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ABSTRACT

An experimental first-year college German course offered at the University of Texas at Austin emphasized communication, with a complementary de-emphasis on morphologically correct forms in spoken or written production. A modification of the Total Physical Response method was used to orient the students, and at four weeks the emphasis was shifted to the primary objective of reading comprehension. Standardized reading and listening comprehension test scores for the group indicated that the students performed above the national norms; student motivation, attrition, and course preregistration rates were found to have improved significantly. The program has been extended into two third semester courses, one emphasizing aural comprehension and the other focusing on oral discussion of German literature. Research on the optimal schedule for introducing vocabulary and grammar concepts and for requiring production of morphologically correct forms in the first two semesters continues. Included in the text are a number of techniques and activities intended to help students understand a reading selectio... (MSE)

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The Role of Listening and Speaking in a Reading Program

Margaret Woodruff, 1978

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Many high school and college students today are accustomed to receiving most of their passive entertainment and even instruction from television, films, tapes, and records rather than from books. Most students seem to become bored more easily when working with readings in class than when engaging in oral communication or aural comprehension. Motivation and attention seem to be higher when oral communication or aural comprehension is a primary focus of the class.¹

Can we maintain student interest after reading becomes the main focus of a foreign language program? Novel and challenging communication-oriented oral/aural activities based on reading selections can be substituted for the exercises that usually accompany reading selections in a textbook: reading aloud, translation, summarizing of the story by answering a series of who/what/when/where questions, and grammar exercises. Will student reading comprehension be as high if this substitution is made, or must the teacher lower his demands for reading facility in order to maintain enthusiasm?

Retention of techniques that had elicited extensive student participation and attentiveness was found helpful in an experi-

¹The importance of a focus on communication, creativity, and personal meaningfulness and on combination of the four skills is stressed by Theodore Kalivoda and Robert Elkins in "Teaching as Facilitation and Management of Learning," pp. 61-96 in Foreign Language Education: A Reappraisal, vol. 4 of the ACTFL Review of Foreign Language Education (Skokie, Ill.: National Textbook Co., 1972).

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mental first-year German program at the University of Texas at Austin (U.T.).² Janet King^{Swaffar}, coordinator of the program, had suggested years before (when following an audiolingual approach) that audiolingual techniques be retained for the teaching of reading in the second, third, and fourth years.³ Now, coordinating an experimental program that resembled the direct method more than the audiolingual, grammar-translation, or cognitive code approaches, she again attempted to preserve the best features of the primarily oral/aural period to supplement and reinforce reading training.

The program was unusual primarily in its almost exclusive emphasis on communication, with a complementary deemphasis of demands for morphologically correct forms in spoken or written production. Speaking and writing practice did not involve repetition or mimicry, but always communication in a context that was clear to the class. The student's grade was not lowered by errors that did not interfere with communication. Though major errors were corrected tactfully, the student was encouraged to focus on learning to comprehend and communicate.⁴

The program began with student physical response to commands to demonstrate aural comprehension, in a U.T. modification of James Asher's "total physical response strategy." This strategy

² Described by Janet King^{Swaffar}, professor and coordinator of the lower-division German program at the University of Texas at Austin, in an unpublished paper, "Language for Communication."

³ Janet K. King, "The Use of Audiolingual Techniques in the Third- and Fourth-Year College Classroom," Foreign Language Annals 2, 2 (December 1968): 185-194; "A Reading Program for Realists," German Quarterly 42, 1 (January 1969): 65-80.

⁴ Freda M. Holley and Janet K. King, "Imitation and Correction in Foreign Language Learning," Modern Language Journal 55, 8 (December 1971): 494-498.

was chosen primarily for three reasons:

1. It stressed aural comprehension before speech production and communication before correctness, following what Asher points out as the natural sequence of first-language learning.
2. It facilitated conducting classes in the foreign language.
3. It had been shown to be effective in fostering motivation as well as in producing excellent comprehension skills.⁵

As Janet King^{Swaffar} wrote in an unpublished paper, "Language for Communication,"

Student speech production was avoided in the first two weeks. Thereafter students were encouraged to speak on a voluntary basis. Comprehension was tested through actual response to commands and answering "yes/no" or "possible/impossible" in response to a question posed by the instructor. Classroom objects and props were used extensively to promote a feeling of genuine communication in real-life situations. Relaxation exercises, a form of simple gymnastics coupled with yoga breathing and muscle relaxation, were introduced to alleviate the pressure students frequently object to in (foreign language classes)...Except for a brief (5-minute) question and answer period at the close of each hour, German was the exclusive language of instruction.

After four weeks of a version of the "total physical response strategy," the emphasis in the U.T. program shifted gradually toward its primary first-year objective, reading comprehension.⁶ The goal was to give students the techniques, structures, and vocabulary that they needed for rapid reading of unedited German texts for the main idea. Positive transfer from similar Eng-

⁵James J. Asher, "The Learning Strategy of the Total Physical Response: A Review," Modern Language Journal 50, 2 (Feb. 1966): 79-84; "The Total Physical Response to Second Language Learning," Modern Language Journal 53, 1 (Jan. 1969): 3-17; "Children's First Language as a Model for Second Language Learning," Modern Language Journal 56, 3 (Mar. 1972): 133-139; "Learning a Second Language Through Commands: The Second Field Test," Modern Language Journal 58, 1-2 (Jan.-Feb. 1974): 24-32.

