount of practice than can be achieved in any other way, and with its use of highly significant contrasts in teaching, will be much more efficient than former approaches have been.

## CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION

In my paper, to begin with I dealt with the nature of language and, through a description of American structural linguistics, ended in the "oral approach." It has been recognized how this approach is reliably scientific.

"The linguistic student should never make the mistake of identifying a language with its dictionary." (Edward Sapir, *Language*, p. 234)

Now that I have finished studying, the above words impress me very much. All learners of a foreign language should understand what they mean. Charles C. Fries comments on them in his book *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language* (p. 38) as follows:

"These words, addressed as a caution to the "linguistic student," need increased and repeated emphasis for the ordinary person who turns his attention to language learning and language teaching. To him, learning a language practically always means primarily learning the "words" of that language. He just cannot realize that even if he could memorize all the "words" in the largest dictionary of a language, and knew only that part of

the language, he could not understand a single utterance. Important as the words with their lexical meanings are, they are by no means the only essential meanings in the symbols and devices of a language."

"From whole to part, or from synthesis to analysis" against the old view of language teaching and learning "from part to whole, or from analysis to synthesis."

These are the words from the seminar discourse of Prof. Takashi Kuroda (Tokyo University of Education), which have also impressed me as well. The statement may be the same in principle as that of Sapir after all.

Prof. Fumio Nakajima (Tokyo University) comments on English teaching in "Consideration for English Teaching" (*The English Teachers' Magazine* Vol. 7, No. 3, June 1958) as follows:

"To learn a foreign language is to acquire a new set of language habits. Since it has to come out of us as the response to stimulus, we have to be able to react quickly by means of practice. This is not knowledge but behavior. The traditional language teaching has dealt with knowledge about language, not with language as behavior, and thus resulted in puzzling out words in books."

And he suggests a future policy for teaching a foreign language by quoting the following words from Gleason, *An Introduction to Descriptive Linguistics* (p. 252) as follows:

"A speaking knowledge of a language, therefore, requires very close to a one hundred percent control of the phonology and control of from fifty to ninety percent of the grammar, while one can frequently do a great deal with one percent or even less of the vocabulary." (*op. cit.*)

Lastly he states that "there cannot be no distinction between the linguistics for culture and that for practical use in the true sense of language teaching, and whatever the final goal may be, the oral approach is properly right." (*op. cit.*)

I conclude by stating that the fundamental purpose or objective of foreign language teaching is to achieve an understanding as complete as possible, i. e. sympathetic understanding, between people of different linguistic backgrounds.

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