Evaluation of major problems in teaching foreign language

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AN EVALUATION OF MAJOR PROBLEMS IN TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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B. Ed., University of Alberta, 1976

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA
1977

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Date
May 17, 1977

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Chapter 1

INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN AN EFFORT TO OFFER HUMAN TEACHING FOR HUMAN LEARNING

A RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

The mastery of a foreign language has been the endeavour of the educated man in Europe for many decades. Educators, in Canada and in the United States, seem to have accepted formally this attitude, but the infrequent contact of students with people who speak other languages has made the study of foreign languages artificial and rather academic in the past. However, recent technological advances in communication as well as in transportation have moved rapidly North Americans into the immediate world community which other European countries had experienced much earlier because of their location. Suddenly the people of this Continent feel the need for multi-lingualism. They no longer visit their fellow man simply to gaze meaninglessly at his historic monuments and his countryside, knowing just enough of his language to order the necessary food and accommodation. They feel the need to meet their fellow man in his surroundings, to exchange ideas with him and to try to understand him and his problems through this intimate linguistic contact. It is their desire to learn to know him, because they realize that man grows, develops and reaches his potential solely through interaction with his fellow man. Man's unique "humanity" appears to develop in proportion to his linguistic achievements. Without language, man would probably not know himself as well and would lead an animal-like existence.
**Goals in Foreign Language Learning**

Although foreign language goals appear to be comparatively simple, attaining them is not so simple. What does the school want to accomplish? Does it want an academician whose mind has been nebulously "disciplined?" Does it want to provide the student with a status ornament or does it intend to teach English grammar through a foreign language? Or does it intend to "prove" to the average student how much "superior" the approximately ten per cent of the student population is to which foreign language classes in high schools were catering traditionally—and how inadequate he, himself, is? It would be rather naive to expect that the answer to these questions would be anything other than a vehement "no." But what are educators in fact doing to ensure that this outcome will not occur? Most foreign language teachers will give the standard reply, "We advocate that communication is a two-way process and that it is predominantly in oral and written form and that we teach the student to listen and to speak, to read and to write in the foreign language"—and one might add facetiously, "... as we did fifty years ago."

Although it seems quite obvious that such an outlook and such practices are indeed insufficient to develop every student's potential and to provide him at the same time with a sense of fulfillment, some foreign language educators seem convinced that foreign language instruction was and is quite adequate. Others indicate that they want to "individualize" because they have heard this new magic word at their last teachers' convention or have read of this new trend in one of their professional journals. As a result, they work indefatigably to produce new materials which will appeal to individual needs and arouse interest.
Altman's words, "... they order 'packets' instead of textbooks, use recordings or cassettes instead of reels, and place students around tables instead of behind their desks." But in order to be able to speak of an individualized foreign language programme, the teacher must not only alter the physical class environment—he (or she) must specifically individualize the goals of the programme for each student, the ways in which he assesses, prescribes, evaluates, etc. Lastly, he must individualize the speed of reaching the set goals.

The Transition from the Traditional "Molding" Process to Individualized Instruction of Foreign Languages

Foreign language educators of the past undeniably took a personal interest in their students and attempted to treat them as special human beings with particular needs and interests. However, every individual was compelled to work at exactly the same speed as his classmate; he had to solve the same problem in exactly the same manner and had to read the same stories or readings. Despite this stagnant process the student of the past usually believed that his foreign language "training" was personalized because his teacher cared about him and was willing to help him if he had the time to do so. In this view, this education process was to some limited extent "personalized education." As the aims of the foreign language curriculum were generally unquestioningly accepted and followed by all students, it was on the whole considered to be relevant.

The student of the 1970's who was squeezed initially into the mold of his predecessors, turns out to be of a different breed, by assuming that

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1Howard B. Altman, Individualizing the Foreign Language Classroom (Rowley: Newbury House, 1972), vi.
the aims of education are very much for him to decide. According to Altman,

He is concerned with himself, with his development as a human being, with the world in which he lives, and with his role in that world. He views his education as part of his life, over which he should have some control, not as a preparation for adulthood. He is unwilling to subordinate his rights as a human being to the preservation of an educational or political bureaucracy in whose creation he was not involved, and whose immediate value to him seems doubtful.²

As a result, individualized instruction in foreign language learning has emerged—an attempt to shape and form teaching to the interest, needs, and ability of every individual student.

