Oral exercises are classified by type and form. Types include repetition, substitution, conversion, pyramid, and combinations. Dialogue, games, play acting, conversation, and repetition are cited as forms. Sample exercises are offered as illustrations. (AF)

Oral Exercises: Their Type and Form

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IN OUR conscientious attempts to apply modern techniques of language teaching, we are likely to find ourselves lost in what appears to be an amazingly countless number of possible kinds of oral exercises. Everyone who writes on the subject seems to have a new one to contribute to the list—at least the name given to the exercise has not appeared before or if the name is familiar, the principle is one to which another author may have applied another label.

By delving beneath the labels one can sort out the same from the different and find the attributes common to various exercises whether or not they carry similar names. Sometimes the label applies to the principle on which the exercise was constructed, sometimes to the form that principle assumes, and sometimes to a classroom technique that might be applied to any and all exercises. Categorized in this manner, the variety available to the teacher is within his conscious control, ever at hand for the demands of his impromptu—or not so impromptu—use.

The more successful the exercise, the less necessity there is for instructions on how to work it. The practical result of adherence to this dictum is that the sooner the student understands what he is to do, the sooner he will be able to get on with the business of practicing the language he is learning.

To this end, then, the teacher sets a pattern in the first few items of the exercise—a pattern of grammar and procedure—that will continue through the rest of it. At the English Language Institute of the University of Michigan three examples are usually found to be sufficient to enable the average pupil to understand what is expected of him and to make it possible for him to continue on his own without elaborate directions from the teacher. The challenge to be met by the teacher is to provide practice of the same grammar patterns without repeating the same sentence twice. Variety in the choice of grammar forms and vocabulary items is the key to success.

If the student has trouble, it can be for one of two reasons (or both, of course): either the pattern of the exercise is not clearly defined, or the grammar construction is beyond his level of comprehension and manipulating ability. A somewhat mechanical adjustment of the pattern of the exercise, obviously, is the remedy in the first case; but in the second, the teacher will have to find just where the gap in the student's knowledge lies and go back to that point with appropriate comment and exercises. Ideally, the student is never asked to say what he does not understand.

Oral exercises can be classified according to the following *types:* I. Repetition; II. Substitution; III. Conversion; IV. Pyramid; V. Combinations of the other four.

The *forms* such exercises may take are: I. Dialogue; II. Games; III. Play Acting; IV. Conversation based on reading material, an oral account, a visual aid, or on shared experiences; V. Repetition presented as "Exploded Drill."

By using illustrative examples from a collection of sample exercises written by Wanda Chrobak,[1] these categories can be defined more precisely.

TYPES

I. *Repetition:* The class simply repeats what the

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[1] Miss Chrobak is a teacher at the Henry Ford Junior College in Dearborn, Michigan, and has for many years been a member of the English Language Institute's summer staff. The exercises that appear throughout this paper are typical of those used at the Institute. Some have been culled from Miss Chrobak's manuscript notes and are included with her permission.

teacher says. In reality, this is a technique for handling any exercise, but it is sometimes useful to deliberately construct exercises to be handled in this way; for instance, in presenting examples of new grammar patterns, or in introducing basic sentences to be manipulated when working with picture stimuli.

II. *Substitution:* As the name indicates, certain portions of the pattern remain constant while others are changed by substituting either known or prompted items. For instance:

Teacher: the door
Student: Please open the door.
Teacher: your book
Student: Please open your book.

The amount of substitution required can range from a single portion of the sentence to any number of its parts—depending on the facility of the student. For instance:

Teacher: the door
Student: Please open the door.
Teacher: close
Student: Please close the door.
Teacher: Let's
Student: Let's close the door.

The prompted item can be conveyed either through the auditory or visual senses.

Substitution frame: *can*
We can put our things there.
    leave
    prepare
    arrange
    take

III. *Conversion:* If the term is defined as applicable to any exercise where the attention is on changing the form of the teacher's utterance, then this category will include exercises which require nothing more than converting full forms into contractions:

Teacher: It is pleasant today.
Student: It's pleasant today.
Teacher: I have finished it.
Student: I've finished it.

It will certainly include such things as:

Teacher: Swimming is fun.
Student: It's fun to swim.

Teacher: I gave the book to her.
Student: I gave her the book.

And as long as the purpose of the exercise is to practice the change in grammar forms regardless of change in meaning, we can list:

Teacher: I go to school everyday.
Student: I went to school yesterday.

Teacher: I wanted to call you.
Student: I considered calling you.

As well as questions prompted by an answer—or vice versa:

Teacher: Mary went downtown.
Student: Where did Mary go?

Teacher: Yesterday.
Student: When did Mary go?

This type of exercise often appears with the label "Transformation" but since the term is currently being used for an analytical procedure on a more theoretical level, and since there is no way to predict just what "transformation" may eventually imply, it seems wisest to choose the equally suitable label "Conversion" for our present purpose.

