

Although these days it is considered perfectly normal to question and discuss the different instructional sequences that teacher trainers encourage trainees to use in their lessons, at the time the article below was published the standard sequence used in much assessed pre-service teacher training in the UK was the "PPP" sequence. Peter Grundy's article was thus ground-breaking when first published

Gone to teachers every one

A critique of accepted pre-service teacher training
(Part 1) – written in 1989

by *Peter Grundy*

'Language is a particular embarrassment to the teacher because, outside school, children seem to learn language without any difficulty, whereas in school with the aid of teachers their progress is halting and unsatisfactory.' (1)

When Mr Wrong decided to become a language teacher, he didn't have any trouble finding a training course.

That taught him to do all the WRONG things.

I bet you can't guess why!

Can you?

Yes, all the training courses were like that, all completely, absolutely WRONG. And for once Mr Wrong found everyone else was doing the same thing as he was, the same completely, absolutely, utterly, WRONG THING!

If I could draw like Roger Hargreaves, you can probably guess what I'd draw you now: Mr Wrong standing in front of a class of would-be learners, playing them a model dialogue from a cassette recorder and looking anxiously through a set of notes for the first controlled practice drill.

In this first of two articles, I set out to describe mainstream language teaching and Royal Society of Arts-type teacher training procedures from a hostile perspective. It may be a slightly academic or theoretical paper in places. In the second, much more practical article, I make suggestions for a more appropriate teacher training programme. If, therefore, this first article argues that we shouldn't think of teacher training as Presentation – Controlled Practice – Free Practice, the second article will ask how else we are to think of it, and consider the implications for 'pre-service training in EFL teaching'. (2)

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Let's start with a quotation from the Old Testament:

The ability to select language items appropriate to students' needs and level, to divide the items into learnable units, to present the language clearly and efficiently to students, to devise and operate appropriate activities for the controlled and free practice of the language presented and to check learning and understanding at all stages of the process. (3)

(This was one of the RSA's declared course objectives for the Certificate at the time of publication in 1989)

The attractions

As an account of what to work on before and during a language lesson, this is obviously highly attractive to teacher trainers. It divides teacher training into a number of areas: materials selection, lesson planning, presentation, controlled and free practice, reinforcement, checking and assessment. Each of these areas is easily teachable as a discrete element to be integrated in due course into a single procedure. Give each of these areas a morning's attention, and even Mr Wrong can walk into a classroom (particularly if the class is a small one) and go through the motions adequately.

It's easy to see how the view of language teaching implied in the RSA course objectives might be much more suited to training would-be teachers in learnable routines than to enabling would-be learners to acquire a second language. And in fact, this is quite often acknowledged by teacher trainers, who say things like, 'OK well it may not be the best way to teach language, but it does work as a teacher training technique. And once teachers have learnt this way, they can always learn to do it another way later.

You will recognize here the unmistakable voice of Mr Wrong's friend, Mr Topsy Turvey (or TT for short).

The problems

This is clearly a subject-centered approach to teaching and not a learner-centered one. Moreover, it treats language as an out-there knowledge-field which can be divided into discrete units and graded for difficulty: this is neither a respectable nor an informed view of the nature of language. It also assumes that language learning occurs as the result of the presentation of a model that is subsequently practiced: that maximally effective language learning occurs under these conditions must be a very doubtful assumption.

I think it's worth spending a little time wondering about how these rather silly ideas have come to be so widely accepted by teachers and so generally reflected in course books and teacher training routines.

Language teaching and education

Don't worry, I don't know anything about the big 'E' either. But you can see why it's relevant to introduce it into this discussion: it's Education that's decided that a 'year' is 40 weeks, a 'week' is 5 days and an 'hour' is 40 minutes. The 'learnable units' into which language is (to be) divided are in fact the (sets of) units of instruction which every coursebook implies. These units are language measured in 'hours', 'weeks', even sometimes 'years' – they exist not in the language, but as an educational or institutional construct.

But, you'll be saying, he's already admitted that he knows nothing about Education. Doesn't he know about all those controlled experiments in educational psychology that validate the Presentation – Practice – Production model (the 3P's) favoured in educational institutions? How it's been conclusively demonstrated that recognition and imitation of a model are critical for effective learning? Doesn't educational psychology tell us what a perfect lesson should look like and hasn't the RSA based its notion of a syllabus on this research?