DEFINING INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

The idea of "individualized foreign language instruction" can have a different meaning to different individuals. Fundamentally it can be said to be a philosophy of education, a self-evident approach of a unique kind. It is not, as often erroneously assumed, a given "method," nor is it a developed "technique." Rather, it must be described as a "self-evident approach to education" because underlying it are fundamental principles which are acceptable to foreign language learning. More specifically, individualized instruction means a learner-centered classroom in which the nature and shape of the curriculum are determined by the needs, interest, and abilities of the individual learner.

In order to define "individualized instruction of foreign languages," one must focus his attention on two separate, but equally important components of the term, namely "to individualize" and "to instruct."

²Altman, pp. 3-4.

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"instruction" in this context means a "conscientious effort on the teachers' part" and must not be misconstrued to mean the teacher finger-pointing to a heap of books and his encouraging words to his students to proceed to acquire knowledge.

Only when the learner experiences a problem with his study will the teacher, in Jacobovits' words "compensate" him for this difficulty by assisting him to remove the obstacle which is in the way of his further progression.3

Thus, the task of the foreign language teacher is to facilitate the learning process by explaining, showing, correcting, suggesting additional drill, etc., when this is needed by the individual—in contrast to the traditional lecture which is given by the instructor, regardless of whether or not the student is ready for it or whether or not he needs it. The important point is that instruction be given to the student only when there is a need by him specifically, because only then will he benefit from it.

"Individualized instruction of foreign languages" must not be mistaken for a "do-your-own-thing-as-you-please" activity. Instead, individual instruction bestows on the student the privilege, or "right," to share in the decision-making regarding his learning. Because the student is usually aware of his own interests and his needs and the foreign language teacher is in the best position to propose in what way these interests and needs could be met advantageously in a specific learning situation, it is crucial that decisions of this kind be mutual and participatory.

Also, comparatively often, "programmed instruction, computer-

assisted instruction, and independent study" are confused with individualized instruction, both by laymen and teachers. It is true that all three play an important role in individualized instruction because they can be part of it. But it would be quite erroneous to equate them with the process of individualized instruction as a whole.

Programmed materials are employed advantageously in individualized instruction because they enable the student to work at his optimal pace, and they usually progress in minimal steps from one concept or problem to the next. Computer-assisted instruction used in individualized instruction permits the application of immensely wide-ranging resources which are available at various centers. Also, independent study, or a modified version thereof, can be made a part of the process of individualized instruction. However, independent study, by definition, stresses the fact that the learner does something for himself. It omits, therefore, the important role of the classroom teacher. Independent study, for that reason, must be regarded as basically self-instruction, although it may play a more important part in individualized instruction after the student has acquired the rudiments in order to work substantially on his own.

At the beginning levels of language learning, on the other hand, individualized instruction consists of a more clearly defined, solid structure. It is true that, occasionally, the structure of a given individualized programme may appear more haphazard and unplanned than the typical situation in a non-individualized class. However, in the individualized programme, both teacher and learners are conscious of the character of the learning activity taking place, and for this reason
no one is tense or worried which, in the long run, is beneficial to
the process of learning.

An important feature of individualized instruction is the con­
cept of learning for mastery. This means that, wherever practicable,
definite levels of accuracy be established for the various assignments
and that these standards of achievement be sufficiently high. Given
the required time for mastery, the student will attain a high standard
in one unit before advancing to the next. In this way, individualized
instruction shifts the competition from the necessity to impress one's
teacher and to surpass one's fellow students, to a desire to excel in
one's own established standard of performance.

Also, it becomes quite important in individualized instruction
at the beginner's level that the student is taught "how to learn" a for­
eign language. This emphasis appears more crucial than learning what
is to be learned, since knowing the "secrets of learning" will lead to
the mastery of the prescribed content.

The Main Characteristics

Although each individualized foreign language programme is unique
in many ways because of its individual local needs, there seem to be, never­
theless, some common characteristics. Curiously enough, these common char­
acteristics do not define the whole process of individualized instruction
in all-embracing terms, and they do not seem to contain any definite, fixed
formulae which one could apply blindly and securely in a universal way.
Instead, they can be considered only, in Altman's words, as "patterns of
individualization" which various modern language departments have adopted.
boldly, and which they use successfully. These "patterns" consist, in
the view of Altman, of the following basic assumptions:

Students are free to proceed through their curriculum materials
at their own speed.

Students are tested on their achievement at given intervals, but
only when they expect to be tested, and only on materials which they
have prepared.