What Patricia O'Connor calls "The Reversed Role Device"[2] might be included here but like "Repetition" it is essentially a classroom technique. The student addresses himself to the teacher who either does the exercise as the student would be expected to, or takes advantage of "having the floor" to alter the exercise pattern.

Conversion Exercises (Affirmative to negative)

Teacher: I can do it.
Student: I can't do it.
Teacher: I could learn it.
Student: I couldn't learn it.
Teacher: We should do it.
Student: We shouldn't do it.

Echo Exercises

Divide the class into two sections:

Teacher	Section I	Section II
He can.	He can't.	Can he?
He will.	He won't	Will he?
They can learn.	They can't learn.	Can they learn?

Eliciting Questions

Eliciting questions with *why:*

Teacher: He goes for shoes.
Student: Why does he go?
Teacher: They are going for dinner.
Student: Why are they going?
Teacher: He comes here in order to eat.
Student: Why does he come here?

[2] Patricia O'Connor, *Modern Foreign Languages in High School: Pre-reading Instruction.* Washington, D. C.: U. S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, OE-27000, Bulletin 1960, No. 9, 1962, p. 26.

Frame Sentence

Adjust a frame sentence to a specific pattern to be drilled:

This store has suits.

Teacher: usually
Student: This store usually has suits.
Teacher: all of the time
Student: This store has suits all of the time.
Teacher: last week
Student: This store had suits last week.
Teacher: next week
Student: This store will have suits next week.

IV. *Pyramid* (or perhaps *Inverted Pyramid*): Starting with a short sentence, the student by means of prompted additional units builds it into a longer and longer one. For instance:

Teacher: That book is mine
Student: That book is mine.
Teacher: red
Student: That red book is mine.
Teacher: on the table
Student: That red book on the table is mine.

Teacher: The man is at the door.
Student: The man is at the door.
Teacher: who called
Student: The man who called is at the door.

Completion Exercises or Building a Pyramid

The teacher can give one example of the exercise. The student usually understands very quickly. Then the teacher gives only the first sentence and the students repeat the four statements in unison.

> The lesson is long.
> The lesson is too long.
> The lesson is too long for him.
> The lesson is too long for him to learn.

Contrastive and Continuative Statements

The teacher gives the opening sentence and the students repeat and supply the continuation.

Teacher: John swims.
Student: Mary does too.
Teacher: John doesn't swim,
Student: Mary doesn't either.
Teacher: The girls work and the boys
Student: do too.
Teacher: The girls don't work but the boys
Student: do.

V. *Combinations of the various types* are of course possible and, needless to say, desirable.

Make a statement about a pair of ideas and attach a question to each statement:

Teacher: Shakespeare . . . Hamlet
Student: Shakespeare wrote Hamlet, didn't he?
Student B: Yes, he did.

(Note: When the speaker thinks that he knows the answer to his question, he should use 2–4 intonation. When the questioner is not sure of the answer, he may use rising intonation on the attached question.)

> Dante . . . Divine Comedy
> summer . . . warm (is)
> Michelangelo . . . musician

There seem, then, to be five basic types of exercises available to the teacher. No matter what label is applied, the exercise itself seems to utilize one of the principles just described.

FORMS

The forms that these basic types may take, however, are varied and limited only by the teacher's ingenuity. The goal, of course, is a natural utterance in a natural setting—that is, an utterance that a native speaker might make when prompted either by another utterance, an object, or a situation. But the practice necessary for leading the student towards this goal must be carefully guided and controlled. The greater the facility the student has acquired in manipulating the devices of the language (that is, its sounds and the characteristic arrangement of them) the freer the teacher can be in setting them in meaningful situations; and the greater the variety of situations, the better. Settings created by pictures are the simplest to handle.

Let us now consider some of the forms exercises may take:

I. *Dialogue:* Useful at even the beginning stages is a rudimentary type of dialogue in which the students themselves (following the pattern set by the teacher) give the stimulus for the next response to their neighbor after having first responded to the other neighbor's cue.

Teacher: I ate at the dormitory. Where did *you* eat?
Student A: I ate at home. Where did *you* eat?
Student B: I ate at the cafeteria. Where did *you* eat?

Eventually, dialogue can be instituted in which the teacher can ask questions to prompt any grammar form already within the student's grasp—that is, requiring him to recall material

learned days and weeks before without the controlled type of prompting indicated in the sample just given.

Dialogue

Exercise I (Please repeat line by line after the teacher)

A. Will it be difficult to learn?
B. No, it's easy to learn, and it's fun, too.

Exercise II (Please listen to the examples)

Will it be difficult to learn?
hard
easy
interesting

Exercise III (Please listen to the examples)

It's easy to learn
interesting
difficult
hard

Exercise IV (Please listen to the examples)

It's easy to learn, and it's fun too.
to play
to sing
to dance
to speak English

Now the complete dialogue is repeated by students. The teacher can say: Let's suppose that Mary can't sing. What is the probable conversation? Two students repeat the dialogue. "Questions in Chain Sequence" might very well be included here:

a) The students ask the question in chain sequence, giving long or short answers as directed by the teacher.
   Can they put their things there?
   Yes, they can.
   Yes, they can put their things there.
b) Questions and answers: The teacher asks the questions. The students answer as indicated.
   Teacher: Can he see them?
   Students: Yes, he can. He can see them.

