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Appraised objectively in this article is a 3-year research project that involved experimentation with audiolingual methods in teaching standard English in Freshman English classes at Chaflin College in South Carolina to Negro students who spoke a nonstandard dialect. Prior to a discussion of the effectiveness of using spelling instruction to teach proper pronunciation, enunciation, and grammar, there is a brief explanation of six sample items included on a diagnostic test developed to be administered before the course began. Also contained in this evaluation of instructional techniques is a commentary on teacher attitudes and student motivation. (AF)

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A DEVELOPMENTAL ENGLISH PROGRAM FOR THE CULTURALLY DISADVANTAGED

General consensus of professional leaders has recognized and research has confirmed that the English profession has left much to be desired. Teachers of English who deal with culturally disadvantaged students at the college or high school level have more problems than others since cultural and educational disadvantages of the child tend to accumulate throughout the early formative years. These teachers have to provide not only the kind of language experiences which the home and the community have failed to provide, but also to teach whatever the child has not effectively learned in the lower grades. To complicate the problem, most teachers received the same kind of pre-service training as their counterparts who teach students from more prestigious homes. Often we feel puzzled and helpless when we are faced with the students' firmly established dialectal habits, their seemingly insurmountable difficulty in reading and writing, and our own inability to motivate them to learn. In a situation like this, we are likely to adopt one of two extreme attitudes. The first is defeatism, to brand the task as hopeless and to give up too readily and too soon. The other extreme is complacency. "Well, the kids have come a long way," or "They have had enough difficult time; why make it more difficult for them at school? Let them pass. Give them a good grade so that they can have a sense of achievement." When we do this, we have not realized that the trouble with these students is not in them but in our attitudes towards them. How can we expect them to learn when we do not believe that they can learn? How can they expect to amount to anything when nobody ever expects them to amount to anything? We may not be able to change the low level of aspiration in the home or the discriminatory attitude of a traditionally segregated community, but we teachers must not be guilty of the same attitude in the classroom.

We often talk of motivation as essential to any form of learning. The best motivation for any student, however, is to know that he can succeed with reasonable effort. If the teacher can assume a realistic and flexible attitude through a broad understanding of the problems of the culturally disadvantaged students and can provide a variety of meaningful language experiences that present both a challenge and a method to meet the challenge, the students can be led to do much more than they have ever expected to accomplish. The key to the whole matter, I believe, is faith in the ability of the students.

With this belief, I have attempted to develop a program for my Negro students in the Freshman English classes. For this program I have no new theory to offer, but I have drawn upon research findings of expert linguists, to whom I am greatly indebted. I have also drawn on my ten years of experience teaching Negro youth in the Deep South. In particular, I have been benefited by the opportunity of directing a three-year research project at Claflin College in South Carolina from 1961 to 1964, with the support of the U. S. Office of Education. This research project — an experiment with the pattern-practice techniques in teaching standard English to students who speak a nonstandard dialect — has been reported to the English profession several times. While the research was in progress, much attention was necessarily given to the research design, language laboratory procedures, evaluation methods and statistical analysis. Now that the project has been concluded for almost a year, perhaps I can discuss more objectively the methods which seemed to work best

with our students and those which must be used with caution.

The basic assumption behind this research is that a student who speaks a nonstandard dialect learns standard English like a second language. This includes attaining new perception and establishing new speech habits essential to the use of the target language. The tape recorder is used to give him ample opportunity to hear, imitate, and repeat after a suitable model until one significant usage pattern after another is firmly grounded, and the student can use all the basic patterns of the target language with ease.

This procedure, effective in many foreign language programs, did not work as well as expected with Negro college students. Fascinated by the possibilities of machine teaching, we had not taken many factors into account. Some students resented the remedial nature of the program. Others, as is usual with the culturally disadvantaged, lack the habit of concentration required for the intensive practice. Some could not endure the loneliness in the individual recording booths. Since all the students understood standard English without difficulty, training in sound perception was at first neglected until we found that some students simply could not hear the difference between John *loves* to read and John *love* to read or between the teacher *asked* me and the teacher *ax* me.

