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SUMMARY OF USOE PROJECT HE0084

by Gerald Dykstra

The product of the TESL Materials Development Center is referred to here in terms of (I) Problem (restated in the form of a series of questions underlying the establishment of the project, (II) Background, (III) Findings.

I. Problem

There were a number of questions underlying the establishment of the project. The primary ones are listed here.

A. Can nonpredictable, purposeful communication* be incorporated into instructional materials for the early stages

of second or foreign language learning?

B. Can pupil participation in such communication be as intensive as it is in pattern practice classes? Can pupil listeners form useful responsive environments for pupil speakers?

This summary report is reprinted in the TESL Reporter because of its value for ESL teachers and current interest in situational communication in second language learning. It has not been previously available except in the official terminal report of Project No. HE-084, Grant No. SAE 7-10-027. January, 1967, Gerald Dykstra, principal investigator.

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For the purpose of the Materials Project, communication means that the individual speaker is to have multiple choices of linguistic content; that he is to participate in a situation in which he has a purpose superordinate to that of language practice; and that only by the use of recently presented or newly learned language forms will he be able to accomplish his superordinate purpose. His hearers are not able to predict his linguistic choices, but are nevertheless required to respond overtly to his linguistic signals by selecting one of a range of potential responses. When the speaker repeatedly and consistently accomplishes his purpose without the necessity of repetition or extraneous signals like translation, communication is to be assumed.

C. Can materials so constituted form viable classroom materials, and can they be made pedagogically useful?

D. Will supporting modes be needed in a program that emphasizes the communication mode? How can supporting modes also more nearly simulate out-of-classroom functional use of language?

E. Can second language reading instruction for young children include from the early stages emphasis on rapid silent reading with overt response?

F. Are the widely-used successful techniques of oral language instruction applicable to primary school writing instruction in the form of exercises that start with models and draw pupils in graduated steps from full reliance to no reliance on a model?

G. Is the communication mode also applicable to writing and to reading?

H. What research can be started within the framework of this project to help determine the nature of the differences that are both necessary and sufficient in provision of materials for different cultures? One ultimate goal of this type of research is to determine the nature and extent of the valid applications of contrastive analysis in materials development. Another is to determine the nature, the possible extent and the relative usefulness of a common core set of materials designed for a wide range of cultures.

J. Is international cooperation feasible in research and development work related to these questions?

II. Background

The background of the questions listed as representative of the problem includes fruitful, creative dissatisfactions; simultaneous consideration of scholarship and school curriculum; and heuristic, alert teaching practice. Of the following summary comments, most refer to historical background and some to conceptual explanation as well.

Upon completion of the revised Intensive Course series for speakers of Spanish at the University of Michigan in the 1970's it was

clear that pattern presentation and pattern practice, promising as these were from the start, did not constitute the ultimate development in second language instruction. Immediately, a closer relevance to language function seemed essential. Subsequent reaction to the shortcomings of other foreign language materials that also emphasize pattern practice, but do not succeed in going significantly beyond, bears out this early response to the Intensive Course. Recent presentations at professional meetings show growing awareness of possibilities, and distinct interest in developing materials with nonpredictable functional use of communication as a criterion for acceptability.

The prototype lesson for this type of materials as subsequently developed in the TESL Materials Development Project was presented in one of the community laboratory schools of the Kaimosi Teacher Training College in Kenya.*

The dissatisfaction with college entrance reading comprehension and reading speeds, the dissatisfaction with writing ability, and the indirect approaches used in teaching these skills, suggested development more nearly parallel with direct oral approaches that were proving more successful of oral ability.

The assumption of the necessity of completely separate sets of materials, based on contrastive analysis, for every different language background was shown empirically to require research on the nature of differences required and on valid applications of contrastive analysis. This undercuts the earlier assumption that contrastive analysis clearly showed its own application somehow. Related to this is the desirability of exploring the application of studies of language universals and the extent of possible core materials for presentation to students from more than one language background, with separate materials where the core proves empirically unsatisfactory.

The world-wide extension of teaching

*Gerald Dykstra, "Active Teaching and Learning of Spoken English," *TEACHER EDUCATION*, Vol. III, No. 2 (November, 1962) pp. 134-139.

English to speakers of other languages suggested the desirability of exploring further the extent of currently possible international cooperation in experimentation and curriculum development. This type of cooperation has often been proposed but it has commonly failed to materialize in any significant, extended way. Research on a central core, and divergences as necessary, seemed a good starting point insofar as a variety of language and cultural backgrounds would be necessary for any culturally differentiated feedback on divergences from a core that might be indicated. Qualified advisers for the project were readily obtained from another country. Readiness for cooperative endeavor had been shown in many countries.

III. Findings.

Representative findings stemming from the work of project personnel and relating to the questions listed at the beginning of this summary statement include those presented here. The lettered divisions here correspond to those listed under section I. Problem, and reference, should be to those questions.

A. One hundred fifty communication activities, which follow the necessary one hundred fifty presentations, have been selected as substantially meeting the requirements of the criteria established for such activities. By internal appraisal, it is determined that nonpredictable, purposeful communication can be incorporated into instructional materials. This was substantiated by the fact that communication, as operationally defined, was repeatedly accomplished in the field locations.

