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WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE PEACE CORPS.

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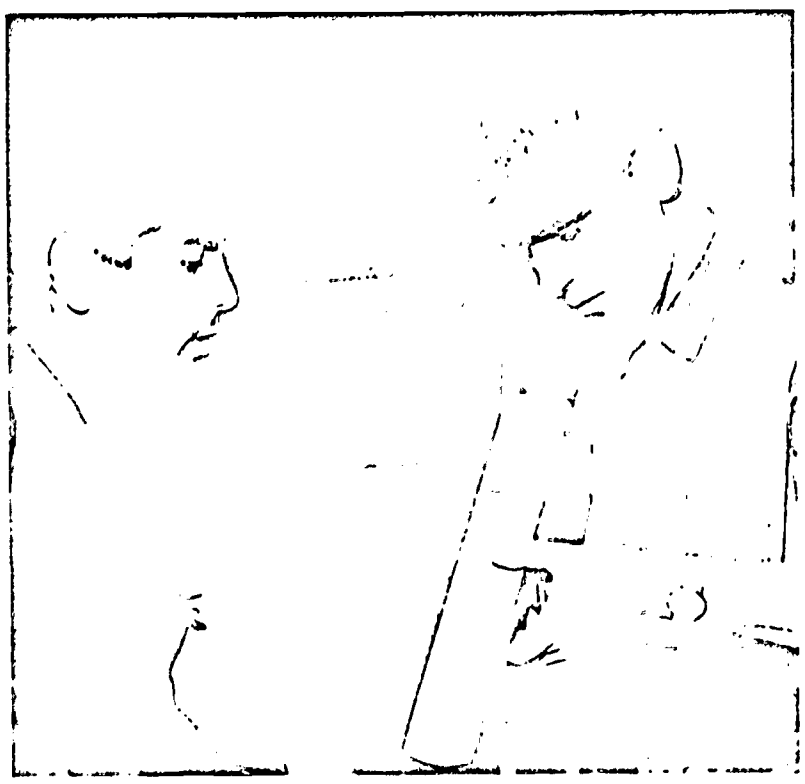
SINCE THE STRENGTH OF THE PEACE CORPS EFFORT DEPENDS ON THE VOLUNTEERS' ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE IN THE LANGUAGE SPOKEN IN THE HOST COUNTRY, INTENSIVE LANGUAGE COURSES, PATTERNED AFTER THOSE OF THE NATIONAL DEFENSE AND FOREIGN SERVICE INSTITUTES, OCCUPY 30 TO 40 PERCENT OF THE AVERAGE 8-TO 10-WEEK PRELIMINARY TRAINING PERIOD. BASED ON GENERAL PEACE CORPS GUIDELINES, THESE AUDIOLINGUAL, CULTURE-ORIENTED INTENSIVE PROGRAMS, USING CLASSROOM PRESENTATION SUPPLEMENTED BY ACTIVE LABORATORY REINFORCEMENT AND GUIDED PRACTICE WITH NATIVE INFORMANTS, HAVE PRODUCED SPEAKERS WITH A RELIABLE WORKING KNOWLEDGE OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE. BECAUSE OF THE STUDENTS' STRONG MOTIVATION, AFTER A FEW MONTHS IN THE HOST COUNTRY, THIS ABILITY USUALLY HAS INCREASED TO A REASONABLE FLUENCY THAT PERMITS THE VOLUNTEERS TO CONDUCT CLASSES, LECTURE, AND CONVERSE COMPETENTLY WITH NATIVE SPEAKERS. FOR SOME OF THE 31 LANGUAGES TAUGHT, NEW TEACHING TECHNIQUES HAVE BEEN DEVISED. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "AUDIOVISUAL INSTRUCTION," VOLUME 7, NUMBER 9, NOVEMBER 1962, PAGES 638-641. (AB)

What Can We Learn from the Peace Corps?

George E. Smith



Peace Corps Volunteer Emery Tomor explains in native tongue how to use a plane at Malloco, Chile. Less than a year earlier he had his first Spanish lesson.

IN THE TINY VILLAGE of Chol Chol, about 750 kilometers south of Santiago, Chile, two tall, lanky, typically American young men are talking with a small group of farmers, explaining a new method of fertilizing a field. The men are gathered around listening intently and nodding occasionally as one of the Americans speaks to them in smoothly flowing Spanish, with the soft accent of the Chilean countryman. A farmer, obviously an Indian, interrupts to ask a question in his own ancient language, and he is quickly answered in the *Mapuche* dialect by the second of the two "gringos."

Less than a year ago these two young men were sitting in a classroom listening to their first lesson in a foreign language. Today they are carrying on their effective work in a second and even a third tongue. All over the world this same scene and similar scenes are being repeated under hundreds of different circumstances. Thousands of people, from a nation long considered to be tongue-tied in matters of speaking anything but English, are studying in highly intensive courses to learn dozens of new languages. Some of these languages have never been taught in the United States.

