

## THE AUDIO-LINGUAL METHOD IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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### ABSTRACT

Audiolingualism is a linguistic, or structure-based, approach to language teaching. The starting point is a linguistic syllabus, which contains the key items of phonology, morphology, and syntax of the language arranged according to their order presentation. They may have been derived in part from a Contrastive analysis of the differences between the native tongue and the target language, since these differences are thought to be the cause of the major difficulties the learner will encounter

### Introduction

The Coleman Report in 1929 recommended a reading-based approach to foreign language teaching for use in American schools and colleges. This emphasized teaching the comprehension of texts. Teachers taught from books containing short reading passages in the foreign language, preceded by lists of vocabulary. Rapid silent reading was the goal, but in practice teachers often resorted to discussing the content of the passage in English. Unlike the approach that was being developed by British applied linguists during the same period, there was little attempt to treat language content systematically. Sentence patterns and grammar were introduced at the whim of the textbook writer. There was no standardization of the vocabulary or grammar that was included.

But the entry of the United States into World War II had a significant effect on language teaching in America. To supply the U.S. government with personnel who were fluent in German, French, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Malay, and other languages, and who could work as interpreters, code-room assistants, and translators, it was necessary to set up a special language training program. The government commissioned American universities to develop foreign language programs for military personnel. Thus the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) was in 1942. Fifty-five American universities were involved in the program by the beginning of 1943.

The objective of the army programs was for students to attain conversational proficiency in a variety of foreign languages. Since this was not the goal of conventional foreign language courses in the United States, new approaches were necessary.

### Theory of language

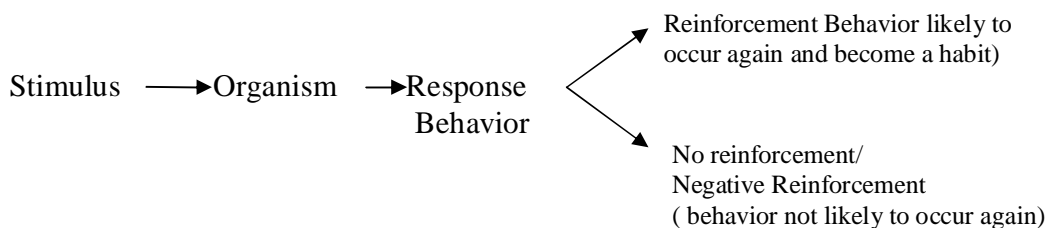
The theory of language underlying Audiolingualism was derived from a view proposed by American linguists in the 1950s — a view that came to be known as structural linguistics. Linguistics had emerged as a flourishing academic discipline in the 1950s, and the structural theory of language constituted its backbone. Structural linguistics had developed in part as a reaction to traditional grammar. Traditional approaches to the study of language had

linked the study of language to philosophy and to a mentalist approach to grammar

The reaction against traditional grammar was prompted by the movement toward positivism and empiricism, which Darwin's *Origin of the Species* had helped promote, and by an increased interest in non-European languages on the part of scholars. A more practical interest in language study emerged. As linguists discovered new sound types and new patterns of linguistic invention and organization, a new interest in phonetics, phonology, morphology, and syntax developed. By the 1930s, the

scientific approach to the study of language was thought to consist of collecting examples of what speakers said and analyzing them according to different levels of structural organization rather than the categories of Latin grammar.

An important tenet of structural linguistics was that the primary medium of language is oral: Speech is language. Since many languages do not have a written form and we learn to speak before we learn to read or write, it was argued that language is "primarily what is spoken and only secondarily what is written" (Brooks 1964).



There seems to be a widely held perception amongst language teachers that methods and approaches have finite historical boundaries - that the Grammar-Translation approach is dead, for example. Similarly, audiolingualism was in vogue in the 1960s but died out in the 70s after Chomsky's famous attack on behaviorism in language learning. In this context, it is worth considering for a moment what goes on in the typical language learning classroom. Do we ever ask our students to repeat phrases or whole sentences, for example? Do we drill the pronunciation and intonation of utterances? Do we ever use drills? What about choral drilling? Question and answer? If the answer to any of these questions is yes, then, consciously or unconsciously, you are using techniques

that are features of the audiolingual approach.