Well, I'm sorry to tell you that my fairly careful search through the resources of two university libraries and my consultations with School of Education colleagues have failed – so far – to unearth this crucial research justification for the way we teach. Maybe Mr Impossible could do better, but I haven't been able to find any principled justification in the psychology literature for the way we do things. In other words, I suspect we teach what we do, how we do, intuitively, and that our views of what a lesson ought to look like are based on folklore rather than hard knowledge.

But Education isn't only concerned with language teaching. A theory of instruction ought perhaps to operate across a wider curriculum and to draw on many disciplines in addition to psychology.

Nearly twenty years ago now, Bruner wrote

One is struck by the absence of a theory of instruction or a guide to pedagogy – a prescriptive theory on how to proceed in order to achieve various results, a theory

that is neutral with respect to ends but exhaustive with respect to means. It is interesting that there is a lack of an integrating theory in pedagogy, that in its place there is principally a body of maxims (4)

Bruner's theory of instruction was an attempt to remedy this lack. It's a theory that seems to me to underlie almost all pedagogic practice. For convenience, it may be boiled down to four central notions, which Bruner terms:

Predisposition
Structure of knowledge
Sequencing
Reinforcement.

In Mathematics (the subject in relation to which Bruner discusses his theory of instruction), it may be the case for all I know that this view of subject-as-knowledge makes sense, and that one could teach Mathematics successfully in terms of these four notions. But in order to structure a language lesson according to this theory, the teacher is obliged to think first of the subject of study (i.e., language), rather than first of the learner, and to treat this subject-matter not as behaviour (which we all know language use truly to be), but, at least in the early stages of learning, as structured, sequence-able knowledge. 'The structure of a domain of knowledge' (I quote Bruner's exact words) seems curiously inappropriate to language, as we debate what syllabus, if any, language teachers should work with.

In addition, a by no means trivial problem with any theory of instruction is that it quickly assumes an identity of its own, and unsuccessful learners are held to demonstrate their inadequacy rather than the theory's. Institutionalised education is centripetal on failure, that is, it's ultimately designed to ensure that of every 20,000 of us who start the process, only one will succeed in becoming a professor. Therefore a theory of instruction that acknowledges Predispositions (or 'aptitude' as language teachers tend to call it) is in a sense paradoxical, since ideally we should be looking for a theory of instruction which enables us all to be successful. Since anyone suitably motivated can learn a language, the notion of ability implicit in Predispositions is especially inappropriate to our field.

The notion of Structure of knowledge also implies a teacher-pupil relation, or as Bruner puts it, 'a relation between one who possesses something and one who does not'. As far as language teaching is concerned, this seems to obscure the fact that the gap between what the speaker of a language and the would-be learner of it knows is relatively trivial, that the would-be learner already knows a very great deal, and that in any case it's the learner who generates the syllabus and must fill that gap (as everyone should know by now), and not the teacher.

Moreover, it's precisely when it occurs to us that the relation is 'between one who possesses something and one who does not' that we create a hierarchical situation and bring into existence a set of institutional structures. And it's precisely then that real language learning ceases to occur, and instead the classroom is taken over by those stunted parodies of true bilingual performance that we all recognise so well.

I apologise for the heaviness of this section, but the point I'm trying to make is that it's possible that what happens in educational institutions is fine for everything except language learning. Most people would agree that in schools in the UK, only a tiny minority benefit much from their encounter with institutionalised language teaching. It could be that the dominant theory of instruction as reflected in syllabuses like that suggested for teacher training by the RSA is entirely counter-productive.

Language Learning and Language

In The Language Teaching Controversy, a book which tries to relate language teaching methodology and theories of language (and which no language teacher should be without), Karl Diller states

We have two major traditions of language teaching, based on two different views of language and language acquisition. Decisions on language teaching methodology.....have been decisions based.....on differing theories of language (5)

Empiricist and rationalist views

These two views of language are, of course, the so-called empiricist view of the North American Structuralists, in which, as Twadell states, 'the rule is a mere summary of the habit' (6) ('the habit'

being, presumably, observed language data), and the so-called rationalist view of the Chomskyans and the Port Royal thinkers of the seventeenth century where, as Diller puts it, 'to know a language is to be able to create new sentences in that language'.