These people are now teaching in schools in Nigeria and the Philippine Islands, building bridges in Pakistan, working in medical laboratories in Malaya, building roads in Tanganyika, and initiating community development in Chile. All work in the languages of their host countries. This is the result of the Peace Corps language program.

From the beginning, the Peace Corps officials realized the importance of having the Volunteer trained in the language of the country to which he was to be assigned. The strength and value of the whole effort depends upon person-to-person communication between the Volunteer and his host country counterparts. Thus the heaviest stress of the Volunteer training was placed on foreign language. In most programs today, foreign language study and practice occupies 30 to 40 percent of the trainees' time.

The basic training in the United States is usually from eight to ten weeks, with a normal training week consisting of sixty scheduled hours. This means ten hours a day, six days a week. In general the trend has been to follow many of the same teaching techniques developed in NDEA foreign language institutes and the older "language houses" found on some of our college campuses. That is, in addition to the formal class hours, native informants live with the trainees and eat with them in small groups where all are required to

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When he wrote this article, the author was associate professor of foreign languages at Purdue University on leave to the Peace Corps. He directed the training of the Chile III group at the University and served as assistant director of the Chile I group. He has since become director of the Indiana Language Program, a new project made possible by a Ford Foundation grant to Indiana University. He has also been a language supervisor under Title III of NDEA.

No time is wasted in the intensive Peace Corps language program. Here Sonia Araneda (right center) conducts Spanish conversation during lunch.

use the target language. Every effort is made to see that trainees use the language whenever possible.

A typical training program is that of the Chile III group carried on at Purdue University. During the course of a ten-hour day there are three-and-one-half hours of more or less formal language instruction and two hours of free conversation at meals. In addition, some informal practice sessions are carried on during study hours, and language laboratory facilities are used by most trainees on a voluntary basis in the "spare" time occasionally available.

The daily three-and-one-half class hours are broken up as follows: one hour of structural analysis and pattern practice, using skilled and experienced Purdue University professors; one 60-minute period of language laboratory practice, using visual aids as well as the usual magnetic tapes; and one-and-one-half hours of conversation with native informants. Five of the seven informants are Chileans, one is Cuban, and the other is an Argentine. The conversation groups are ordinarily made up of no more than six or seven trainees, and in order to provide a variety of experience the informants change groups at regular intervals. This can be done since all groups follow the same loosely structured outline of material, and the informants coordinate their work by holding weekly meetings.

The audiovisual materials consist of short 16 mm color films coordinated with a series of carefully designed exercises and drill tapes. These materials are used as part of the language laboratory practice sessions and help also to provide instruction in the culture of the future host country.

Although the diversified backgrounds of the trainees make it necessary to initiate the majority of the technical and academic courses in English, the last weeks of the course on Chilean culture and the course on cooperatives and credit unions are carried on in Spanish. Even the process of preparing a set of books for a credit union is done on forms written in Spanish.

In general the results of the language training have been very gratifying. All language instructors concerned with the projects I have visited indicate that they have never had a group of people who made such rapid progress. This is probably due to various factors such as intensity and competence of training, and the "new key" methodology being used; but the largest single factor which helps to bring about the excellent results is probably the intensive personal motivation, the Volunteer's knowledge that everything depends on his ability to master the target language.

There have been cases, of course, where certain individuals were unable to make the necessarily rapid strides. In some extreme instances trainees have been "selected out" for failure to meet the language requirement, but the overwhelming majority have finished the eight-to-ten-week course with a reliable working knowledge of the foreign language. By the end of several months in the host country this ability has increased to reasonable fluency. From my own experience in Chile, I can report that at the end of six months overseas the Volunteers were able to conduct classes, lecture, and join in all conversations with their counterparts in thoroughly competent Chilean.

Occasionally there have been some humorous sidelights to the early experience of our Volunteers. In one case the mere substitution of the masculine article

el for the feminine *la* caused complete consternation and bewilderment among a group of Chilean farmers who understood a Volunteer to say that an egg was better than a Pope, when he meant better than a potato. This same Volunteer later was the cause of much merriment when he mistook the rural expression *camarada* (wife) for camera and generously offered to lend his to a farmer.

The Peace Corps has outlined in general terms the kind of language training it requires in a bulletin prepared by the training division. Following is a statement of the overall objectives:

The objective of this course is to enable the Volunteer to communicate effectively with natives of the host country in their own language. . . . The course must provide intensive audio-lingual training in the target language, using the level of educated native speakers in casual conversation.

Vocabulary will be selected for its appropriateness to the specific Peace Corps assignment in the host country.