⁶In "A New Reading," p. 170, Janet King, Freda M. Holley, and Betty N. Weber give reasons for choosing this objective. The reading strategies described in this paragraph and in the following pages are discussed in "A New Reading," particularly pp. 172-187. "A New Reading" is chapter 6 in Perspective: A New Freedom, vol. 7 of the ACTFL Review of Foreign Language Education (Skokie, Ill.: National Textbook Co., 1975).

lish vocabulary and structures was emphasized. Students were helped to improve or learn the skills needed for reading fluency in the native language as well as in the foreign language.

King, Holley and Weber describe these skills as:

prediction, inference, speed reading skills, differentiation among a variety of reading objectives such as searching for details and skimming for the gist of the material.⁷

However, English was not the language of the classroom. Classes were conducted entirely in German, so that the students would have as much practice as possible in obtaining meaning directly from German and thus learn to read German more rapidly.

The reading emphasis was accelerated as fast as possible, under the assumption that the more one reads, the better one reads. All four skills were practiced, however, for several reasons:

1. For variety, to keep students interested.
2. In order to reinforce reading training.
3. As the regular beginning course, this course included students with additional objectives, such as future German majors or students who planned a trip to Germany.

Oral/aural communication activities that were retained included:

1. Some physical response to commands and giving of commands.
2. Other oral communication practice, including casual conversation.
3. The use of drawing pictures and pantomiming to communicate or show understanding of word meanings.
4. Relaxation exercises with instructions in German, to relieve tension or help students wake up.

⁷"A New Reading," p. 211.

5. Repetitive games that provided for a kind of drill in a novel, playful or communicative context.

Aural communication practice was stressed for several reasons:

1. Understanding and receptive skills logically should precede practice and productive skills.
2. Skill in aural comprehension apparently transfers to other skills.⁸
3. Aural comprehension is important for communication as a tourist or student in Germany.
4. Aural comprehension is harder to study on one's own than the other skills.

Transition to Reading Emphasis

In the first four weeks of the U.T. program, meaning of verbs had been acted out in the classroom, and nouns had been pointed out (as objects or pictures) and manipulated. To make the transition to the printed word easier, students were given a reader (Deutsch 2000, Hueber Verlag) which included for each of the first fifteen chapters a picture illustrating every two or three sentences and a title picture. In addition, teachers tried to maintain variety and frequent change of activity in the lesson plans for the reading phase just as they had in the primarily oral/aural phase.

⁸Asher, "Learning a Second Language Through Commands."

The traditional series of who/what/when/where questions usually seems boring to students and in any case is not adequate as the sole activity based on a reading assignment. Students can be asked to cooperate with each other in telling the teacher the main idea of the story, as if the teacher hadn't read it. Then students should ask the teacher or their classmates questions as if they were trying to trip them up and find out whether they had really read the story. Thus the necessary questioning process, in order to verify basic comprehension, becomes more of a real act of communication, and motivation is improved.⁹

In the U.T. program a typical second-semester class oriented around a reading selection might begin with commands given by students to classmates to act out old vocabulary. Students would then pantomime the story for the day as the teacher read it aloud. Students would open their books and ask the teacher (in the foreign language) questions on the intensive reading paragraph. They would then jointly summarize the main ideas in the story. Working in pairs, one student would interview the other, who assumed the role of a character in the story, and then would report to the class on what this student said. Finally,

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Some of the techniques mentioned in this paragraph and in the following pages are discussed in "A New Reading," p. 206; and by Kenneth Goodman, "Psycholinguistic Universals in the Reading Process," Journal of Typographic Research 4 (1970), pp. 135-142; and by Nicolas Ferguson, "Some Aspects of the Reading Process," English Language Teaching Journal 28, 1 (Nov. 1973): 29-34.

the teacher would have students practice vocabulary, identifying word families (for example: scribe, script, description, inscription, manuscript, scripture, prescription); opposites; synonyms; or cognates of certain words selected from the story. At the end the teacher would go over the day's homework and give an example of how to do the next day's homework, then read parts of the next day's story aloud to the class or help the class practice previewing the story (predicting its general theme). After any 5-10 minute activity the teacher might stop and give commands for a relaxation exercise, particularly if students seemed frustrated or sleepy or bored, before changing activities. Students could give these commands to their classmates themselves, freeing the teacher to find materials for the next activity and thus facilitating smooth transitions.

The following list includes additional activities that can supplement and to some extent replace the traditional comprehension questions.