This approach has its roots in the USA during World War II, when there was a pressing need to train key personnel quickly and effectively in foreign language skills. The results of the Army Specialized Training Program are generally regarded to have been very successful, with the caveat that the learners were in small groups and were highly motivated, which undoubtedly contributed to the success of the approach. The approach was theoretically underpinned by structural linguistics, a movement in linguistics that focused on the phonemic, morphological and syntactic systems underlying the grammar of a given

language, rather than according to traditional categories of Latin grammar. As such, it was held that learning a language involved mastering the building blocks of the language and learning the rules by which these basic elements are combined from the level of sound to the level of sentence. The audiolingual approach was also based on the behaviourist theory of learning, which held that language, like other aspects of human activity, is a form of behaviour.

In the behaviourist view, language is elicited by a stimulus and that stimulus then triggers a response. The response in turn then produces some kind of reinforcement, which, if positive, encourages the repetition of the response in the future or, if negative, its suppression. When transposed to the classroom, this gives us the classic pattern drill- Model: She went to the cinema yesterday. Stimulus; Theatre. Response: She went to the theatre yesterday. Reinforcement: Good! In its purest form audiolingualism aims to promote mechanical habit-formation through repetition of basic patterns. Accurate manipulation of structure leads to eventual fluency. Spoken language comes before written language. Dialogues and drill are central to the approach. Accurate pronunciation and control of structure are paramount.

While some of this might seem amusingly rigid in these enlightened times, it is worth reflecting on actual classroom practice and noticing when activities occur that can be said to have their basis in the audiolingual approach. Most teachers will at some point require learners to repeat examples of grammatical structures in context with a

number of aims in mind: stress, rhythm, intonation, "consolidating the structure", enabling learners to use the structure accurately through repetition, etc. Question and answer in open class or closed pairs to practise a particular form can also be argued to have its basis in the audiolingual approach, as can, without doubt, any kind of drill. Although the audiolingual approach in its purest form has many weaknesses (notably the difficulty of transferring learnt patterns to real communication), to dismiss the audiolingual approach as an outmoded method of the 1960s is to ignore the reality of current classroom practice which is based on more than 2000 years of collective wisdom.

### **Behaviorist Approach**

#### **Audiolingualism (drilling as habit formation) and structuralism in language learning and teaching**

##### **a. Meaningless drills - the drawbacks**

Choice (by the learner) of vocabulary is needed to permit individual control over the meaning of the information conveyed. When not permitted there's a danger that all that is being practised is pronunciation. Drills which lean heavily on automatic responses without reference to appropriate contexts may give rise to little or no naturalistic speech. [ *Question set by David Jones on RSA Course in Stockholm 1981* ]

Sample answer:

1. The artificiality of the stimulus (in drills) may give rise to a kind of "**structurespeech**"; which is marked by lack of interaction in a real sense. No information is conveyed which is not already known.

2. The content presented by "**meaningless drills**" may teach learners that listening is a waste of time. Only **hearing** is required to complete meaningless drills. Language learning may be presented as a tedious process.
3. **Behaviorists** unapologetically set out to minimize the role of understanding in order to focus attention on structure. e.g. *Don't worry about the meaning of these minimal pairs (watch wash; batch bash). I want you to get your tongue round the sounds.*
4. When using "meaningless drills" e.g. minimal pairs for pronunciation, teachers should remember to convince learners of the importance of phonology, stress and intonation or any other features of language systems which might be isolated from meaning for the purpose of practice. Students should be given **the rationale** behind any attempt to focus **atomistically** on some feature of paragraph, sentence or word. e.g. Watching v Washing the TV. Awkward consonant clusters or diphthongs. Communication often fails at **motor skill level** (e.g. poor pronunciation of certain phonemes)
5. These drawbacks can be avoided by selecting a high proportion of "**meaningful drills**". Reject drills with **anachronistic vocabulary items** such as "ducks", "geese" & "sheep". These might have worked during the Agrarian revolution. Drills should contain a large proportion of vocabulary which meets learners' **communicative needs**. Good