When a student needs help to proceed in his work, he consults
with his teacher, or with some other "resource person" in the room.
The teacher removes the obstacles to his further progress by pro-
viding a needed explanation, by suggesting additional drills, by
recommending a different approach to the task, etc. At other times,
the student is engaged in learning, and he does not remain in "eye-
bail-to-eyeball" contact with his teacher.

Students are always aware of the nature of their learning tasks.
This implies that

1. they know what they are supposed to accomplish,
2. they know at what level of accuracy they must work,
3. they know under what conditions they must demonstrate
   what they have achieved,
4. they know by what time limit (if any) their work must
   be satisfactorily completed.

Although Altman appears to have formulated a splendid summary of
the main characteristics of individualized instruction, his enumeration
(or any enumeration, for that matter) can hardly be "all-embracing," nor
can it be nearly absolutely complete. In order to become more familiar
with the tremendous possibilities which individualized instruction has
to offer, let us examine critically two other positions which are held
by Bockman and by Carroll respectively.

In Bockman's view, as in the view of most proponents, individuali-
zation has to mean "humanization and personalization" in order to be

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4 Altman, p. 12.
5 Altman, p. 12.
meaningful. But more important than that statement, which is almost trite, is his advanced equation—namely that "individualized instruction = (equals) the facilitated operation of the learning process."\(^6\)

This puts individualized instruction into a new light, because of its gigantic potential to "cure" many ills in various foreign language programmes. "If we could concentrate on this equation," Bockman continues, "all the factors of individualization would take their proper subordinate place and could be viewed subordinately."\(^7\)

As the foreign language teacher can see from this tenet, he cannot start his implementation "in medias res" and relatively unprepared, because one's endeavour to individualize instruction will be successful only to the extent that it is founded on a thorough comprehension of the learning process and the knowledge of how to cleverly "exploit" the same.

Carroll supports this view when he suggests, through his Conceptual Model of the Learning Process, that "the success of learning in an educational setting is a complex function of five kindsof elements:"\(^8\)

1. the learner's aptitude = function of time;
2. the learner's general intelligence;
3. the learner's perseverance = time allowed by learner;
4. the quality of instruction = sequence, order, etc.;
5. the opportunity for learning = time allowed by school.\(^9\)

Although many will find these terms rather familiar, it is the


\(^7\)Bockman, p. 37.


\(^9\)Carroll, 723-733.
relationship of one to another, in Bockman's view, which makes the difference:

... as concepts, these elements hang together to mean more than the simple sum of the parts. As strength in one part of the model is reduced, a commensurate reinforcement of another part will be required if damage to learning is to be offset.\(^\text{10}\)

He urges that

... it should be noted that three of the five elements are functions of time. A fourth element, the Quality of Instruction, implies certain concomitants of time which may be thought of as the Quality of the Use of Time designed by the teacher for the operation of the learning process in a given situation. It seems that we may be justified in regarding four of the five elements of the model as functions of time, and for this rationale it is important that we mark well the role which time plays in the successful learning operation.\(^\text{11}\)

**Rationale and Plea**

It is indeed surprising to learn from Carroll's model that "four out of five elements are functions of time," and one is led to the speculation, if not conviction, that if enough time were available, any student of general intelligence could attain mastery of even highly complex problems. This finding seems to be in sharp contrast with traditional assumptions that only students with an exceptionally high I. Q. were able to learn abstractions and could solve complex problems. The student with "low" ability was said to be able to learn only simple things, since he lacked the "deeply revered" ability in question. As a result, educational institutions advocated the "right to fail" for the mediocre student, although, ironically enough, they

\(^{10}\)Bockman, p. 38;  
\(^{11}\)Bockman, p. 40.
themselves were the source which did not allow sufficient time for the task.

It becomes irrevocably evident that time limits in traditional education have catered--and, to some measure, still do--to a small minority and have served as a rather convenient screening device in the past. Mastery does not seem to have been an important aim of traditional education (except at the University level?), and, if mastery was occasionally demanded, then it was held to have been the individual student's responsibility. Traditional education at the high school level can be said to have been greatly unjust to the so-called academically unfit, because it was interested predominantly in the exclusion from learning of the majority, instead of helping anyone to mastery through a meaningful learning process.