Language training will reflect the customs of the host country, enabling the Volunteer to perform acceptably while avoiding embarrassing or taboo situations. It will allow the Volunteer to communicate intelligibly on the social, political, and cultural subjects pertaining to the United States.

The Peace Corps also suggests clearly which techniques are to be stressed and which are to be avoided. It is evident from the wording of the bulletin that the latest thinking in foreign language teaching methodology has found its way into the training division. Here we quote the section on "methods and materials."

1. *Classroom Methods.* The classroom will be used to introduce grammatical features *inductively*, with a minimal use of written symbols, conventional or phonetic. Repetitive and four-phase pattern drills will be tried briefly in class in preparation for laboratory drills, so that the instructor may make necessary corrections and preclude errors of procedure in the laboratory. Following laboratory practice, the classroom will serve as a place in which grammatical patterns may be put to use simulating situations to be encountered in the host country. Conversation practice, situation practice, and (later) public address practice will be part of the normal classroom work. Orientation in the classroom will be primarily audio-lingual, and written drills (including translations, verb conjugations, and graphic devices) will be avoided.

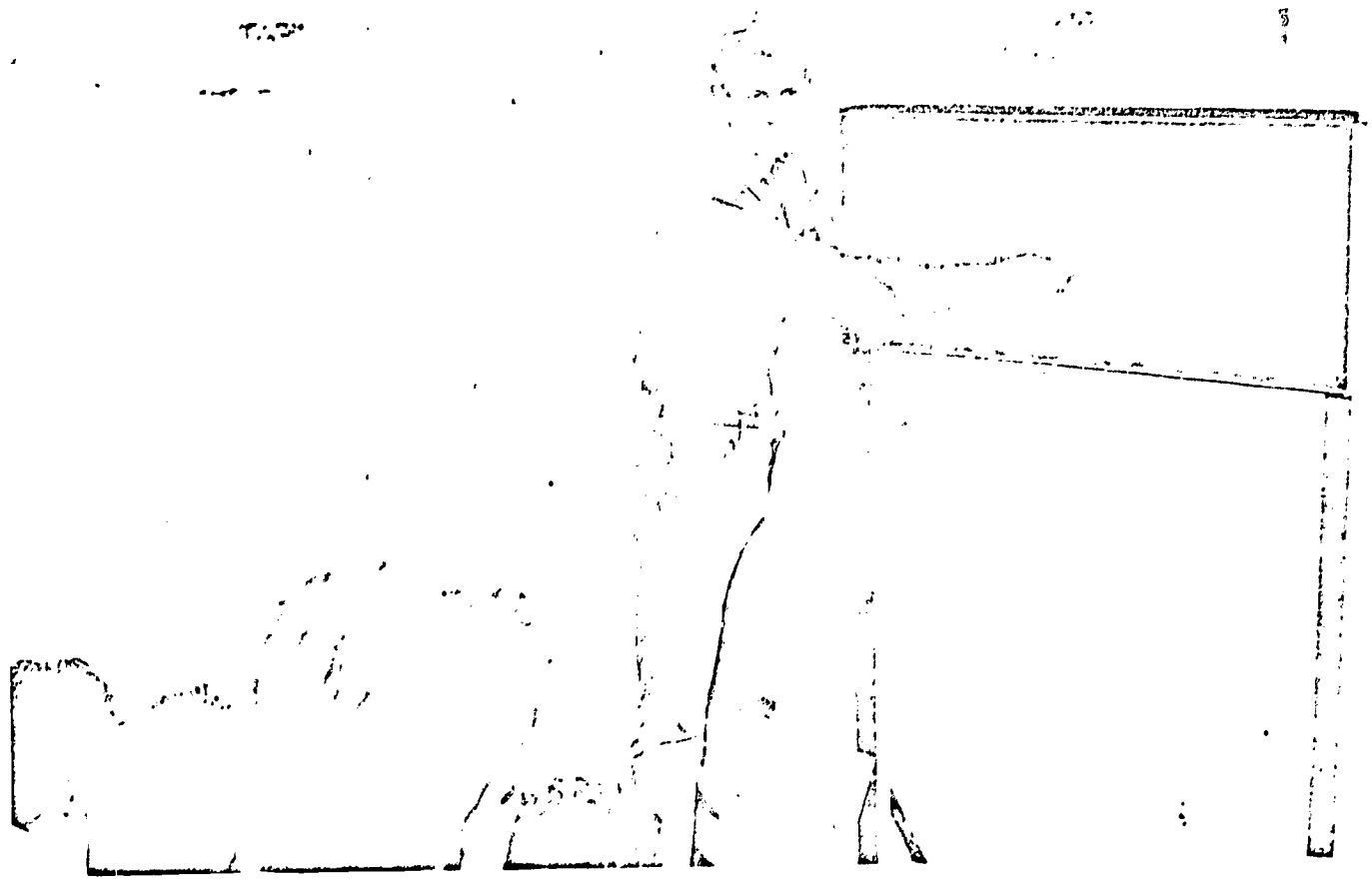
Native speakers of the target language will be provided in addition to the classroom instructor to help set up typical situations for language practice, and to criticize student performance.

