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ABSTRACT

Beginning with a brief review of the growth of the audiolingual method of foreign language instruction in the United States of America, this paper examines implications and lessons drawn from an educational experiment in language instruction known as the Pennsylvania Report. The text of a memorandum to school administrators in Pennsylvania by the Superintendent of Public Instruction discusses the project in which 104 beginning French and German classes from 66 participating school districts in the two-year educational experiment attempted to determine the effectiveness of the audiolingual method of language instruction. Achievement of students trained in the audiolingual method and the traditional method is compared and other factors bearing on achievement are commented on. Teacher qualifications, the use of the language laboratory, and commonly accepted theories of language instruction are critically examined. (RL)

PHILIP D. Smith, Jr.
delivered at the
Penn. State University,
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A STUDY IN DISESTABLISHMENTARIANISM -- LESSONS AND IMPLICATIONS FROM THE PENNSYLVANIA REPORT

By 1964 the audio-lingual crusade had been won. Emerging from insights into linguistics and psychology of the 1940's and 1950's, the "new key" approach to foreign language had become the accepted system of second language teaching in the United States. As the Nevada State Supervisor I was a minor baronet. All of the secondary schools in my state had language laboratories -- all but one remote hold-out had adopted materials reflecting the new approach.

Unfortunately, with success the zealot becomes the establishment. By 1968 the audio-lingual approach was called the American approach.

Such wide-spread acceptance had not come without words of caution, not only from those we "Young Turks" regarded as conservative hide-bound traditionalists but from such respected scholars and thinkers as David Ausubel and John Carroll. As late as 1966 Nelson Brooks characterized the audio-lingual movement as "an act of faith."

There was little or no research to support the assumptions on which we acted. The initial assessment of the approach by Agard and Dunkel in 1948 was rather subjective and the evaluation pre-dated adequate tests that were not available until the development of the tape recorder. The Scherer-Wertheimer study in Colorado was hailed as proving that the audio-lingual approach was superior to a more traditional one. When I became knowledgable enough in research to read the report itself I found that such

enthusiastic support for the method was not at all to be found in the data presented by the authors. So much was obviously wrong with the Keating Report that none of us ever bothered to find out if some good might have been derived from it.

In 1963 the Keating Report stimulated the state of Pennsylvania to undertake a large-scale assessment of the audio-lingual approach as it was being implemented in the public schools of the Commonwealth. It is not my purpose here today to detail to you the history of the study. Permit me, however, to review for you briefly the main points as they were disseminated last year to school superintendents throughout the state of Pennsylvania.

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Adapted from SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR'S MEMORANDUM #154

Subject: Foreign Language Research May 12, 1969

To: Chief School Administrators

From: David H. Kurtzman, Superintendent of Public Instruction

The Pennsylvania Department of Education in cooperation with West Chester State College has completed a statewide four-year foreign language study which is having an impact both nationally and internationally. The study challenges the effectiveness of both the audiolingual teaching approach and the language laboratory as they are implemented in the typical secondary school situation in Pennsylvania. The experiment involved 104 beginning French and German classes from 66 participating school districts for the first year. Fifty classes continued in the project for the second year of the study.

Experimental classes were taught utilizing an updated "traditional", "audiolingual," and a composite "audiolingual with grammar" approaches. All audiolingual classrooms were equipped with a tape recorder for daily use. In addition, randomly selected classes spent two half-hour periods each week in a listen-respond or listen-record language laboratory.

A select group of nationally known foreign language educators defined the contrasting teaching strategies and identified representative texts for each. Teachers were trained in their assigned method, extensively tested, and observed for adherence to their assigned approach. Instructional materials were limited to widely accepted commercially published programs.

Almost 2,200 students completed 28 pre- and post-measures during the first year. Pre-experimental measures included intelligence, foreign language aptitude, student opinion and achievement. Final measures for all students included both the "traditional" 1939/41 Cooperative Tests of reading, vocabulary, and grammar as well as the contemporary Modern Language Association Cooperative Classroom Tests of listening and reading. A ten percent random sample of each class took additional tests on speaking and writing skills.

One thousand, one hundred (1,100) of the same students were observed as they continued the experiment through French and German II. In addition, an independent seven hundred (700) student, twenty-eight (28) class, replication was undertaken to confirm the first year findings. Procedures, materials and testing remained essentially the same.

The extensive statistical analyses were carried out under the supervision of a consultant from the University of Maryland. Results of the two-year experimental phase include:

1. "Traditional classes" achieved significantly better than "audiolingual" classes on measures of grammar, vocabulary, and reading and writing. No significant differences occurred in listen-

ing and speaking. No advantage was found for "beefing" up an audiolingual approach with formal grammar summations.

2. Neither the audio-active or audio-active-record language laboratory systems had any discernible effect on foreign language achievement in either listening or speaking when the laboratory was used twice a week for half a class period.
3. Teacher proficiency scores did not correlate with student achievement scores after one, two, or even four years of daily classroom contact.