In other words, you can take an empiricist or out-there view of language, deciding that it's an observable and hence describable phenomenon. Or you can take a rationalist or in-the-head view, deciding that language is a mental ability, and that the observable data is of less significance in itself than the underlying system or set of mental abilities of which it is an indicator. It's therefore a more generalised internal grammar that enables us to generate sentences, and since, as Miller notices,

It would take one thousand times the estimated age of the earth to utter all the admissible twenty word sentences of English (7),

A model-offering approach seems pretty futile.

Diller's argument is that the out-there people have tended to teach it one way and the in-the-head people another. Thus he equates empiricist views of language with model-offering, behaviouristic teaching methodologies (particularly audio-lingualism), and rationalist views of language with the earlier Direct Methods of Berlitz and his contemporaries in the latter part of the last century.

It follows from this that our choice of methodology ought to be determined by our knowledge of the nature of language as well as by our knowledge of how second languages are learnt. For the former, we need to study theoretical linguistics, and for the latter applied linguistics.

We don't need to study much theoretical linguistics to know that in modern times the empiricist view of language has had to give way to the rationalist for reasons that are irresistible. It's therefore appropriate to ask to what extent language teaching methodology has abandoned audio-lingualism in favour of a more appropriate alternative? It may help to review briefly (and no doubt controversially) the development of mainstream language teaching methodology in recent times and to try to see where we're at now.

Elsewhere (8) I've argued in some detail that in reality language teachers haven't 'switched from one methodology to another in the decisive way that Diller's polarization of opposites suggests. In fact all methodologies are essentially constrained by the nature of institutionalised language teaching and exhibit only minor, although often ideologically violent, reactions against the immediately preceding paradigm. Thus early Direct Method retained and even elaborated on the notion of a language graded for difficulty, which had been a cardinal principle of Grammar/Translation, but reacted violently against the mother tongue as a medium of instruction and against talk about rather than talk in the target language. And in one sense, it could be argued that audio-lingualism, and its French cousin the audio-visual method, were in the direct method tradition of Berlitz and others, and not, as Diller claims, in an altogether different tradition.

Audio-lingualism, as is well known, separated and sequenced the four skills, so that in its heyday each ten minutes of listening was followed by ten of speaking, and each ten minutes of speaking by ten of reading, and each ten minutes of reading by ten of writing. The strict sequencing of material that was such a hallmark of Berlitz's work inevitably led to a teaching methodology in which error was at all costs to be avoided, since one couldn't progress to the next stage in the graded sequence of materials until there was error free performance in the preceding stage. Thus pattern drills, transformation exercises, substitution tables where the learner couldn't go wrong, and in particular, imitation of target language norms, naturally became the standard classroom practices of audio-lingualism.

By this time, say 1970 in UK, most teachers of English as a foreign language had grasped that the word 'Chomsky' meant that what was then going on in their classrooms was 'a bad thing', and were generally happy to abandon audio-lingualism in its strictest form. But rather than reflect Chomsky's rationalist position, language teachers turned instead to Del Hyme's work on 'the rules of use' (9), and substituted the Notional Syllabus for the structure-based teaching of the preceding model. Again, we see a continuing tradition in the subject-centered view of language teaching and in the idea of the 'cycle' of difficulty that was so important a concept in Wilkin's work; and again we see a violent reaction, this time against the way in which the subject-matter of the syllabus is arranged, with

functions that cut clear across the former sacrosanct boundaries between one structure and another, now being seen as criterial.

It's my believe that Diller's assertion that there is an empiricist and a rationalist language teaching tradition is actually easier to demonstrate today than it was in 1971 when Generative Grammar, Structural Linguistics and Language Teaching (10), the forerunner of The Language Teaching Controversy, first appeared.