Helping students understand a reading selection:
Skills to practice

1. Inference: When students ask about unfamiliar words, they should usually be asked how much they can understand without knowing the exact meaning of the words, or told how to guess-- i.e., "Can you think of an English word or another FL word to which this word is related?" "Does this verb probably describe an action or a thought?" Students can be trained to make a general guess of word meaning by having them list all words in the story having to do with politics, school, etc., or all negative phrases describing the main character, etc., as regular exercises. They can be reminded of clues in morphology and word order as to whether the word is a noun, verb, adjective, etc. They can be reminded of the inference techniques that they used in understanding the teacher in all-FL instruction in the first 4 weeks of the semester. Cloze readings, in which every fifth word is left out, can be used to teach and test inference.
2. Main idea: Students should be trained to extract a nucleus from a paragraph by copying the subject and all parts of the verb phrase from each sentence into a column of fragmentary sentences and then looking to see if there are any objects or prepositional phrases that are essential to completing the meaning of any of these sentences. Or they can find 5 sentences in the story that they can use to tell the main idea and eliminate all unnecessary words in them. Or they can simply cross out all superfluous or redundant words or phrases in a recopied passage to arrive at a nuclear meaning. Or they can jot down a few key words or phrases by memory after each paragraph as they go along.
3. Prediction: Students should be told to preview the reading and predict its general nature by reading the title and subheads and introduction to the story, looking at the pictures, scanning the first and last paragraphs to get an idea of the main themes of the story. This idea will be confirmed or disproved after students read the story. They should also formulate one or two questions that they think the story will answer, before they start reading. Students should be trained to read for the answer to a specific question; this can be handled quickly if the teacher asks in which paragraph or on what page a certain question is answered.
4. Sequence: Students should be trained to extract the main sequence of events from a story by underlining all clues to time in the story and then listing the events (as phrases copied from the story) in chronological order. Later other details from the story can be fitted into the framework: "Does X do this before or after his father arrives?" Some stories lend themselves well to daily schedules or itineraries; in some, there are not enough discrete events at different times to make such an approach worthwhile.
5. Discrimination: Students should have considerable practice in identifying to which character an ambiguous pronoun refers; in identifying who is speaking, if that identification is not explicit in the story; in identifying whether a verb is in present, past, or future, in indicative or subjunctive; in identifying whether statements are dialog or narrative, if there are no quotation marks in the story. Such exercises are challenging because of the problem-solving element. These skills are also important for comprehension.

Class activities using vocabulary and structures from readings

1. The teacher can find magazine pictures or draw a series of stick-figure scenes on the blackboard to use as clues and tell the story by referring to these illustrations, then have students retell the story from these cues. Pictures can also be used to practice structures that are prominent in the story or appear for the first time in the story, such as relative clauses describing someone in the picture. Students can ask each other questions about the pictures.
2. Pantomiming as the teacher reads aloud, followed by improvised skits on the basis of the story, helps students internalize the vocabulary through action and increases student motivation and participation, as well as making the general action of the story clearer and more vivid for the students.
3. The teacher acts out verbs from the story and describes her actions in the present, then past tense. Students are then asked to describe her activities as she does them and after she does them and perhaps to guess what she is about to do (future tense). Then students act out verbs for student descriptions. This can be used for active and passive voice: one student says "He's throwing the ball," the other says "The ball is being thrown," always referring to classroom actions.
4. Students give each other commands using the verbs from the story, in pairs or in front of the class. The funnier, the better, since vocabulary practiced in a novel context is remembered better.
5. Personal questions on the basis of events or of vocabulary used in the story.
6. A mock interview in which, in pairs, students play a character from the story and a reporter or policeman interviewing him or perhaps a prospective employer. The reporter/policeman/employer then reports the results of the interview to the whole class.
7. A guessing game in which the class guesses a person or thing from the story on the basis of descriptions by teacher or student.
8. A chain drill--for example, your class has read a story about an inventor and needs to practice the past tense. Each student repeats the sentence "I'm a famous inventor and I invented the ___" and includes all inventions named by previous speakers plus a new one he contributes himself (perhaps from a list of twentieth-century inventions on the board). Thus the past tense endings and all new vocabulary relating to inventing are practiced at the same time, in a context of communication.
9. The traditional directed dialog, following the plot of the story the first time and perhaps deviating from it the second time: "Say that you bought the radio yesterday; ask him where he bought it; tell him to stop asking you questions."

Specific and interesting reading assignments help solve some of the motivation problems often associated with longer reading passages.¹⁰ Students should be challenged to comprehend the story, just as they were challenged to infer the meanings of words from the teacher's actions in the oral/aural period. Such a challenge need not demand facility in written foreign language composition that the students do not yet possess. Just as the students progressed from physical demonstration of their understanding of commands in the first two weeks of the U.T. program to manipulating the behavior of the teacher and classmates by giving commands themselves in the third and fourth weeks of the program, later in the first year students progressed from choosing phrases to copy into categories and drawing pictures (recognition activities) to production activities: summarizing articles in German magazines for an oral report to the class, writing a poem consisting of simple noun phrases describing their favorite activities and things (on the basis of a poem by Brecht), or describing their own homes and neighborhoods.

The typical reading assignments and test questions that follow emphasize recognition and selection of phrases in a story that answer a question or belong in one of two categories. They also involve some drawing and labeling of pictures to show comprehension. Test questions, like reading assignments, were designed to interest and challenge the student without demanding correct production of speech forms with which he was not sufficiently familiar. Wherever production as well as recognition and selection was involved, students were usually given credit for an answer if it communicated clearly. An exception is a task such as "Rewrite the paragraph in the first person/past tense."¹⁰ "A New Reading," pp. 179-181.

Typical reading assignments

Notes: These assignments are handed out to students as part of a syllabus written entirely in German, which also includes some supplementary readings and some all-German grammar handouts. The assignments are intended to give students a main focus or purpose in their reading. The difficulty of the texts increases somewhat as the semester progresses, but the complexity of the assignments doesn't change much. One additional assignment that occurs frequently is to list the infinitives of the verbs in an intensive reading passage selected from the story being read. This assignment is made in an attempt to train students to guess the infinitive from an inflected form so that they can look up words efficiently in the dictionary if necessary. Often students are asked to learn the principal parts of the verbs in the intensive reading. The assignments selected for this handout are the more interesting and creative assignments. Students read about one 2-3 page story each day, and later in the week or in the next week they have a review day for this story, instead of a new reading assignment. Thus a total of two days is spent on most stories. By simultaneous use of 1-paragraph intensive reading sections, from which students are to learn all new verbs, and 2-3 page extensive reading assignments, from which students are to find the main ideas and a few additional specific elements, students can be trained to differentiate between recall and recognition learning.