Since learning can increase the capacity for learning, an important goal of every individualized instruction programme should be to elicit positive changes in the learner and thus provide opportunities for utilizing every individual's talents and energies and to help our coming generation to play their role as responsible adults and dignified humans.
Chapter 2

NEW WAYS AND TECHNIQUES TO OVERCOME PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN TEACHING FOREIGN CULTURES

AN ATTEMPT TO DEFINE AN ACCEPTABLE PHILOSOPHY OF CULTURE

"Culture" is a word which seems to have a great number of meanings, both to the layman and the scientist. Although some anthropologists appear to subscribe to the general view that culture is "the way of life of a people, the sum of their learned behaviour patterns, attitudes and material things," the critical person will wonder what the substance of culture, more specifically, is comprised of.

The difficulty in obtaining fuller and more pertinent data in order to answer in more specific terms the question under discussion, can be noted when one takes a closer look at statements, from men in the field, such as Hall, which read, "Until recently no one had defined any basic units of culture . . . there was no generally agreed upon underlying theory of culture . . . no new way of being specific . . ." Even today a volume which examines the various concepts and theories of culture, written by the nation's two outstanding anthropologists, A. L.


2Hall, p. 35.
Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, calls for such qualities as "empathy" in the investigator. The authors state that "no constant elemental units of culture have as yet been satisfactorily established."^3

Furthermore, Hall and Trager tried to develop a method for the analysis of culture, consisting of five basic steps:

1. To identify the building blocks of culture.
2. To tie these isolates into a biological base.
3. To build up a body of data and a methodology that would enable them to conduct research.
4. To build a unified theory of culture that would lead them to further research.
5. Finally, to find a way to make their discipline tangibly useful to the non-specialist.4

On another occasion Hall indicated that they felt that much of the preoccupation of anthropologists with statistics was having a stultifying effect on their discipline, and he admits or suggests that

... the methodologies and theories borrowed from sociology, psychology and other biological and physical sciences had been "ineptly" used.5

In the search for an adequate answer to the question "what is culture?" the foreign language teacher can discern various attempts by scientists to systematize the phenomenon "culture" and, although it would be unrealistic to expect to find a "neat," definite answer to such a complex problem, it is perplexing to learn of the great number of theories, often contradicting ones, which have been developed. But

^3Hall, p. 35.
^4Hall, pp. 36-37.
^5Hall, p. 37.
none of these scientific descriptions (let alone the description by any layman) is as thorough and comprehensive in substance as the foreign language teacher would like them to be. For this reason, he gets the impression that he does not come closer to any "final solution," and he is humbled, awed and overwhelmed by the difficulty and complexity involved. There does not seem to exist one all-embracing, "correct" description of culture, but various scientific theories which attempt to accept or reject tentatively one view or a synthesis of the theories as held and expressed by the scientist, on the one hand, and by the humanist, on the other.

In the search for an acceptable philosophy of culture, the curious educator will want to examine still other, more diverging ideas: Brown, for example, holds that "the material to be dealt with in a cultural description or analysis will not be limited to that which is felt to be great and timeless."^ Bruner, Friedl and Herzfeld seem to have a similar view when they say that "the word 'culture' as it is used in anthropology does not refer exclusively to the arts and the humanities."^ People of "culture" are not, in their sense of the word, that small group in any society which appreciates man's finer achievements in literature, music, and painting. In their view, every person is a cultured human being because "everyone participates in some of the regularly patterned ways of life characteristic of his society."^  

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Nostrand, in contrast to the preceding views, holds that a student ought to have a coherent set of concepts based on facts concerning the main values of the culture:

... its assumptions about the nature of man and his world, its great art forms, its folk arts and its humor; and likewise should have an understanding of the people's social institutions, their social psychology, and their ecological arrangements.\(^9\)

The next two statements by the same author, on the other hand, appear to be somewhat presumptuous, although enlightening, when he says that

there is also the great need for language teachers to learn how to carry on research in this phase of our teaching, and for all of us to become exacting, professional consumers of research conclusions and generalizations made about national character by careful observers,\(^10\)

and that

it is too often that the teacher must place credence in what an artist says whose genius lies rather in self-expression than in illustrating a cultural way of life.\(^11\)

Brooks makes a more valid and acceptable point in his definition of culture when he states that the most important single criterion in distinguishing culture from geography, history, folklore, sociology, literature, and civilization is the fact that "in culture we never lose sight of the individual."\(^12\) Also, Hall makes an interesting and constructive observation, by holding that culture hides much more than it reveals, and strangely enough what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants.