The language laboratory also plays an important part in language training. It is suggested that for every hour of classroom work there be a corresponding hour of laboratory drill.

The taped material must provide drills which avoid simple repetition (except in the first few hours of pronunciation drill); they should invariably be of the four-phase type, providing a variety of native speakers. The stimulus and correct response should have the relationship of conversational context, rather than mere repetition.

Mere "passive" listening is to be avoided at all times in the stages of grammatical study. The student must be required to respond to every stimulus, and to compare his response with the correct one. A recording-type laboratory is most desirable, for this purpose as well as for testing and checking purposes. Pattern drills on grammatical features should consist of at least eight examples of each detail; only one change at a time is to be made in conformity with good laboratory practices. Laboratory equipment should consist of monitoring facilities at the teacher's console, and student booths having fully-equipped recording tape decks (dual channel). The student should be able to receive a broadcast of any one of several programs from the console at the teacher's discretion; he should be able to record this program on the master track of his tape recorder, and record his own responses on a separate track. The master track should be unerasable from the student position, but the student should be able to erase

Language laboratories at Purdue University are utilized by the Peace Corps training project.



"More language training" is plea of Peace Corpsmen reporting back from field. Here Purdue-trained Jim Coleman explains art of volleyball to group of Chileans.

and record his portion of the tape as often as he chooses.

The laboratory work must be scheduled as part of the language course. The instructor must be present in the laboratory, and must grade each student several times during the period. Books will not ordinarily be used in the laboratory unless required by the nature of the drill; and any drills which tend to increase the student's reliance on printed symbols must be avoided.

In accordance with Peace Corps suggestions, the main types of instruction are the following: (a) sound discrimination, hearing, and production; (b) inductive grammar in the classroom; (c) intensive pattern practice in the laboratory; (d) conversation and situation practice in the classroom; (e) transition to writing through dictation practice in laboratory, using student comparison with written transcription sheets; (f) aural comprehension practice in the laboratory by use of the resume method (student hears material and writes a detailed summary).

However, these are, in general, only guide lines, and many courses have required much original thinking in order to solve unusual problems. One such problem was encountered in the language teaching for the Somali project where the target language is one which has no alphabet and thus has never been written down. Here is a list of languages which have been taught at Peace Corps Training Centers:

SPANISH
FRENCH
PORTUGUESE
TAGALOG (Philippines)
MALAY (Malaya, Sarawak and Borneo)
THAI
GREEK (For Cyprus)
TURKISH (For Cyprus as well as Turkey)
QUECHUA (Peru—Andean Dialect)
AMHARIC (Ethiopia)
SOMALI
SINGHALESE (Ceylon)
TAMIL (Ceylon)
NEPALI
FARSI/PERSIAN (Iran and Afghanistan)
MENDE (Sierra Leone)
HINDI
GUJERATI (India)
PUNJABI (Pakistan)
PUSHTO (Pakistan)
SINDI (Pakistan)
BENGALI (Pakistan)
URDU (West Pakistan)
KRIO (Sierra Leone)
TEMNE (Sierra Leone)
TWI (Ghana)
IBO (Nigeria)
HAUSA (Nigeria)
YORUBA (Nigeria)
SWAHILI
EWE (Togo)

To date a total of 31 languages have been taught, and it is apparent that many more will be added to the list during the course of this second year of operation now well under way. For some of these languages, new techniques of teaching are being tried, and it is hoped that from the experiments more effective methods may evolve. However, the majority of the training courses employ modifications of the NDEA institute approach or the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) procedure.

Here are some of the conclusions reached by Peace Corps training directors:

- Total language learning still takes time. In spite of the intensity of training and the highest motivation, there is no short cut.
- Under an intensive, well taught program the Volunteer can usually get a working knowledge of the target language in eight to ten weeks. (In some cases more time is required to master complex sound systems, structure patterns, or alphabets.)
- The teaching of grammar inductively has again proved effective. Volunteers in the Chile I Project with no previous training in Spanish were taught no grammar *per se*. In most cases they quickly caught up with the advanced group in audio-lingual skills—they have learned reading and writing skills largely on their own.

If there is one overwhelming message sent back to the training centers from the Volunteers in the field, it is: "More language training." Without communication facility, the most intelligent Volunteer would be reduced to the state of an ineffectual bystander.