FIRST SEMESTER

- 7th week: Read the letter and make two lists: the things Barbara would like to do and the things Barbara has to do.
- 8th week: Read the letter and compare university life in the U.S. and in the Federal Republic of Germany. Example: (chart with phrases under the headings "U.S." and "Federal Republic" such as "Winter Semester Oct. 15-Feb. 15" and "Fall Semester Sept. 1-Dec. 15").
- 8th week: Review chapters 11 and 12 and make two lists, with time indications if possible: a. what Martina and Klaus do on Sunday; b. what Brigitte and Werner do on Sunday.
- 10th week: Draw the part of the city of Munich that is described in chapter 19. Label all buildings. Which buildings are in the north/south/east/west of the city?
- 11th week: What does the man in chapter 22 do in his free time? List his hobbies.

SECOND SEMESTER

- 1st week: Draw a large picture of the scene in the story "A Nice Guy" on a 8x11 sheet of paper. Label everything you can: time on the clock, furniture, people, etc. In class we will discuss the drawings. On the back of the drawing list all negative and all positive phrases used by family members to describe the "nice guy."
- 2nd week: Replace the personal pronoun sie (=she, they, you if capitalized) in the intensive reading assignment with "Monika," "Monika and her parents," "her parents," or "Aunt Else."
- 2nd week: List all phrases in the fable "Fish" that are typical for a traditional fable or fairy tale and all phrases that are not typical. Example: "the fisherman cried" - typical; "training astronauts" - not typical.

Typical reading assignments (continued)

3rd week: Draw 2 pictures of Herr Moritz: how he looked at the beginning of the story and at the end. Make 2 lists of simple sentences describing what is the same in the 2 pictures and what is different.

3rd week: What do the fish say? What does the fisherman say? Draw a comic strip with words, like "Peanuts," from their conversations.

5th week: Find 4 sentences or phrases in chapter I that have to do with the question "What is a modern person?" Which phrases are especially important? Which are trivial? (2 lists)

7th week: Read a short article in a German magazine, write a summary of 3-5 simple sentences, and tell the class about the article.

7th week: Write a poem with simple noun phrases instead of complete sentences, like Brecht's. Describe your favorite sights or activities (such as a glance out the window) instead of Brecht's.

11th week: Rewrite the portrait of the foreign worker in Germany (a third-person narrative) as a first-person narrative. Underline the nouns, articles, pronouns, adjectives, and verbs in the original text that you had to change.

12th week: Describe the place where you live, using today's story as a model. In what part of the city do you live? How does it look? Are the houses old or new? What kind of neighbors do you have? Is the furniture old-fashioned or modern?

13th week: Make 2 lists of sentences from the text: a. objective statements of events--e.g., "The painter climbed onto a scaffold." b. subjective comments by the narrator--e.g., "Such an absurd situation!"

Typical test questions (selected items only)

Notes:

1. Extensive use of 10-20 minute sight reading tests as a supplement to regular tests trains students for inference and rapid reading. Students are assigned to scan for specific details or to skim for general information within a time limit. This prevents the use of dictionaries (on which students may rely at home even though this is discouraged) and discourages translation.
2. The use of pictures, either drawn by the students, perhaps with labels, or matched by students with printed statements on the test, is an excellent way of testing comprehension of details before students are able to rephrase these details in FL sentences.
3. We deliberately tested primarily for reading comprehension rather than for production of correct forms.

FIRST SEMESTER

(Note: on the first two tests most instructions were given both in German and English; afterwards most instructions were given in German only.)

First test:

- Circle the command that corresponds with the picture.
- Identify the parts of the body (copy words from the list to label the picture).
- Watch the teacher. Write "yes" if he does what is stated, "no" if he does not.

Third test:

- Read the following sentences, then draw an appropriate picture.
- Identify the following foods as appetizer, main dish, drink, or dessert.
- Put the following sentences in chronological order (number from 1 to 10).
- Rewrite the following commands into statements and yes/no questions.
- Read the statement and circle (later: supply) the question word answered by the underlined part of the statement.

Fourth test:

- Look at the map, read the following directions, and circle the name of the building to which the directions lead you from the train station.

Fifth test:

- Read the statement (later: story) and circle the most appropriate answers to the questions (later: the main idea).
- Read the passage and underline all verbs in the past tense/ all commands/ all parts of the verb/ all accusative objects.

Sixth test:

- Read the story and write something that someone was supposed to do but didn't do; that someone wanted to do but didn't do; that someone did.

Seventh test:

- Read the story and draw the route of the journey described on the map. Use these symbols.
 - Identify which of the following sentences fits best into which conversation described below.
- (Note: sight reading tests were also given in the 1st semester.)

Typical test questions, continued

SECOND SEMESTER

First test:

Put everything that is said by someone in the reading passage between quotation marks.

Are the following statements made before or after Rita's announcement?

Third test:

What happened in this story? Retell it more simply, in 6 sentences, using the single-word cues given for each sentence.

Underline all verbs and rewrite the story in the present tense.

Fourth test:

Underline all forms of the verb werden and number them according to their use in the sentence: #1 for future tense auxiliary, #2 for passive voice auxiliary, #3 for the simple verb meaning "to become."

Fifth test:

To help summarize the main ideas of the story, fill in each blank in the summary with a word or phrase that answers the question word under the blank.