Continuation of the study through the third and fourth years of language study confirmed the results favoring the "traditional" approach.

Three separate reports of the study were submitted to the U.S. Office of Education and are now available to the profession in a single volume.

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The Pennsylvania Reports have been"cussed and discussed" and will probably continue to be so for some time. It has been most gratifying to me personally to read John Carroll's statement in the December 1969 Foreign Language Annals that he considers the findings of the study in regard to teaching methodologies to be valid.

It is not my purpose here today to defend the Pennsylvania Studies but rather to point out to you some of the lessons that I have learned while being involved with this project. Some of them apply to the profession as a whole while others have some direct implications for you in the classroom.

Our professional knowledge lag has been very forcefully brought home to me. The first of the Pennsylvania Reports was disseminated only to concerned professionals for 6 months before it was made public, with absolutely no reaction from the profession despite this advanced warning that findings were unfavorable to the audiolingual approach. After acceptance by the United States Office of Education the results of the Pennsylvania Studies were made public. It took only a few weeks for the public press to widely disseminate the results; it took from one to two years for our professional journals to do so. When reaction finally did come from the profession it was both subjective and inaccurate. The State Supervisors of Foreign Language were informed by the reviewer they had appointed that the Pennsylvania Study had not included tests of speaking. This in fact was not so, as the text and report plainly indicated. An authority on language laboratories pointed out in 1968 that laboratory usage twice a week was "the minimum effective." In 1969, in reaction to the Pennsyl - vania Study, this same educator referred to language laboratories two times per week as "sabotage." The second lesson I learned from the study, then, was that "Hell hath no fury like an audio-lingualist scorned."

I have come to the conclusion that even the best of us play what Jakobovits calls the "data game." In our professional dealings supportive research is alluded to but not always clearly cited. Studies which support our own hypotheses are accepted while contrary studies are either omitted or rationalized as being invalid. A study done with two or three classes in a laboratory school which supports our particular bias is valid but one with a hundred classes in a real school setting is not.

It is evident that more is read into research -- including the Pennsylvania Studies -- than should be. It is also clear that we as foreign language educators need a greater consumer sophistication and a greater availability of research findings. Much lip service is paid to research but research has very little effect on the actual classroom practice.

An almost heart-rending lesson in this was given to me by the Pennsylvania schools that participated in the project. When they were informed that the use of the language laboratory twice a week in their own school situation did not enhance achievement, they did not modify their curriculum pattern in any way. Follow-up studies indicated that they continued to schedule language laboratory practice in a way that was known to be ineffective.

Another lesson that I have learned about us as a profession is that we have a tendency to assume "protective coloration." I was greatly surprised at the large number of people who approached me after the Study was released to be sure that I knew that they had had their reservations about the audio-lingual approach all along. I cannot place myself in this category. In 1964 I was convinced that the audio-lingual approach was the only way to effectively teach foreign languages. I was shocked when the computer results of the Pennsylvania Study were given to me. I was so shocked that I refused to accept them and checked them through several times on different computers. This has spurred me to reassess my own position until I have finally reached the point where I realize that method is probably the least important variable in classroom instruction.

I see a number of implications for direct application at the classroom level. The first is that the finding of great variance among classes within the same general teaching strategy often overshadows differences between teaching strategies. This is to say that perhaps 30 to 40% of foreign language achievement can be directly attributed to inherent student or teacher factors such as aptitude, intelligence, personality, and motivation. Carroll has pointed that our studies indicate that only 3 to 5% of foreign language achievement may be attributed to one method or another. There is a strong implication here for creating materials that are flexible, providing for a variety of learning styles among individual students. The second implication is for placement of students in advanced courses by testing rather than assuming that teachers at an earlier level are achieving roughly the same goals.

The Modern Language Association Cooperative Classroom Tests which were used in our study provoked Valette (MLJ, Dec. 1969) to do a closer analysis of their content. She has shown that the MLA tests favor certain textbooks. The implication for this is that placement tests need to be course and text specific, validated on students within your particular school system. Another implication is that generalized proficiency tests should be criterion referenced, aiming at specific language behaviors, rather than as general tests of achievement. Text developers have the obligation to provide a graded series of serial measurements of specific behaviors for the teachers utilizing their materials. To date only one widely used foreign language text, Voix et Image, has undertaken such an ambitious project. Teachers utilizing this program receive -- via computer analysis -- specific insights into the mastery or weakness of individual students on very specific linguistic items.

One finding of the Pennsylvania Studies was that classroom observation was more effective in judging teacher ability than the MLA Teacher Proficiency Test. John Carroll has stated that measurement of teacher ability "has successfully eluded several generations of educational researchers." It has eluded us in Pennsylvania, too. Since the publication of the study, Pennsylvania, for 6 years the only state in the nation to require the MLA Proficiency Test for teacher certification, has removed this obligation from the teachers of the Commonwealth.