\(^10\)Nostrand, 6-7.
\(^11\)Nostrand, 6-7.
\(^12\)Nelson Brooks, FL Annals (Yale University, 1968) 204-217.
The question arises whether or not man, in fact, "handles" a "reality" even when he has managed to reconstruct certain parts of the elements of culture. Beaujour suggests that the answer to this question is "no" if one understands the word "reality" in its traditional sense of concrete, material facts. It is "yes," in his view, if understood in the sense of imaginary, mental, mythical reality.*

Through the above mentioned readings, the writer has arrived at the following tentative, eclectic philosophy of culture: In an over-simplified, subjective and inadequate description, the word culture could be defined in two different ways. In one sense it could mean the sum total of a people's achievements and contributions to civilization, such as literature (belles lettres), music, art, architecture, technological progress, etc. The other meaning would include the individual, namely his behavioural patterns of life styles: What and when does he (and for that matter the people as a whole) eat and drink? How do they make a living? What are the ways in which they organize their society? What are the attitudes which they express toward the members of their families and toward their friends? How will they act or react in various situations? What expressions do they use to express approval and disapproval? What are the traditions which they observe and in what way are they being observed? This latter definition or anthropological approach is sometimes referred to as "culture with a small c," whereas the former has been named, for clarity and convenience, "culture with a capital C."

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Goals of Culture Study

After having tried to define the nature of culture, the teacher's next step will be to clarify the aims of culture study. And the question arises, "What are important objectives of culture study in foreign language programmes?"

Brown seems to make a constructive contribution with his finding that

a person whose entire view of the world is determined by the value-perspectives which he has gained through a single cultural environment—who thus cannot understand or accept the point of view of another individual whose values have been determined by a different culture—may be considered 'culture-bound' in his attitudes.\(^1^4\)

This person makes premature and for-his-culture-typical, value judgments. Also, he is limited in his understanding of the world and, for that reason, Brown seems to hold that the understanding of the culture of a specific country, say, Germany is not, in and by itself, all that the cultural aspect of foreign language study should contribute to a general and a liberal education. In order to achieve the "fullest" possible contribution, three important ends must be borne in mind in selecting and presenting cultural material. Brown says:

1. The student must gain an understanding of the nature of culture.

2. His culture-bondage must be reduced.

3. He must achieve a fuller understanding of his own cultural background.\(^1^5\)


\(^{1^5}\) Brown, 1196-1218.
Bruner sees a different problem in culture learning, namely "the getting of a feel" for a foreign culture by any individual, whether he is a student, immigrant, tourist, etc., or even a professional anthropologist. The main theme in his discussion is his finding that "untutored observation is apt to result in a superficial grasp of what is seen and heard." This pertains even to a willing teacher who belongs to the culture which is being studied, or one who is an eager learner from another culture, because great and basic difficulties remain.

Nostrand's main point of argument (and contribution) is his admonition that the teaching of culture be related to the student's interests, and he is more explicit when he states that the need for the foreign language teacher is to relate the culture to the student's interests. In this view, more is known about children's needs and interests than about a foreign culture. For that reason Nostrand advises the teacher to examine needs and interests to which the cultural materials would appeal, especially because the teacher's own experiences will provide ideas which will be multiplied as soon as he talks with his students who will relate, in turn, their experiences.

Brooks makes an interesting observation in regard to "goal three" in his systematic study of culture in the target language. He says:

Literature and non-literary works can be read with both analysis and synthesis in mind, enabling the learner to interweave and interrelate the triple objectives of this phase: The perfecting of the control of language skills, an acquaintance in depth with a significant number of literary works of the "highest order," and a sophisti-

16Bruner, 19-27.
cation in cultural awareness, insight, and sympathy with regard to the way of life of those whose language he is studying.17

The Teaching of Culture

While most foreign language teachers agree that culture should be taught as part of a foreign language course, not all of these educators agree on what should be taught and how it should be introduced.

If the foreign language teacher wishes to teach, for example, German culture with a small "c," then he must focus on contemporary patterns of culture because these patterns reflect the value system of the people. A study of contemporary German culture, for example, shows a people much more concerned with the present and the future than with the immediate past (for obvious reasons). A knowledge of German geography is necessary if the American or Canadian student wants to understand the concern of the Germans over their divided country. Also, an awareness of German music and opera is necessary if the student intends to understand the underlying feeling of the inhabitants of Dresden who rebuilt their opera house and revitalized the opera company which played nightly to full houses while debris still covered most streets, after that city had been bombed in a continuous raid and suffered a loss of approximately 300,000 lives in February 1945.