First sight reading:

List words from the text that have to do with railways and trains.

Copy the phrases from the text that answer the following questions.

Fourth sight reading:

Read the sentences and for each one copy out a sentence from the reading passage that means approximately the same.

Draw two pictures: the scene at the beginning and the scene at the end.

Sixth sight reading: see attached sheet "Unbekannter Text #6:
Ein Haus aus nichts als Müll gebaut.

Ein Haus aus nichts als Müll gebaut (II)

Situation: You are an environmental science major and a second-semester German student. You are a research assistant to Professor Karen Wehst, who cannot read German. Professor Wehst is interested primarily in the scarcity and prices of raw materials. She has just handed you this article, sent her by a colleague in Germany. She can't decide whether to have the article translated or not. She wants you to find out whether the article deals primarily with the scarcity and prices of raw materials or with the recycling of wastes as a possible solution to this problem. You have 20 minutes, so reading (skimming), not translation, is called for at this stage.

I. Read (skim) the article 3 times.

- A. The first time, circle each noun naming a specific kind of waste or garbage that can be recycled, such as Einwegflaschen (nonreturnable bottles).
- B. The second time, draw an asterisk (*) in the margin by each sentence that mentions natural raw materials or their scarcity or prices.
- C. The third time, underline each sentence about recycling or recycled waste materials.

(Be sure to do part I; it is counted in the scoring of the test.)

II. After reading the article 3 times, answer this question:

Should this article be translated for Professor Wehst? (Remember, she is interested primarily in the scarcity and prices of raw materials.)

Yes _____ No _____

Comment (optional): _____

Evaluation of the Program

Modern Language Association Cooperative Foreign Language Test reading and listening comprehension scores indicate that in these skills U.T. students in the experimental program performed at levels above the national norms. At the end of their first semester, taking a test designed for the end of two semesters, students scored at the 45th percentile in listening comprehension and between the 26th and 31st percentiles in reading. At the end of their second semester, their reading comprehension at the 68th percentile had almost caught up with their listening comprehension at the 70th percentile. At the end of the first semester 59%, at the end of the second semester 78% of the students felt that they could grasp the main idea of a reading passage most of the time.¹¹ It seems possible that aural skills transfer to some extent to reading comprehension, though the relative and absolute improvement in reading comprehension is undoubtedly due in part to the increase in amount read and in class time spent on reading in the second semester.

Moreover, student motivation and the attrition rate improved considerably when the experimental program was introduced. Many students expressed to their instructors their enthusiasm for this more personal and communication-oriented approach. This enthusiasm was also reflected in student responses to a university-wide course-instructor survey. The course rating rose from an average score to above-average and the instructor rating from slightly above average to a score between above-average and excellent in a comparison of first-semester courses in the old and

¹¹ Swaffar, Janet King, "Language for Communication."

the new program. For the second-semester course the increase in ratings was also significant. Moreover, between 76% and 84% of first- and second-semester students indicated on a questionnaire that the course gave them a feeling for contrasts and similarities in German and American culture and increased their interest in Germany and the German language. The percentage of students registering for the second semester was 72%, whereas in the previous year only 55% of the first-semester students continued with German.¹²

The University of Texas has extended this experimental program into two different experimental third-semester courses. One emphasizes aural comprehension: listening to lectures and presentations in German about German culture, daily life, and customs, and handing in on the next class day notes summarizing the presentation. The other, a literature course, stresses oral discussion in German. Students meet every other week for one of the three weekly class hours, in small interest groups, to discuss extensive outside reading of German magazines, novels, or whatever the group has chosen. A third alternative is a long-established conversation course. With regard to experimental courses in both the first and second year, U.T. is still experimenting with the optimal schedule for rate of introduction of vocabulary and of grammar concepts, and for requirements of production of morphologically correct forms.

¹² Swaffar, Janet King, "Language for Communication," and statistical analyses from the University of Texas Measurement and Evaluation Center.

Conclusion

For motivational purposes, more than for the purpose of following what Asher ("Children's First Language") suggests is the natural sequence of language learning, extensive class work with aural comprehension and playful use of a foreign language, as in the games and communication activities described above, seems to be indicated for beginning students even after they have begun extensive reading of unrelated texts. Such play and stress on aural comprehension seem to foster reading comprehension skills superior to those attained in programs in which the principal student activities based on readings offer few challenges to the imagination or intellect. Additional factors in the reading program described above that may have been crucial for its success are systematic work on reading skills and novel homework assignments and test questions that were designed to capture student interest.

SEQUENCE FOR WORKING WITH TEXTS

A. SIGHT READINGS

1. TEACHER READS QUESTIONS ALOUD, STUDENTS FOLLOW ON COPIES.
2. STUDENTS SKIM TEXT FOR ANSWERS WITHIN TIME LIMIT.
3. IF TIME REMAINS, STUDENTS REREAD TEXT TO VERIFY ANSWERS, UNDERSTAND MORE.

B. READINGS IN REGULAR PROGRAM
(EVEN BAD TEXTS CAN BE USED WELL)TEXTS MUST BE PREVIEWED.

TEACHER LEADS STUDENTS THROUGH PREVIEW, FOCUSING ON AN ORGANIZING IDEA WITH WHICH TO APPROACH THE TEXT.