There are strong implications in this finding for the improvement of student teaching by frequent observation, and for the certification of teachers by seeking the judgment of qualified observers rather than asking for test scores and courses completed.

The finding of the Pennsylvania Study that there are differences between the audio-lingual texts that are reflected in student achievement implies that the text which provides a greater variety of student involvement is the one that will teach the most.

The widely-publicized finding that the language laboratory used twice a week during class time was not effective simply means that the language laboratory must be used as an extension of instructional time -- the primary reason that it has been successful at the college and university level. The sine qua non that the language laboratory should only be used to practice what has already been presented in class is also doubtful in light of the remarkable success of the Foreign Service Institute in programming courses with a "pre-study" component presented by tape. We really have no research to prove that the language laboratory should not be used before class rather than afterward.

Lastly, the findings of the Pennsylvania Study are simply one of a number that are now challenging the approach to language learning based on Skinnerian stimulus-response psychology and the Fries-Brooks-Lado tagmemic -inductive grammar approach. It simply is not as effective as an explicit cognitive approach with considerably more content and greater intellectual challenge.

As I stated, the Pennsylvania Studies are only one of a number which now point in this direction. I would refer you to the recent work of Robert Politzer at Stanford and of Chastain at Purdue. Those of you who have been able to compare the revised ALM with the original model will find a 180° turn from the inductive generalization-after-pattern-drill to the explicit statement-followed-by-practice.

At the conclusion of the Pennsylvania Studies I was asked by the Center for Curriculum Development in Philadelphia to direct a 2-year project in the development of instructional materials for the training of Peace Corps Volunteers. We were almost given carte blanche to create the best possible instructional package. These were intended to be the first official Peace Corps texts and to serve as prototypes for future texts in other languages. We are currently at the half-way phase in producing exemplary texts in Brazilian Portuguese, French in the African context, and Korean. Here I was given an opportunity to fully implement what I had learned from the Pennsylvania Studies.

Briefly, our approach has been this: 1) a systems approach to language learning with a precise definition of expected terminal linguistic behaviors at each level; 2) the elimination of the unimportant by

first establishing this precise definition and then examining each language to determine the most essential features. This is based on computer analyses now available in many languages. We are currently undertaking a computer analysis of spoken Korean. 3) We are concentrating on language for communication -- with less emphasis on the native-like accent and more stress on individual communication at early stages. Yes, even communication with error because we cannot frustrate the learner by months of much talking but no saying.

4) We are depending upon the interface of visuals between languages to communicate both semantic and structural meaning. We will not hesitate at times to use English if it is more efficient or more economical. Our materials contain explicit grammar in both traditional and transformational terms. This is one of the few features actually specified as required by Peace Corps in our contract.

We are stressing an inherent knowledge of the deep structure of the language and examining current linguistic thought; not thought that was available to the profession five to ten years ago. Our grammar will be described for interested linguists in transformational-generative notation. While we are still debating as to the best method -- or even the advisability -- of introducing the student to transformational grammar, it certainly colors the thinking of our production team. We are also investigating the new concept of case grammar advanced by Filmore and seeking to reconcile it with what we can observe students doing as they attempt to communicate with an imperfect knowledge of the language. It may be a better description of what we actually do when we try to string a new utterance together in a still-unfamiliar tongue.

Our materials will contain specialized tests, have specialized course-specific teacher training, and provide for continued evaluation and immediate revision.

Our Korean materials finish a two-week pre-test at Fairleigh-Dickinson University today; Brazilian materials begin a six-week trial in the state of Sao Paulo Monday; the French materials are scheduled for trial at the Peace Corps Training Center in the Virgin Islands this spring. When finally accepted by Peace Corps these courses will be available to the public. We think that we will have the first good Portuguese course at the secondary level and think that a French course in an African context may be considerably more relevant to some of our urban centers than the traditional concentration on Continental French culture.

May I close with one note of caution. This past summer I was interviewed by a graduate student at Temple University who was writing the typical paper in an Education course. He had chosen as his topic the Pennsylvania Foreign Language Research Project and had obtained a copy of the first report from the University library. I asked if he had available to him the second report and pointed out that the third report was at that time being mailed to interested professionals. This man responded that he did not have time during a short summer course to write a paper on all of the Reports and he would be satisfied with simply examining the first. I was appalled.

Please do not either accept or reject research until you have read it all. Don't let anyone tell you that the Pennsylvania Study says this unless he can give you chapter and verse; and don't you tell anybody else that it says that unless you can give the citation. Do not take from context as one critic did, beginning a quotation from page 27, putting in the tradi-

tional 3 dots, and concluding the quotation with page 129. That's a great deal of liberty to take with 3 dots.

Much professional reaction to the Pennsylvania Studies has been, "The Pennsylvania Studies do not say this or that." I would like to point out that they do say a great deal and that what they do say is that we can never be satisfied, we can never stop improving, and we can never reach the point where we are beyond challenge.