After the content of the cultural portion of the language course has been determined, the language of instruction must be analyzed and scrutinized in order to establish its appropriateness and effectiveness. The important question arises whether or not the teaching of culture should

17Brooks, 204-217.
be postponed until the student can study it in the target language. Allen and Valette suggest rather strongly that culture should be taught as early as possible and explain that the disadvantage of waiting until the third year before introducing culture is that "only about ten percent of those students who begin a foreign language ever reach that level." Although the rate of "typical mortality" might not be as high in various settings, one can see rather clearly that many students would be deprived of that opportunity, simply because one year of culture learning could not be equated to three years of exposure. It is the writer's strong view that culture can indeed be taught quite successfully from the very start, even if out of necessity it has to be in English. It must be definitely an integral part of all instruction, instead of "an added frill."

Another concept which students should be taught to develop in their study of a foreign culture is that people in various cultures react in many different manners to the various needs of life. The student should realize, for example, that the American or, say, Canadian way is not the only way, sometimes not even the best way. It is most likely the best way which works for Americans, while other ways might work best for other people.

A crucial problem in teaching culture is the possibility that both the teacher and the students generalize from unrepresentative, i.e. from too little, information. For that reason it becomes necessary

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that the teacher treat the way in which people live in the large cities as well as in the country, that the attitude of a large number of people be studied, i.e. young and old, poor and rich, etc., instead of confining the study to a non-representative locale, or another meaningless criterion.

Although Brooks makes a somewhat incoherent statement in his treatment in regard to "phase three in the systematic study of culture in the target language," he nevertheless comes up with rather clear and brilliant suggestions in other places of his discussion, namely that the teaching of culture be tied directly with the language: "Knowledge of culture is best imparted as a corollary or an 'obbligato' to the business of language learning." For this reason he recommends a daily five-minute presentation at the beginning of each language period. Also, he offers sixty-four topics related to culture, with suggested questions, which he calls "hors d'oeuvres" or "Leckerbissen."

Other, specifically designed fifteen-minute cultural "Sprechsituationen" have the advantage of making it possible to provide for a more complete treatment of a logical sequence of topics and to provide the kind of oral exchange between student and teacher, which integrates fully the teaching of the target language with its culture and enables both student and teacher to benefit from each other's experiences. Incidental teaching, on the other hand, has the advantage that it does

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19 Brooks, 204-217.

20 Brooks, 204-217.

21 Brooks, 204-217.
not separate the linguistic from the cultural and permits the latter to arise in the most natural way from the text. A judicious combination of both incidental and specific teaching will probably prove to be most effective. Another important role of the foreign language teacher is to open the students' eyes to the impact which foreign cultures have had on American culture and to make them aware of the diversity which has developed around them.

Hall summarized quite existential-humanistically the importance of culture learning when he said:

The best reason for the layman to spend time studying culture is that he can learn something useful and enlightening about himself. This can be an interesting process, at times harrowing but ultimately rewarding. One of the most effective ways to learn about oneself is by taking seriously the cultures of others. It forces you to pay attention to those details of life which differentiate "them" from "you."22

The language of culture speaks indeed clearly although it is a silent one—and the discovery of the importance of teaching culture offers the conscientious foreign language teacher new, overwhelming challenges.

22 Hall, p. 40.
Chapter 3

HUMANISTIC VALUE OF THE STUDY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

In order to understand how two languages interact with each other so that a new kind of consciousness is the outcome, one has to understand how consciousness comes into being. Attempting to grasp the idea of how consciousness comes into being, puts one immediately into the framework of looking at animal development and at human development.

Although it is comparatively easy to find out what animals can do and what humans can do, it becomes much more difficult to analyze why there is no consciousness in animals and why there is consciousness in human beings. Thus the investigator has to scrutinize the socio-genesis or the development of any individual society. He must look at how that society has grown and changed. Furthermore, he must find out what is important to that society and what is relatively immaterial to it. And lastly—usually not contained in any traditional discussion of consciousness—but of crucial significance to this investigation, is the newly emerging question, "How does an individual grow up in a society whereby two social experiences or three social experiences combine so that there becomes 'a new kind of consciousness' in that particular individual?"

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Whenever one is thinking of a bi-lingual act, it becomes necessary to consider these three characteristics almost simultaneously:

1. What is consciousness?
2. How did it come about?
3. What are the particular understandings of a given cultural group and what is that individual's experience within that cultural group?