- EITHER: 1. TEACHER ACTS OUT MAIN ACTION OF TEXT, ACCOMPANIED BY BRIEF NARRATION. OR TEACHER TELLS STUDENTS MAIN IDEA IN 2-5 SENTENCES. THEN TEACHER GIVES STUDENTS A QUESTION TO WHICH THEY MUST FIND THE ANSWER BY THE NEXT DAY--FOR EXAMPLE, HOW WAS THE ATMOSPHERE AT ANN'S HOUSE: FRIENDLY OR UNFRIENDLY? WHICH CHARACTERS ARE THE CENTER OF ATTENTION IN THIS STORY? IF CLASS TIME ALLOWS, STUDENTS THEN FOLLOW IN TEXTS AS TEACHER READS ENTIRE TEXT OR PARAGRAPH CHOSEN FOR INTENSIVE READING ALOUD.
- OR: 2. STUDENTS ARE INVOLVED IN FORMULATING THE QUESTION TO WHICH THEY SHOULD FIND THE ANSWER. THEIR ATTENTION IS CALLED TO THE TITLE, PICTURES, FIRST AND LAST SENTENCES OR PARAGRAPHS, MARGINAL NOTES AND INTRODUCTION. THEY PREDICT WHAT QUESTION THIS TEXT WILL ANSWER AND WHAT KIND OF TEXT IT IS--NARRATIVE OR DESCRIPTIVE? ABSTRACT OR CONCRETE? HUMOROUS? SURREAL? NEWS STORY? PAST, PRESENT OR TIMELESS EVENTS? IF CLASS TIME ALLOWS, STUDENTS THEN FOLLOW IN TEXTS AS TEACHER READS ENTIRE TEXT OR PARAGRAPH CHOSEN FOR INTENSIVE READING ALOUD.

TEXTS MUST BE READ MORE THAN ONCE.HOMEWORK MUST INVOLVE PROBLEM SOLVING.

1. REREADING FOR DIFFERENT PURPOSES IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT. STUDENTS READ TEXT AT HOME, ALOUD IF POSSIBLE, 3 TIMES--FIRST RAPIDLY FOR MAIN IDEA, SECOND JOTTING DOWN ESSENTIAL WORDS AND PHRASES THAT THEY UNDERSTAND, THEN AGAIN FOR MAIN IDEA, THIS TIME MARKING IMPORTANT SENTENCES WHOSE MEANING IS STILL UNCLEAR. THEN STUDENTS DO ONE OF THE PROBLEM-SOLVING HOMEWORK EXERCISES DESCRIBED ON ANOTHER HANDOUT. IF IT IS UNDESIRABLE TO ASSIGN HOMEWORK, STUDENTS ARE GIVEN CLASS TIME FOR THIS STAGE IN THE SEQUENCE.
2. NEXT DAY TEACHER ASKS IF ANYONE CAN IDENTIFY SENTENCES OR LINES IN THE TEXT WHICH REFLECT THE MAIN IDEA OR THE ANSWERS TO THE PREDICTIVE QUESTIONS FORMULATED ON THE DAY BEFORE. FINDING

THESE INVOLVES EVALUATIVE SKILLS. SEQUENCE IN COMPLEXITY OF PRODUCTION SKILLS EXPECTED IN STUDENT FORMULATION OF MAIN IDEA, DEPENDING ON STAGE IN SEMESTER--

- A. IDENTIFY MAIN IDEA--UNDERLINE SENTENCES IN TEXT OR CHOOSE FROM MULTIPLE SENTENCES PROVIDED BY TEACHER; READ THEM ALOUD.
- B. AS A RECALL EXERCISE, PRODUCE MAIN IDEA IN ONE WORD OR PHRASE (BEING ABLE TO POINT TO PLACE IN TEXT AS EVIDENCE FOR THIS).
- C. AS A RECOMBINATION EXERCISE, REDUCE SENTENCES THEY HAVE IDENTIFIED AS CONTAINING MAIN IDEA TO NUCLEAR FORM (GIVE THEM INCREASINGLY HARD SENTENCES WITH WHICH TO DO THIS).
- D. AS A FIRST STAGE IN WRITTEN SENTENCE GENERATION, WRITE SUMMARY OF TEXT AFTER TEACHER HAS INTRODUCED IT.
- E. WRITE SUMMARY OF SIGHT READING.

CLASSWORK MUST DEMONSTRATE COMPREHENSION.

AFTER GOING OVER THE HOMEWORK, TEACHER READS INTENSIVE PARAGRAPH OR ENTIRE TEXT ALOUD AS STUDENTS PANTOMIME IT AND AGAIN AS THEY SUPPLY FL. SYNONYMS OR ANTONYMS FOR WORDS IN TEXT, SUPPLY ENGLISH OR FL RELATED WORDS, OR SUPPLY ELEMENTS OF COMPOUND WORDS. VOCABULARY AND STRUCTURES OF INTENSIVE PARAGRAPH ARE EMPHASIZED.

LANGUAGE PRODUCTION SHOULD BE BASED ON TEXTS.

ORAL CLASS ACTIVITIES IN WHICH STUDENTS GENERATE SENTENCES:

- A. ONE STUDENT READS A PARAGRAPH ALOUD AS OTHER STUDENTS PANTOMIME THE PARAGRAPH; THEN STUDENTS PANTOMIME AGAIN AND A STUDENT DESCRIBES WHAT THEY ARE DOING.
- B. ONE STUDENT DESCRIBES A CHARACTER OR PLACE IN THE TEXT WITH CLUES AND OTHERS GUESS WHICH IS MEANT.
- C. STUDENTS COMMENT ON THEIR OWN WISHES OR ASPECTS OF THEIR OWN LIVES AS RELATED TO SOMETHING CENTRAL IN TEXT.
- D. EXERCISES DESCRIBED ON THE OTHER HANDOUT WHICH ARE DESIGNED FOR HOMEWORK OR TESTS CAN BE DONE ORALLY IN CLASS.

