

**TEACHING & LEARNING
ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

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FRIES — Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language

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. One never seems to gain satisfactory control of language material by silent study and memorizing. The struggle with new words through a two language dictionary which seeks to give word equivalents in the two languages is exceedingly laborious and ineffective. Practically never do two words (except possibly highly technical words) in different languages cover precisely the same areas of meaning. When it is necessary, in addition to the struggle with new vocabulary, to puzzle out the structural devices in which the new words are used, the task becomes one that but few students can accomplish. 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.

The "oral approach" here advocated does not mean the "direct method" as that method is usually understood. A very brief statement of the essential features of the "direct method" is the following.⁸

"Direct method. A method of teaching a foreign language, especially a modern language, through conversation, discussion, and reading in the language itself without use of the pupil's language, without translation, and without the study of formal grammar. The first words are taught by pointing to objects or pictures, or by performing actions."

It is true that the "direct method" described in this quotation and the "oral approach" indicated above have a number of things in common. In both, the emphasis is upon the actual use of the foreign language rather than upon the memorizing of paradigms and forms out of context. In both, translation is eliminated. But in the "direct method" reading in the foreign language may form an important part of the early work whereas in the "oral approach" it is deliberately postponed until the structure of the new language is firmly grasped, and it may never become an important part of the study. In the "oral approach" although the language of the pupil is avoided as much as possible it is used when necessary to make sure that explanations are thoroughly understood. Generalizations concerning structure, or grammar, are a regular feature of the "oral approach" although they are always intimately related to the oral practice of the language. In the Intensive Course in English for Latin-American Students there are four volumes of lesson materials covering grammar, pronunciation, and word study, but these materials as they are taught are always developed orally first and the statements that are given concerning structure or use are always summaries or generalizations drawn from the actual sentences the students have already practiced and understood thoroughly. The lesson materials in the book become for the students the notes they might have taken of the exercises they have just been led through. Never are the students assigned a lesson in advance for silent study before coming to class. Whatever study there is outside of class is always in repetition of the matters already practiced orally under the leadership of and also in imitation of a native speaker of the language. Then too, as has been insisted upon before, 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."

⁸ Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition, 1934, p. 738.