II. *Games.* These can be as simple as "Guess what is in my hand" to practice vocabulary items and simple grammar construction of "Is it a ——— ?", to "Twenty Questions" which allows for the introduction of a variety of verbal constructions; or even something as involved as a "What's my line?" type of panel. A game is particularly effective in teaching to tell the time, especially if it is worked out around a clock with movable hands.

A Guessing Game

What do you use to draw a straight line? You draw a straight line with a ruler.
How do you draw a circle? With a compass.
How do you open a can? With a can opener.

III. *Play Acting.* Either rehearsed or completely "free" with all the possible grades of controlled utterances in between these extremes, play acting or role playing is extremely useful as a means of pattern drill.

IV. *Conversation based on reading material, an oral account, a visual aid, or shared experiences* (*trips to local monuments and institutions, perhaps*) can, if adroitly handled, result in a stimulating type of language practice. Possible question cues were neatly schematized by Earl W. Stevick.[3]

Patterning from Context

Richard said, "I'm hungry. Let's eat." John said, "We must make a fire first. Then we must cook the meat. I'll make the fire and you bring some water for the coffee." The boys cooked the dinner and ate it. The picnic was a great success.

Teacher: Could the boys eat their dinner immediately after swimming?
Student: No, they couldn't.
Teacher: What did John say?
Student: We must make the fire. Then we must cook the meat.

Extracting Further Patterns from Context

Teacher: We need a fire.
Student: We must make a fire.
Teacher: We need water
Student: We must get water.
Teacher: We need wood.
Student: We must find wood.

Reconstructing portions of a given story—patterns based on content of a story

1. What could the boys see when they arrived at the lake?
2. Tell about getting the wood.
3. Tell about swimming.
4. Tell about preparing dinner.

Patterning from a Drawing

The teacher places the following drawing on the board: There are three stores on this street.

[3] Earl W. Stevick, "'Technemes' and the Rhythm of Class Activity," *Language Learning*, Vol. IX, Nos. 3–4 (1959), pp. 45–51.

One store is a drug store. Another store is a shoe store, and the other store is a grocery store.

Have the students repeat your explanation about the three stores and add a clothing store, etc.

First student: One store is a drug store.
Second student: Another store is a shoe store.
Third student: And the other store is a grocery store.

(This exercise can be repeated with books, students, etc. There are 13 books in the room. Two books are in English. Four other books are in German. Four other books are in Italian and the other three books are in Spanish.)

Paul's Schedule:

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 7:00  Breakfast
 7:30  Laundry
 8:00–11:00  Class
11:15  Haircut
12:00  Lunch
 1:00–2:30  Shopping
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From the above schedule several items can be drilled: Who? When? Where? How long? What? After, before, etc. Echo exercise. Substitution exercises. Reconstructing a story. It serves as a summary of many drill exercises.

Comprehension drill with limited patterns and vocabulary—for advanced classes

Read a selection about famous people or any interesting subject and elicit specific patterns presented in the selection. Ask questions for comprehension. The teacher may have to re-write the selection to fit the grammatical structures to be emphasized.

While reading the teacher can place on the board leading words and later the students are asked to build utterances around the words or expression the teacher has chosen for the selection.

V. *Repetition* can be dressed up into what has been called by Edward Stack: "Exploded Drill."[4] This is a recorded speech adjusted to provide blank spaces at intervals long enough for the student to repeat what he has just heard.

Thus, through the maze of labels fixed to language teaching exercises, the principles involved emerge few and clear. Whether it be "Proportional Drill",[5] "Parallel Substitution Drill,"[6] "Expansion Exercise,"[7] "Open-end Mutation Drill," "Fixed Increment Drill,"[8] or any of the names used by Miss Chrobak, examination reveals the exercises themselves to be manipulation of a relatively limited number of types and forms. With these clearly in mind, the teacher is free to apply—and of course, should be encouraged to apply—whatever camouflaging label he chooses. Variety—however achieved—should be the language teacher's goal and is unquestionably a measure of his art.

[4] Edward M. Stack, *The Language Laboratory and Modern Language Teaching,* New York: Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 45.

[5] Richard Gunter, "Proportional Drill," *Language Learning,* Vol. X, Nos. 3–4 (1960), 123–134.

[6] Term used by Harold King in a paper given at the Michigan Linguistic Society meeting at Wayne State University, November 22, 1958.

[7] Term used by Waldo Sweet in a hand-out for "A Demonstration of A Structural Approach to Latin."

[8] Stack, *op. cit.,* pp. 16–18, 40–42.