This is not to say that the language laboratory had no effect on the students' mastery of standard English, or that the techniques of second-language learning could not be successfully applied. Those students who were alert, mature, and capable of self-direction were greatly benefited in enunciation and in usage, and the majority of the class showed definite progress. The fact remains, however, that for the culturally disadvantaged students who need constant reassurance, individual attention from the teacher is still the most powerful motivation and inducement to learning. In other words, learning must first take place in the classroom, under the close supervision of the teacher. The machine is a valuable aid to re-enforce new learning, but if learning has not taken place first, then practice over the tape recorder can do more harm than good by re-enforcing undesirable habits.

These observations suggested the desirability of trying out pattern practice techniques in the regular classroom, integrating all phases of language activities and organizing a developmental rather than a remedial program: I shall attempt here to describe for you a program which I have subsequently developed and which I am still using in my Freshman English classes.

Paradoxically, even though pattern practice, as used by Professor Fries and many others, applies primarily to oral drills on grammatical patterns, I choose to begin my program with spelling. In addition to the fact that spelling is often neglected by the school and needs serious attention, there are many reasons for placing it first. First, it is the area of least resistance. For the culturally disadvantaged students, the habits of writing are not as firmly established as the habits of speech. Many agree that they cannot write or cannot spell, but few want to admit that they cannot talk. Second, thanks to the radio and television, most students come to college with a fairly good speaking vocabulary. They know and can use many words with ease, although they do not know how to spell them. Thus, to begin with these words is to begin where the students are. Third, to learn to transform these spoken words into written symbols, the students must learn the relationship between sounds and spelling. To alert them to the sounds of words that they normally take for granted is a logical starting point for ear training, which is essential to the perception of differences between standard English and their dialect.

Prior to spelling instruction, the students first take a diagnostic test which I have worked out. The test includes, for example:

1. words such as *children, find, prepare, sportsman* to determine a student's ability to hear all the sounds of a word in proper sequence;
2. words such as *believe, receive, freight, beginning, regrettable, dictionaries* to determine a student's ability to apply spelling rules;
3. words like *misspell, roommate* to test a student's knowledge of simple word-formation;
4. words like *magnificent, significant, sufficient* to test a student's ability to distinguish three different sounds rep-

resented by the same letter, in this case the letter *c*, and to recognize the relationship between these sounds and the spelling patterns that represent them;

5. words like *autumn, Wednesday, thought* to test his awareness that some letters in English spelling are not sounded;
6. long words with five or more syllables, such as *characteristic, individualism* to test his ability to perceive the number of syllables in a word.

Test results and diagnoses of weaknesses are discussed fully with the student. From this test and subsequent practices, students learn to become alert to sounds. They learn to recognize the number of syllables in a word, the stressed syllable and its vowel, the beginning and ending sounds of each syllable or word, and the grammatical endings. They also learn the relationship between certain sounds and certain spelling patterns, including the silent letter patterns in English spelling.

Simultaneously, pronunciation and enunciation are taught to eliminate (1) clearly substandard pronunciation such as *dis, dat* for *this, that;* (2) mispronunciations which frequently indicate inability to sound out the written symbols; (3) lip laziness — often a result of either poor habits or a lack of self-confidence, both of which are equally detrimental to other phases of language learning. The pronunciation of final consonant clusters also receives considerable attention, since many students fail to pronounce an *s* or *ed* ending simply because it becomes a part of a difficult cluster. Once a student is shown how to de-emphasize the middle consonant and pay a little more attention to the end of the cluster, a little practice can help him pronounce such words as *asked*, or *consists* with more confidence and ease.

From inflectional endings one can quite logically move on to derivative endings. Endings like *-ment, -ness, -ion, -ity*, and many others are associated with nouns; endings like *-fy* as in *glorify, dignify; -ate* as in *activate, necessitate*, and others are associated with verbs; endings like *-ous, -al, -ful, -ive* are the signs of adjectives; while the *-ly* ending, added to an adjective, is the sign of the adverb. At this stage, spelling practices include not separate, unrelated words but entire groups or cognate words. For example, the students are asked to spell the word *action* and indicate that it is a noun, then go on to spell *active, activity, activate, activation*, indicating the part of speech of each word by means of the derivative ending. Or they can start with the word *continue* and go on to spell *continuous, continuously, continuity, continuative, continuation.* These exercises, frequently leading from familiar words to unfamiliar ones, help students perceive relationships not only between words but also between different aspects of language such as spelling, word formation, and various parts of speech. This perception of relationships will in turn pave the way for further grammar instruction and vocabulary growth.