The Notional Syllabus as currently interpreted has in many ways led to the most behaviouristic teaching practices we have yet seen. The inordinate stress placed on the target language's surface structure phonology has led us to hold that the right learner response is a repetition of the original model-like stimulus. If the characteristic features of a behaviouristic lesson are

Recognition-Imitation-Repetition-Variation-Selection

(as they are for Diller), is not this learning sequence (a) remarkably in tune with Bruner's theory of instruction, (b) an ideal description of the way in which so many contemporary published materials seem to expect the functional lesson to progress, and (c) what the teacher trainers would have us believe we should be training our students to do:

And yet at the same time, in the so-called 'humanistic' methodologies whose cause has been so advanced by Earl Stevick, there is a strong and detectable move towards a more rationalist position. Perhaps the current interest in humanistic methodologies also indicates a deep boredom with all those endless functional/notional syllabuses, the dwarf Van Ek's that the language teaching sections of bookshops would foist on us, as well as out of a recognition of the ludicrous nature of the models of language we are forever encouraged to offer our learners.

<u>Bruner</u>	<u>Diller</u>	<u>Streamline</u> (11)	<u>TPH</u> (12)	RSA
Predispositions				
Structure of Knowledge	Recognition	Presenting	Presenting Language	Presentation
Sequencing	Imitation – repetition	Providing Practice	Controlled practice	Controlled Practice
Reinforcement	Variation-Selection	Extending/encouraging application	Checking	Free practice

So when people talk of Communicative Language Teaching, they may be thinking of materials and techniques that reflect either of Diller's two traditions: they may be considering learning as either 'a process of mimicry and analogy or a process of rule governed creativity' (13).

The Speaking activities consist of 'repetition of model utterances', 'manipulative drills', 'controlled practice' ('These activities are designed to enable the student to use the newly-acquired language in situations which minimize the possibility of error'), and 'transfer' – the final stage – in which

Whenever possible the student is encouraged to use the newly-acquired language in some way meaningful to him/her. The degree of real communication that takes place is of course limited by the nature of the classroom environment..

The Reading activities consist of 'Reading from the board' and 'Reading everything that appears in the student's book'. Mr Wrong will no doubt agree that

Like listening, reading is a receptive skill. It would normally occur after listening and speaking in the sequence of learning a language

and that

Reading can help to reinforce and fix in the memory what has already been heard and practiced orally.

The Writing activities in Streamline English consist of 'Copying from the board', 'Exercises' ('to reinforce and consolidate what has been heard, said, and seen'), 'Guided compositions' ('The compositions in Streamline English are always controlled to the extent that the choice of structures and lexis is limited. The student works from a model letter, but is encouraged to relate it to his/her own situation'), 'Comprehension questions' and 'Dictation'.

Moreover,

Each unit has been carefully phased to provide a gradual transition from listening and repetition work through manipulative drills and controlled practice to transfer.

Such skills division, dictated only by the institutional obsession with literacy as the metric of academic failure, together with the notion of teacher as model and the selection and grading of language, is of course pure audio-lingualism.

In the Introduction we are also told rather surprisingly that

This approach is based on the results of recent research into language acquisition.

So whilst it may be fashionable to talk of such things as 'communicative language teaching' and 'a practical approach', a closer look at the materials often shows them to be methodologically out-dated and in fact adapted to the procedures of teaching institutions and to a dominant theory of instruction that implies 'a relation between one who possesses something and one who does not'.

A similar view of how languages are learnt is reflected in an otherwise excellent book, Gower and Walter's Teaching Practice Handbook. (15) This book has been specifically written to cover 'all the major areas dealt with on the RSA Preparatory Certificate (TEFL) and other comparable courses'. A glance at the first specimen lesson plan in the chapter entitled 'Teaching Strategies' demonstrates the dominant theory of instruction at work again.

LESSON PLAN

Learning Aims for the Students: to be able to use the past simple more fluently and have improved listening skills.

Teaching Aims: to give further practice to the past simple and develop listening skills through a taped dialogue.

Time Available: 55 minutes

Stage 1:

Aim: Improve listening skills (20 minutes) Method: Lead students to comprehension of dialogue
Step 1: Set scene: relate students personally to the topic
2: Set focusing questions

3. Play tape
4. Follow up focusing questions
5. Ask further simple gist questions
6. Break up dialogue into segments
7. Ask more difficult and more detailed questions and check comprehension
- etc.

Stage 2:

Aim: Give controlled oral fluency practice using past simple (10 minutes)

- Method: Practise pronunciation of past tenses from tape
- Step 1: Stop tape before examples of past tense and try to elicit them
 - 2: Choral repetition
 3. Individual repetition
 - etc.