The Aristotelian Thesis

Aristotle recognized the problems under discussion about 2,000 years ago and put forward his thoughts in *Organon* which Bain summarized in this way:

Language distinguishes man from animal. Our whole capacity of being truly human is implicit in language. Truth is only possible in language or, at least, by means of language. Even a lie presupposes language. Language is an organon (tool) which comes into use as a means of coming to terms with the experience occurring between self and the surrounding world and between the mind's intercourse with itself.2

It is perhaps perplexing to note that such profound thoughts on this subject had been formulated already so many years ago, and it is even more astounding to see that it has direct relevance to the present struggle in convincing the people of the United States and Canada of the humanistic value of the study of foreign languages. Aristotle's insight into human nature was preserved, mostly in a dormant state over the years, when it was "discovered" during the last century by philosophy and brought into formal psychology, i.e. into the sciences, since the Second World War.


Aristotle expresses in his fundamental statement that man is not born human, but that he "becomes" human through language. In the process of becoming a human being he, moreover, develops a consciousness through a language. Aristotle becomes somewhat "flowery" when he uses the term "truth"—at least modern man would think that it is "flowery" because he perceives it as such through the hazed view of his present culture. While today the term "knowledge" or "cognition" would be used, in Aristotle's time the other term had been employed.

Becoming human and developing consciousness are only possible in language or by means of language. There is no truth or falsity or "no-knowledge" in the animal kingdom—there is only behaviour. Man acquires knowledge if he gains truth through study by means of language, with language being the tool. Thus language becomes the organon. It is a tool which comes into use as a means of coming to terms with the environment, for man to grapple with what is being said, with what is being written etc. It also comes into use between the mind's intercourse with itself. Again, modern man might consider this to be a "flowery" term and what he would say today is that when a person is talking to himself he uses language. So, on the one hand, language is the tool used by the individual in coping with his environment and, on the other hand, it comes into use when he attempts to communicate his whole understanding. By language obviously not just verbal noises are meant. Instead, it is a means of coming to understand the surrounding world, including the self which is part of the universe.
The Vygotskian Thesis

If the foregoing represents language, then language itself has to be viewed within the context of the general law of human development. This seems to be the assumption held by Vygotsky which he expresses as follows:

Any function in the child's human development appears on the stage twice, on two planes: First on the social plane and then on the psychological plane--first among people as an 'intermental' category and then within the child as an 'intra-mental' category.\(^3\)

The emphasis and importance of history in connection with language seem to gain in clarity, when one looks at the problem from Vygotsky's point of view. According to his dictum, any function, thought, behaviour, idea, etc., or any aspect of human consciousness for that matter, appear on the human stage twice. More specifically, anything which anyone is doing, appears on the stage twice: It appears on the historical stage--for example, the development of the words which an individual is using to describe his experiences, have already appeared in history on the social plane because history is a social phenomenon. It is a history of "real" people who have in fact lived at one given period in time or another. Moreover, in the development of a person on the psychological plane he internalizes the experiences which are inherent in language. Since then (In Aristotle's terms) he comes to understand his environment and, also, he comes to understand himself. In this way (looking at the problem from Vygotsky's point of view) it

is reasonable to say that indeed any phenomenon of experience, no matter what it is, appears on the stage twice: It appears historically or in a social context, and it appears subsequently in a psychological context. What an individual "is," is something which he has become through originally interacting with social experience or historical experience and re-shaping it, or re-modelling it, in his own image, in his own understanding.

In Vygotsky's view, even a creative act always has a social origin to it, because nothing is totally new in man's consciousness. There seems to be always some aspect of it which can be traced to the history of that particular language in which the individual has grown up. Thus, any one language automatically puts blinkers on a person because if he comes to understand the surrounding world, he is coming to understand himself through a kind of framework, through a kind of net, a kind of an historical experience of one people—and this is automatically restrictive because no one people has experienced everything. So, when the individual comes to develop himself psychologically, a single language tool automatically restricts him in the development of his psyche and his logic, namely in his consciousness. This does not necessarily mean that this is bad because some languages are more global or universal than others. But, nevertheless, they have restrictions in themselves, regardless of how or what any particular language is considered to be.

The Bain Thesis

Bain brings together brilliantly the tenets held by Aristotle and by Vygotsky and adds another dimension to them: He makes the strong point
that the individual is not simply providing a more flexible "organon" or a more elastic means of coming to terms with experience, when he becomes bi-lingual or multi-lingual, but that "we are also fostering a new kind of intra-mental category, a 'new kind of man'."