illustration (picture reference prompts) allows for **application relationships**. See the drills included in the "Streamline Departures Speech work" series. For the most part, these have meaningful context. **Implication relationships** are well exploited: S: Joe Freezer is strong. R: but Tim Lyons is \_\_\_\_\_. **Substitution, Mutation and Transformation** should not be discarded as a means of practicing known lexis in different patterns. Streamline selects and presents the lexis carefully before practicing the patterns.

#### **b. Meaningful drills - the potential**

Robert O' Neill is the author of some of the best language laboratory drills that have ever been constructed. The quality of these practice exercises depends on a clear understanding of the purposes which can be served by various types of drills and sensitivity to situational context and naturalistic conditions in their presentation. Moreover, learners using these "meaningful drills" are required to make choices i.e. to display conceptual awareness and a grasp of meaning by discriminating between different responses.

Robert O' Neill's success with the **Kernel** series [ see "Kernel Lessons Plus" Laboratory Drills/Tapescript Longman Group Ltd (c) Eurozentrum 1974] stems from his interest in both the **generative function of language** (TG Kernels) and the **personal / creative use**. The following steps are important in the provision of good meaningful drills:

1. **Step 1** is contextualization - presenting a pattern in a context which suggests a basic use for that pattern.
2. **Step 2** is to ensure through comprehension Qs on the short introductory texts that Ss actually understand the basic features of the context.
3. **Step 3** Kernel Analysis K1 I object to something. K2 I share my room with the children. K3 I object to sharing my room with the children. The learner is fully prepared to manipulate the pattern as part of a drill.
4. **Step 4** is to provide more K2s: i.e. the drill: You are an au-pair girl. You don't like your work. You have to clean the toilets... so you say: I object to cleaning the toilets. S You scrub the floors R... S You look after the baby. R... S You wash his nappies.

Far from being a collection of fragments with no reference to one another, **Robert O Neill's prompts follow a series**. The drill has **something of the continuity of a real collection of utterances**. It is centered both around a structural pattern & the function of complaining.

Transfer: You are unhappy with your job. Tell your boss some of the things you object to doing. Learner supplies 50% of vocabulary through adding this phase.

Other landmark materials offering learners important opportunities to get their tongues round English syntax were provided by Shiona Harkness, John Eastwood, Duncan Shoebridge and L.G. Giggins. The virtue of Shoebridge & Giggins' book is that ONE COPY ONLY

is required for the teacher. The learners actually speak. Far too much grammar is practiced passively these days using materials which require no more than reading and writing + use of Answer Keys to check written exercise formats. The landmark drilling materials are:

Cue for a Drill by Shiona Harness and John Eastwood [Oxford 1976]

Even if you only manage to get hold of a single copy of this book, suitable for practice at elementary to intermediate levels, it provides excellent examples of cues [pictures, menus, timetables - documents with an authentic feel to them although the authors have sensibly simplified them to make oral practice more accessible] which you could draw on the board for your learners to see. The cues are tied to areas of syntax and grammar such as verb tenses and adverb formation from adjectives. This book poses a fair challenge for learners and succeeds in its purpose i.e. practising grammar orally.

Tense Drills by Duncan Shoebridge and L.G. Giggins [Longman 1970]

This material demonstrates coalface experience of syntax, classroom dynamics [learner participation] and the related practice opportunities. You'll have everybody speaking to everybody else in every permutation and combinations, providing you have enough participants to make up speakers A, B, C, D and E. It's a class resource as opposed to a One-to-One teaching material. It is intended for use at intermediate levels and draws upon practice of syntax to cover many useful lexical items e.g. what does a greengrocer do? A greengrocer sells fruit

and vegetables. What does a pilot do? A pilot flies planes.