AS REVIEW A WEEK LATER--AFTER CLASS HAS REREAD TEXT AT HOME, THEY QUESTION TEACHER ON HIS RECALL OF CONTENT OF TEXT OR ASK HIGHER-LEVEL QUESTIONS OF TEACHER OR EACH OTHER. ON THE BASIS OF THE TEXT THEY CAN INTERVIEW EACH OTHER, WRITE LETTERS, DEVELOP CONVERSATIONS OR JOINTLY RETELL THE TEXT (EACH STUDENT TAKES UP WHERE THE PREVIOUS STUDENT LEFT OFF). THEY COULD BE ASSIGNED TO FIND A SIMILAR TYPE OF TEXT IN THE LIBRARY AND REPORT ON IT, ORALLY OR WRITTEN, IF THE TEXT IS FROM A PERIODICAL.

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS OR TEST ITEMS
THAT ENCOURAGE A PROBLEM-SOLVING APPROACH TO READING

1. Drawing pictures of characters or scenes or matching phrases to pictures; often the initial situation is contrasted with the final one in a passage through the drawing of before-and-after pictures; or students produce a cartoon version of the story, perhaps with dialog balloons for the speakers.
2. Inserting quotation marks or writing cartoon scripts to show ability to identify the speaker or distinguish dialog from third-person narrative.
3. Writing a timetable or daily schedule listing events of a story or dialog in order of their chronological occurrence.
4. Selection of three to five sentences that pinpoint the main events of the story.
5. Elimination in selected sentences of words which are not essential for understanding of the main idea; or selection of subject, verb and any other phrases which are essential to completing the basic idea.
6. Matching words or phrases in the story with other phrases or words in the same text that are virtually equivalent in meaning.
7. Identifying words that refer to a theme such as school, politics, or work.
8. Identifying words or phrases in particular grammatical categories, such as the past tense verbs in a reading passage or the subject and verb phrases in a clause.
9. Underlining and identification of "who, where, what, when, how" phrases, to help students see units of meaning in the story.
10. Cloze readings, in which every tenth word is left out and students supply a plausible word.
11. Decoding confusing grammatical features: ambiguous pronoun reference; whether a verb form is functioning as a noun, adjective or verb in a particular sentence; word order that contrasts with English usage.
12. Selecting words or phrases that fit into meaningful categories, e.g. all the ways in which Mary refuses to cooperate; all the negative adjectives applied to Bill; and including opposing categories-- concrete vs. abstract adjectives; subjective comments vs. objective statements; verbs describing actions vs. thoughts; phrases that are typical or not typical for a fairy tale; what Bill does on Sunday vs. what John does; what Barbara must do and what she would like to do; life in the U.S. vs. life in Germany.

THE ROLE OF READING IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

TRADITIONALLY--READING READINESS WAS ASSUMED TO BE PREDICATED ON ORAL MASTERY AND KNOWLEDGE OF GRAMMAR RULES.

READING EXERCISES CONSISTED OF TRANSLATION AND ANSWERING CONTENT QUESTIONS.

PROBLEMS--IF READING IS HANDLED BY TRANSLATION AND ANSWERING CONTENT QUESTIONS, TEXTS NEED NOT BE UNDERSTOOD.

BECAUSE THESE EXERCISES DO NOT DEMAND EVALUATIVE SKILLS, THEY ARE PERCEIVED BY STUDENTS AS MECHANICAL; BOREDOM RESULTS.

READING IS DELAYED LONGER THAN NECESSARY IF ORAL MASTERY AND KNOWLEDGE OF RULES ARE FIRST IN THE SEQUENCE.

BASIS FOR PROBLEMS--COMPREHENSION SKILLS ARE ASSUMED, NOT TAUGHT.

SOLUTION--STUDENTS ARE TRAINED IN COMPREHENSION SKILLS (PROBLEM SOLVING). INFERENCE, EVALUATIVE AND CRITICAL REASONING ARE THE PRIMARY TOOLS.

ADVANTAGES--STUDENT MOTIVATION AND INTEREST ARE HIGHER.

TECHNIQUES REFLECT SUCCESSFUL READERS' APPROACHES TO UNDERSTANDING A TEXT--CATEGORIZATION (SEMANTIC, GRAMMATICAL);
 VISUALIZATION;
 IDENTIFYING SEQUENCE;
 INFERENCE REASONING (FROM PRIOR KNOWLEDGE, FROM TEXTUAL CONTEXT, FROM ASSOCIATIONS WITH COGNATES, LOANWORDS, WORD FAMILIES).

THESE TECHNIQUES ENHANCE RETENTION OF VOCABULARY AND STRUCTURES.

READING TEXTS ARE THE CORNERSTONE FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING, BECAUSE THEY PROVIDE THE BASIS FOR

- A) CONTEXTUAL LANGUAGE LEARNING BEYOND CONCRETE CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE;
- B) TEACHER ELABORATION OF CONCEPTS;
- C) INDEPENDENT REVIEW BY STUDENTS;
- D) EXTENSION OF STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE WITH THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE OR CULTURE OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM.

CLASSROOM APPLICATION--STUDENTS PREVIEW TEXTS.