Stage 3:

Aim: Give semi-controlled fluency practice using past simple (10 minutes)

- Method: Drill using 'infinitive' prompts. Students convert into past tense
- Step 1: Recap on context in dialogue
 - 2: Choral/individual repetition of model
 - etc.

Stage 4:

Aim: Give 'freer' practice of above (15 minutes)

- Method: Role-play
- Step 1: Using same context, bring out characteristics of two of the characters
 - etc.

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(Note that I've slightly re-arranged the TPH layout so as to make more explicit the relationship between **Aims** and **Method**)

The next three sections of the chapter are labeled

Presenting language
Controlled practice and
Checking

Recap' of argument so far

This article began with a quotation from John Macnamara: it's easier to learn a second language if you don't have a trained teacher. I went on to make seven claims

1. Although they may not ultimately produce teachers who enable second language learning to take place, our teacher training methods do make a training course syllabus much simpler to devise and implement than it would otherwise be.
2. Typical approaches to language teaching are subject-centered and see language learning as the acquisition of knowledge.
3. As knowledge has structure (Bruner), so we 'divide language items into learnable units (RSA) and offer these units as models to the learner.
4. We assume that this is how people can be taught a language, but unfortunately this assumption is largely false.
5. Viewing language as knowledge implies that language is out-there, an empirically verifiable set of habits/data.
6. Unfortunately this account of the nature of human language is also false.

7. People keep on writing course books and training manuals that are based on mistaken accounts of second language acquisition and the nature of language. This is why language learners are better off without language teachers.

Follow-up article

In the follow-up article, I'll be suggesting several practical alternatives to current teacher training procedures, alternatives more in line with what is known about Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and the nature of language. Meanwhile, I conclude this article with a list of 24 axioms that Mr Wrong's trainers would have done well to consider. No doubt they won't seem axiomatic to everyone, but they are axioms nevertheless! They are the starting point for the follow-up article:

1. Encountering a sample of language should be seen as a means to an end rather than a target in itself.
2. Skill divisions (listening, speaking, reading, writing, translation, interpretation, etc.) are generally unmotivated by theories of SLA. They also limit what is possible in the classroom.
3. The learner is the only true language resource.
4. The use of authentic 'teaching materials' should be downgraded; other so-called 'teaching materials' should be dispensed with.
5. Learners should not be offered models of language to imitate.
6. The notion of a learner-generated syllabus should be respected.
7. Learners should be enabled to express their own (and not someone else's) meanings.
8. The methodology (including materials and technology) should be in the hands of the learner as at least an equal partner with the teacher.
9. Distinctions such as learner:teacher, native:non-native speaker, proficient:less proficient user of the language should be dissolved.
10. Learning should be person-related and essentially experiential.
11. Language learning is not an end in itself but part of the larger process of living – thus distinctions such as those between classroom:home, school:street are unmotivated.
12. Language learning progress should not be measured against a syllabus nor against standard language norms.
13. Language teaching should be learner -driven and seek to make the learner autonomous.
14. It isn't the individual units of which a larger unit is made up that matter to meaning, but the larger units of which any particular smaller unit is a part – for Phonology, the suprasegmentals; for structure, the information structure of the discourse.
15. Only knowing what a piece of language means (or counts as doing), and nothing else, is what enables us to (learn to) use it.
16. The way anyone thinks (s)he learns must be respected, but it isn't always a reliable indication of the processes themselves.
17. No lesson should ever have an ordained structure that pre-exists its content; the starting point for every lesson is the learners.
18. Institutions should respect learning style, and not vice versa.

19. Everybody can learn a second or foreign language, but not everyone is ready or predisposed so to do.
20. Nothing should happen in a language learning classroom that isn't worth doing in its own right – the fact that it's in a foreign language should be an incidental bonus.
21. Bilinguals typically privilege one code for one context or purpose, the other for another.
22. Learning a language also involves learning to use it in conversations with people less proficient than oneself. This is especially true for an international language like English.
23. An Interlanguage (or language learner grammar) is a valid system requiring an explanatory machinery no less elegant than that required for standard varieties. There is no logical reason to regard Interlanguage as a stigmatized variety.
24. All learning involves learning about oneself, and therefore every lesson requires genuine learner investment.

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