The observation of sounds can also lead to the study of grammar. The use of stress patterns in English to indicate different parts of speech, such as per*mit* (v.) and *per*mit (n.), di*gest* (v.) and *di*gest (n.), is familiar to all of us. To help students use the patterns of intonation and juncture, which they know intuitively, to determine the completeness of a sentence has been repeatedly suggested by expert teachers in their published works, although this simple technique does not seem to have been widely applied in the teaching of writing. I use a similar method in teaching the spelling of *to* and *too*, which many students confuse. Taken out of context, both words are pronounced the same. Used in a sentence, however, they never sound alike. *Too*, as an adverb, is stressed and the vowel is given full value; *to*, as a preposition or sign of the infinitive, is not stressed and the vowel is reduced to a schwa. Thus we say: "It is *too* cold *to* go *to* swim." When a student, after some practice, learns that he can rely on his ears to distinguish between the two, his confusion vanishes. Further, the student can begin to grasp the idea of the function words and the content words in English grammar. The content words, including nouns, verbs, and adjectives and adverbs, are normally stressed in a sentence, whereas the function words, words that denote grammatical relationships rather than subject content, including prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, articles, auxiliaries, and the like, are normally unstressed.

By now a foundation should have been

laid for the discussion of sentence structure. In this connection I use a simplified approach based on the works of Fries, Roberts, Francis, to name just a few. Discussion begins with the most frequently used word combination: noun + verb + noun where the second noun in the string is optional. From there, three basic sentence patterns can be distinguished:

1. John saw a doctor. (subject + transitive verb + direct object, which may be preceded by an indirect object.)
2. John is a doctor. (subject + linking verb + predicate nominative, which may be replaced by a predicate adjective.)
3. John came. (subject + intransitive verb, which may or may not be followed by an adverb.)

Whether grammar should be taught in a composition or communication class has long been a subject of controversy. In my opinion, a more or less systematic approach to the structure of English has many advantages. First, college students, or even high school students, have enough intellectual ability to understand how their language operates to convey meaning, if its structure is presented in a realistic and meaningful way. Second, a simple systematic discussion of sentence structure provides a frame of reference for teacher and students to discuss the correctness or effectiveness of sentences as well as the proper use of punctuation in students' writing. Third, particularly for students with a local dialect, proper understanding of grammatical patterns in standard English can make pattern practice more meaningful and less monotonous. When each student is called upon to contribute a sentence to illustrate a pattern, the same pattern will have been repeated at least twenty times in different sentences, and the entire class is doing pattern practice in a natural way. They grasp the idea of a subject as a noun or equivalent occupying a position before the verb, the idea of an object as a noun or equivalent occupying a position after the verb, unless the verb is a linking verb and the second noun (the predicate noun) is closely related to the first noun (the subject). They learn subject-verb agreement when nouns and pronouns, both singular and plural, are used in the subject position, or when the subject is compounded and the parts linked together by certain connectives. They learn to associate different pronoun case forms with different positions in these patterns. If an adverb of time is attached to a pattern, the students can practice various verb tenses in simple, progressive, or perfect form. Finally, by contrasting a linking verb followed by a predicate adjective with an intransitive verb followed by an adverb, students can practice patterns like "John is happy" and "John sings happily." Each time a new pattern or a new variation is introduced, each student must give at least one example to demonstrate his understanding. All students are asked to listen carefully to other students' examples, to point out any deviation from the pattern in question, and to write down as many examples as they can remember to reënforce the retention of the newly acquired structure. Once the idea of the basic sentence structure is firmly grasped, the students will learn then to expand and transform sentence patterns.

Some people believe that teaching the culturally disadvantaged must begin with enriching their experiences. Experiences, however, either derived from actual life or gained vicariously through reading, must be verbalized and conceptualized if they are to be meaningful; and verbalization and conceptualization belong in the domain of the English class. When a student learns to observe, compare, and analyze facts – whether facts of language or experiences of life – when he learns the intricate relationships between words and words, between words and ideas, and between ideas and ideas, he will see that the decision is his to make, limited only by his alertness to possibilities and consequences. He will be able to go on his own, to break away from the shackle of his disadvantaged background, and to see that life is but a continual process of seeing possibilities and making choices.

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