### **Theory Of Learning**

The language teaching theoreticians and methodologists who developed Audiolingualism nor only had a convincing and powerful theory of language to draw upon but they were also working in a period when a prominent school of American psychology — known as behavioral psychology — claimed to have tapped the secrets of all human learning, including language learning.

The Learning Principles which became the psychological foundations of Audiolingualism and came to shape its methodological practices. Among the more central are the following:

1. Foreign language learning is basically a process of mechanical habit formation. Good habits are formed by giving correct responses rather than by making mistakes. By memorizing dialogues and performing pattern drills the chances of producing mistakes are minimized. Language is verbal behavior — that is, the automatic production and comprehension of utterances — and can be learned by inducing the students to do likewise.
2. Language skills are learned more effectively if the items to be learned in the target language are presented in spoken form before they are seen in written form.
3. Analogy provides a better foundation for language learning than analysis.
4. The meanings that the words of a language have for the native speaker can be learned only in a linguistic and cultural context and not in isolation. language (Rivers 1964: 19—22).

In advocating these principles, proponents of Audiolingualism were drawing on the theory of a well-developed school of American Psychology-behaviorism. The prominent Harvard behaviourist B.F Skinner had elaborated a theory of learning applicable to language learning in his influential book *Verbal behaviour* (1957), in which he stated, “ We have no reason to assume... that verbal behaviour differs in any fundamental respect from non-verbal behaviour, or that any new principles must be invoked to account for it” (1957:10). Armed with a powerful theory of the nature of language and of language and of language learning , audiolingualists could now return to the design of language teaching courses and materials.

### **Design**

Audiolingualists demanded a complete reorientation of the foreign language curriculum. Like the nineteenth-century reformers, they advocated return to speech-based instruction with the primary objective of oral proficiency, and dismissed the study of grammar or literature as the goal foreign language teaching. “A radical transformation is called for, a new orientation of procedures is demanded, and a thorough house cleaning of methods, materials, texts and tests is unavoidable”. (Brooks 1964; 50).

### **Objectives**

Brooks distinguishes between short-range and long-range objectives of an audiolingual program. Short-range objectives include training in listening comprehension , accurate pronunciation, recognition of speech symbols as graphic signs on the printed page, and ability to reproduce these symbols in writing (

Brooks 1964:111).” These immediate objectives imply three others: first, control of the structures of sound, form, and order in the new language ; second , acquaintance with vocabulary items that bring content into these structures; and third; meaning, in terms of significance these verbal symbols have for those who speak the language natively’ (Brooks 1964:113). Long range objectives “must be language as the native speaker uses it... There must be some knowledge of a second language as it is possessed by a true bilingualist” (Brooks 1964:107).

### **The Syllabus**

Audiolingualism is a linguistic, or structure-based, approach to language teaching. The starting point is a linguistic syllabus, which contains the key items of phonology, morphology, and syntax of the language arranged according to their order presentation. They may have been derived in part from a Contrastive analysis of the differences between the native tongue and the target language, since these differences are thought to be the cause of the major difficulties the learner will encounter. In addition, a lexical syllabus of basic vocabulary items is also usually specified in advance. In foundations for English Teaching (Fries and Fries 1961), for example, a corpus of structural and lexical items graded into three levels is proposed, together with suggestions as to the situations that could be used to contextualize them.

The language skills are taught in the order of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening is viewed largely as training in aural discrimination of basic sound patterns. The language may be presented entirely orally at first; written

representations are usually withheld from learners in early stages.

### **Types Of Learning And Teaching Activities**

Dialogues and drills form the basis of audiolingual classroom practices. Dialogues provide the means of contextualizing key structures and illustrate situations in which structures might be used as well as some cultural aspects of the target language. Dialogues are used for repetition and memorization. Correct pronunciation, stress, rhythm, and intonation are emphasized. After a dialogue has been presented and memorized, specific grammatical patterns in the dialogue are selected and become the focus of various kinds of drill and pattern-practice exercises.