A fortuitous discovery, after designing each tenth communication activity to serve as a test, was that every activity not merely every tenth one, served as a proper test of language ability. The full significance of this dawned gradually. Altogether, the activities form a set of programmatically graduated tests linguistically more valid for an English language teaching program than sets which elicit markings on paper or which measure control of sub-elements of language production (e.g., pronunciation) or sub-elements of language recognition in lieu of checking on ability to communicate and

comprehend messages that are cued by controlled but non-predictable situations.

The one hundred fifty communication activities accepted for the program use vocabulary that correlates with objects which are formed by using plastic pieces. An alternative program using vocabulary that correlates with items made from materials available in nearly all environments has been illustrated and demonstrated.

B. By using pupil responders in the communication situation (only after appropriate presentations), effective responsive environments have been set up. In these, successful language production by one pupil is regularly followed by an appropriate and desired overt, non-linguistic response. Incorrect language production is followed by responses not sought by the child speaker. Clearly established and known goals, non-linguistic in nature, are in these instances not attained. The activity breaks down and the pupil must start again.

With such responsive environments and with a properly programmed sequence, it is not necessary for the teacher to hear correct production of the point being practiced in order that reinforcement may take place, nor is it necessary for the teacher to hear errors in the use of the point being practiced in order that the errors be detected. In this situation, with pupils forming effective and useful responsive environments for pupil speakers, a multiple unit design in the classroom is feasible. The amount of speaking and response to speaking is high.

The density of pupil participation, while not quantitatively measured in the project, is anecdotally recorded as being lower than in good choral pattern practice, higher than in individualized pattern practice and qualitatively superior to both.

C. With minimal presentation and a minimum of artificial practicing, it is possible to move directly into functioning use of the language, provided situations are carefully selected. Materials so constituted do form viable classroom materials. The best tryout centers for this project have been those where teachers had the benefit of guidance from a person who knew the rationale and operation of the activities.

Children in Aiyetoro, Nigeria, responded significantly better to oral instructions from their teachers after one year of Communication Activities than did their older companions, who had studied English for two years. Evidence indicates that taking children into early functioning use of the language can be made pedagogically useful.

D. Communication in the restricted sense used here is not enough by itself to simulate the range of situations in which oral language is commonly used. Songs, physical education activities, playlets and improvisations were developed and planned to illustrate other modes by which communicating language (as well as language that is phatic in nature and is not appropriate to presentation in programmed communication activities) may be presented in situations that simulate (as in the playlets) or parallel (as in the songs) out-of-classroom use of language.

E. Tryouts indicate empirically that silent reading can be started successfully at very early stages immediately after an oral presentation. (Silent reading was not tried without oral presentation and practice.) Differential response to increasingly complex segments was a basic feature of the design in the reading presentations. This work is being continued without benefit of project support except for limited experimentation and the development of a small set of materials for children, following upon completion of a program in cursive handwriting developed by the project.

G. The idea of reading, selecting, compiling and transmitting prepared messages for reading and responding by a recipient in situations requiring communication was added early in the course of the project. Materials of this type are unknown outside the project and very limited within. Findings are positive on the feasibility and work is being continued privately by project staff. Relative effectiveness is undetermined.

An intended part of the project from the first was preparation and experimentation with an approach to writing which incorporates purposeful communication requiring responses unpredictable except from the written message, which itself is unpredictable and develops out of the needs

of a given limited but not controlled situation. Experiment was limited to use of the oral communication activities with a substitution of written messages for oral messages. A degree of success is indicated parallel to that for oral communication activities but to make it maximally significant as a writing program, the need for separate dequencing is indicated.

H. The research initiated by the project to check into the possibility of determining the nature of curricular differences required by different cultures took the form of trying a single core set in a variety of cultural settings. Adverse

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comments from tryout centers were almost invariably on activities not clearly and simply operable. Where a given activity went badly in one area, it went badly elsewhere. The songs, on the other hand, were enthusiastically received at each tryout center. There was no adverse comment anywhere on the geometrical abstractions which were designed to represent "real" objects and which were made by the children themselves, using plastic pieces of various shapes. The only clearly identified cultural differences were such as the anticipated special difficulty in West Africa in distinguishing "bed" and "bird" in an early version of a communication activity that had been pointedly designed to include this problem as a check on differential feedback.

J. Tryouts for TESL Project materials have been held in Japan, New Guinea, Peru, Ethiopia and Nigeria, as well as in Saipan, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, New Mexico, Texas, Mississippi and New York. About one-third of the advisers for the project were British, and consultation with them was somewhat more frequent than with their American counterparts. The only serious threat to

ready international cooperation came from within one of the major institutions sponsoring the project, where it was stated that the international aspects of the project might jeopardize years of careful work in cultivating a relationship with Africa by a senior and highly respected professor in the institution. Empirically it is determined that international cooperation is possible in materials development. Evidence includes

consultation and correspondence with British colleagues and extensive international collaboration in tryouts, as outlined in the project quarterly reports.

There are vast gaps in the materials field and many interesting and potentially rewarding areas have been opened up to be imaginatively developed. Specific identification of a few of these is a contribution.