According to the Bain Thesis, language has such a profound effect on transforming the individual from a sensory motor organism into a thinking adult that he comes to "think" in terms of that language experience to which he has been exposed. Therefore, the language to which he is exposed, tends to encapsulate his mind and, as a result, it tends to shut off alternatives. Moreover, since any single linguistic history is arbitrary, the uni-lingual individual becomes a victim of a particular "tyranny." It follows that if the only tool which an individual possesses, is a singular language tool with which to encode and decode, i.e. to think, to conceive, to perceive, to understand, to express himself, to act and to re-act, then he is naturally, or automatically, cut off from alternate ways of addressing himself to his problems and, consequently, restricts his personal growth in becoming a mature adult.

The Bain study reveals quite clearly that in order to develop into a mature adult, the individual needs more than one language at his disposal. He literally needs that second language, or preferably a variety of languages in order to achieve the level of "contemplative perception, where action is giving way in favour of inspection, judgment,

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analysis, and distantiation"\textsuperscript{5}--in contrast to "participation, where he responds organismically to the dynamic, affective, physiognomic properties of the environment,"\textsuperscript{6} which is the immature version in Bain's concept.

The crucial finding in the understanding of bi-lingualism which Bain has come upon is that by acquiring a more flexible language tool and elastic means of coming to terms with experience, i.e. out of the juxtaposition of the two ways, or more than two ways, of looking at the world which permit a "more dimensional" perception of the reality in and of itself--the individual is propelled and thrust forward with enormous speed, perhaps at an exponential rate, in his individual development.

Conclusion

It appears that the Aristotelian thesis is mainly concerned with the important role which language plays in making man into a human being who deals effectively with his environment while, on the other hand, the Vygotskian thesis focuses on the basic, fundamental development in the individual and also tries to answer the question, "What is consciousness? How did it come about? What are the particular understandings of a given cultural group and what is that individual's experience within that cultural group?"

The Bain thesis does not leave it at that level. After acknowledging the spade-work of the other two significant postulates, it asks,


\textsuperscript{6}Bain, 157-296.
"Where do we go from here?" It appears that Bain's newly formulated concept for the development of a "new kind of consciousness" contains an incredible potential for a realistic improvement of both the individual and the present and future world.

Although a comparatively large number of misinformed students and parents are still not quite convinced of the necessity of foreign language study for everyone, by holding that foreign language learning is too time-consuming and an irrelevant "subject" in modern society, there is growing evidence that bi-lingualism and multi-lingualism are no longer idle luxuries, but the area which needs the most urgent improvement, as far as man's survival is concerned: If man hopes to preserve peace among the peoples of this globe, he must abandon the technique of military threat—and learn how to communicate with each other, instead.

Through Bain's findings it becomes irrevocably evident that foreign language learning must be considered to be an essential component of the technological age—a component which is in serious need of restoration and improvement.

But apart from this obviously noticeable necessity for communication, there is a newly evolving, not so readily perceivable urgency for foreign language learning: Psychologists, such as Bain, are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that an understanding of man's higher mental functions necessitates an understanding of his language and of foreign languages, because language is not only an object of knowledge, but also a medium through which other knowledge is gained,
In the development from the sensory organism in infancy to the level of the fully functioning adult, a level which is interestingly enough only static and stagnant to the extent that the mind remains encapsulated by the absence of foreign language experience.

Von Humboldt put the paramount influence of language into a significant perspective, after he completed his science-expedition to South America from 1799-1304, his voyage of discovery to Siberia, and having lived in Paris as a German for approximately one quarter of a century: "The influence of language extends over everything man thinks or feels, decides and achieves. It transforms the world into a possession of the mind." From findings, such as this one, it can be deduced that there is nothing more important in the world today, in terms of crucial issues which face mankind, than trying to understand the nature of human consciousness. The most effective tool for understanding human consciousness which man possesses, is through language studies in general and bi-lingual studies in particular.

When man is looking around him in his world today, he can see all kinds of problems which are facing people--from individuals who are unable to pay their rent, to the great global systems which are about to conquer the planet earth and even outer space. There are great struggles going on for the understanding of man's mind and for man's consciousness--and the outcome of the next 50 or 100 years is very much dependent upon the fact of who will most fully understand and improve the nature of human consciousness.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY
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