The use of drills and pattern practice is a distinctive feature of the Audiolingual Method. Various kinds of drills are used. Brooks (1964:156-61) includes the following:

#### 1. Repetition

The student repeats an utterance aloud as soon as he has heard it. He does this without looking at a printed text. The utterance must be brief enough to be retained by the ear. Sound is important as form and order.

Example.

This is the seventh-month .-This is the seventh- month.

After a student has repeated an utterance, he may repeat it again and add few words, then repeat that whole utterance and add more words.

#### 2. Inflection

One word in an utterance appears in another form when repeated.

- Examples.  
I bought the *ticket*. - I bought the *tickets*.  
*He* bought the candy.- *She* bought the candy.  
I called the young *man*. -I called the young *men*..
3. Replacement  
One word in an utterance is replaced by another.  
Examples.  
He bought this *house* cheap.- He bought *it* cheap.
4. Restatement  
The student rephrases an utterance and addresses it to someone else, according to instructions.  
Examples.  
Tell him to wait for you.-Wait for me.
5. Completion  
The student hears an utterance that is complete except for one word, then repeats the utterance in completed form.  
Example.  
I'll go my way and you go...- I'll go my way and you go *yours*.  
We all have ... own troubles. -  
We all have *our* own troubles...
6. Transposition  
A change in word order is necessary when a word is added.  
Examples.  
*I'm* hungry .(so).- So *am* I.  
*I'll* never do it again. (neither). -  
Neither *will* I ..
7. Expansion  
When a word is added it takes a certain place in the sequence.  
Examples.  
I know him.(hardly).-I *hardly* know him.  
I know him. (will).- I know him well...
8. Contraction  
A single word stands for a phrase or clause.  
Examples.  
Put your hand on the table. -Put your hand *there*.  
They believe that *the earth is flat*.  
-*They believe it*...
9. Transformation  
A sentence is transformed by being made negative or interrogative or through changes in tense, mood, voice, aspect, or modality.  
Examples.  
He knows my address.  
He doesn't know my address.
10. Integration  
Two separate utterances are integrated into one.  
Examples.  
They must be honest. This is important.- It is important that they be honest.
11. Rejoinder  
The student makes an appropriate rejoinder to a given utterance. He is told in advance to respond in one of the following way:  
Be polite  
Express regret.  
Fail to understand.
12. Restoration  
The student is given a sequence of words that have been culled from a sentence but still bear its basic meaning. He uses these words with a minimum of changes and additions to restore the sentence to its original form. He may be told whether the time is present, past or future.  
Examples.  
students/ waiting/bus. -The students are waiting for the bus.



boys/build/house/tree.- The boys  
built a house in a tree...

### **Learner Roles**

Learners are viewed as organisms that can be directed by skilled training techniques to produce correct responses. In accordance with behaviorist learning theory, teaching focuses on the external manifestations of learning rather than on the internal processes. Learners play a reactive role by responding to stimuli, and thus have little control over the content, pace, or style of learning. They are not encouraged to initiate interaction, because this may lead to mistakes. The fact that in the early stages learners do not always understand the meaning of what they are repeating is not perceived as a drawback, for by listening to the teacher, imitating accurately, and response a new form of verbal behavior.

### **Teacher's Role**

The teacher's role is central and active.. The teacher models the target language, controls the direction and pace of learning, and monitors and corrects the learners' performance. The teacher must keep the learners attentive by varying drills and tasks and choosing relevant situations to practice structures. Language learning is seen to result from active verbal interaction between the teacher and the learners. Failure to learn results only from the improper application of the method, for example, from the teacher not providing sufficient practice or from the learner not memorizing the essential patterns and structures; but the method itself is never to blame.

### **The Role Of Instructional Materials**

Instructional materials in the Audiolingual Method assist the teacher to develop language mastery in the learner. They are primarily teacher oriented. A student textbook is often not used in the elementary phases of a course where students are primarily listening, repeating, and responding. At this stage in learning, exposure to the printed word may not be considered desirable, because it distracts attention from the aural input. The teacher, however, will have access to a teacher's book that contains the structured sequence of lessons to be followed and the dialogues, drills, and other practice activities.

Tape recorders and audiovisual equipment often have central roles in audio-lingual course. If the teacher is not a native speaker of the target language, the tape recorder provides access to models dialogues and drills. A language laboratory may also be considered essential. It provides the opportunity for further drill work and to receive controlled error-free practice of basic structures. It also adds variety by providing an alternative to classroom practice. A taped lesson may first present a dialogue for listening practice, allow for the student to repeat the sentences in the dialogue line by line, and provide follow-up fluency drills on grammar or pronunciation.

### **Procedure**

Since Audiolingualism is primarily an oral approach to language teaching, it is not surprising that the process of teaching involves extensive oral instruction. The focus of instruction is on immediate and accurate speech, there is little provision for grammatical

explanation or talking about the language. As far as possible, the target language is used as the medium instruction, and translation or use of the native tongue is discouraged. Classes of ten or less are considered optimal, although larger classes are often the norm. Brooks lists the following procedures the teacher should adopt in using the Audiolingual method.

*In a typical audiolingual lesson the following procedures would be observed:*

Students first hear a model dialogue (either read by the teacher or on tape) containing the key structures that are the focus of the lesson. They repeat each line of the dialogue, individually and in chorus. The teacher pays attention to pronunciation, intonation, and fluency. Correction of mistakes of pronunciation or grammar is direct and immediate. The dialogue is memorized gradually, line by line. A line may be broken down into several phrases if necessary. The dialogue is read aloud in chorus, one half saying one speaker's part and the other half responding. The students do not consult their book throughout this phase.

The dialogue is adapted to the students' interest or situation, through - changing certain key words or phrases. This is acted out by the students.

The students may refer to their textbook, and follow-up reading, writing or vocabulary activities based on the dialogue may be introduced. At the beginning level, writing is purely imitative and consists of little more than copying out sentences that have been practiced.

### **Assessment**

Audiolingualism turned out less effective than expected when learners were found to be unable to transfer skills acquired through audiolingualism to real communication outside classroom. On the other hand, its theoretical basis was also questioned. Critics pointed out that language couldn't be cut into discrete units and that language behavior is much more complex than animal behavior. In spite of all the criticism, the major contributions audiolingualism has made cannot be denied. First, it was among the first theories to recommend the development of a language teaching theory on declared linguistic and psychological principles. Secondly, this theory proposed a habit-formation process of language learning which demanded little abstract reasoning and allowed ordinary learners to learn a second language. Thirdly, it led to the development of simple techniques without translation of varied, graded and intensive practice of specific features of language. Finally, it stressed syntactical progression while previous methods had been mainly concerned with vocabulary and morphology.

Audiolingualism reached its period of most widespread use in the 1960s and soon saw its decline. But audiolingualism and materials based on audiolingual principles continue to be widely used today.

### **Conclusion**

Although we are forced to be atomistic during some of the stages of our teaching, these stages need to be related to others where students attempt to arrive at the end-product. In this context drills can succeed. However, if drills become ends in themselves, students

may never find out what it really is to communicate in another language.

Audiolingualism holds that language learning is like other forms of learning. Since language is a formal, rule governed system; it can be formally organized to maximize teaching and learning efficiency. Audiolingualism thus stresses the mechanistic aspects of language use.

There are many similarities between Situational Language Teaching and Audiolingualism. The order in which the language skills are introduced, and the focus on accuracy through drill and practice in the basic structures and sentence patterns of the target language, might suggest that these methods drew from each other. In fact, however, Situational Language Teaching was a development of the earlier Direct Method (see Chapter 1) and does not have the strong ties to linguistics and behavioral psychology that characterize audiolingualism. The similarities between the two methods reflect similar views of language and of language learning through these views were in fact for quite different traditions.

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