STUDENTS READ TEXTS MORE THAN ONCE.
 HOMEWORK INVOLVES PROBLEM SOLVING.
 CLASSWORK DEMONSTRATES COMPREHENSION.
 LANGUAGE PRODUCTION IS BASED ON TEXTS.

A COMPREHENSION-BASED LANGUAGE PROGRAM: CLASSROOM APPLICATION OF READING THEORY

CLASS IS CONDUCTED ENTIRELY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE.

STUDENTS MUST INFER MEANING, NOT TRANSLATE WORD-FOR-WORD.

QUANTITY OF MATERIAL AND LIMITED TIME FORCE THEM TO GUESS.

A. STUDENTS MUST PREVIEW TEXT. TEACHER DRAMATIZES OR SUMMARIZES,
OR THEY DEVELOP QUESTIONS.

B. TASKS FOR REREADING SHOULD BE:

1. INTERESTING (PROBLEM-SOLVING, EVALUATION)
2. EFFECTIVE READING STRATEGIES (INFERENCE, MAIN IDEA)
3. VARIED (REREAD FREQUENTLY FOR DIFFERENT PURPOSES)
4. TASKS THAT SHOW COMPREHENSION AT A HIGH LEVEL
 - A. WITH JOINT USE OF ENGLISH
 - B. WITHOUT DEMANDS FOR ELABORATE ERROR-FREE PRODUCTION

NOTE: IN UT PROGRAM, HOWEVER, ALL-FL CLASS AND HIGH COMPREHENSION FORM EXCELLENT BASE FOR FIRST-YEAR PRODUCTION:

1. GUESSING GAMES
2. NARRATING PANTOMIMES
3. SKITS
4. STUDENTS QUESTION TEACHER, STUDENTS
5. INTERVIEW "CHARACTERS," REPORT
6. JOINT RETELLING OF STORY
7. REWRITE STORY AS LETTER OR FROM ANOTHER VIEWPOINT
8. DESCRIBE OWN WISHES/EXPERIENCE IN FORMULATIONS OF STORY

BECAUSE TASKS FOR REREADING ALLOW STUDENTS TO SHOW COMPREHENSION, THEY CAN BE USED AS HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS, CLASS ACTIVITIES, OR TEST ITEMS FOR EITHER SIGHT OR FAMILIAR PASSAGES.

WITH THIS APPROACH STUDENTS CAN READ UNEDITED MAGAZINE/ NEWSPAPER ARTICLES IN THE FIRST YEAR. THIS GIVES THEM A FEELING OF ACHIEVEMENT, AND THE MATERIAL IS OFTEN MORE INTERESTING THAN TEXTBOOK SELECTIONS. HOWEVER, THE APPROACH WORKS EQUALLY WELL WITH ESSENTIALLY UNINTERESTING TEXTS.

WE STRESS TO STUDENTS THAT COMPREHENSION INCREASES UPON REREADING.

THE READING STRATEGIES WE TEACH ALSO ENHANCE VOCABULARY RETENTION.

TASKS FOR FIRST READING

- A. SELECT SENTENCES CONTAINING MAIN IDEAS
(LATER, RECALL WORDS/PHRASES CONTAINING MAIN IDEAS,
THEN REDUCE SENTENCES TO NUCLEAR MEAN'NG BY
1. SELECTING IMPORTANT WORDS
2. ELIMINATING UNIMPORTANT WORDS,
THEN SUMMARIZE TEXTS IN OWN WORDS)
- B. ANSWER SIGNIFICANT QUESTION POSED BY TEACHER OR CLASS
-

TASKS FOR SECOND AND SUBSEQUENT READINGS

- A. VISUALIZATION, PHYSICAL RESPONSE--PANTOMIME, BEFORE/AFTER
B. SEQUENCE--LIST EVENTS IN ORDER SKETCHES, CARTOONS
- C. SPEAKER-IDENTIFICATION--LABEL SPEAKERS, INSERT QUOTES
- D. SHOW WORD/PHRASE COMPREHENSION
A. READING-INPUT (CLOZE) TESTS OR DICTATIONS OR NOTE-TAKING
B. MATCH WORDS/PHRASES
1. TO PICTURES
2. TO EQUIVALENT PHRASES--REDUNDANT FORMULATIONS IN TEXT
OR PARAPHRASES SUPPLIED BY TEACHER
3. TO COGNATES
4. TO WORD FAMILIES (ALSO IDENTIFY ELEMENTS OF COMPOUND
WORDS)
- C. CATEGORIZE
1. BY THEME--ALL WORDS HAVING TO DO WITH____
2. INTO OPPOSING CATEGORIES--ACTIONS VS. THOUGHTS, ETC.
- E. DECODE STRUCTURE WHENEVER NECESSARY FOR COMPREHENSION
A. TYPE OF SENTENCE--QUESTION, COMMAND, STATEMENT
B. UNITS OF MEANING
1. VERB PHRASE
2. PHRASES ANSWERING WHO, WHAT, WHY, WHEN, WHERE QUESTIONS
C. CATEGORIZE FROM GRAMMATICAL MARKERS--GENDER, NUMBER,
MOOD, TIME
D. DECODE CONFUSING FEATURES
1. PRONOUN REFERENCE
2. WORD ORDER
3. IDENTIFYING FUNCTION OF VERB FORM (ADJECTIVE, NOUN, VERB)
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NOT ALL TASKS ARE USED WITH ALL READINGS. FOR LONG READINGS,
STUDENTS FIND THE MAIN IDEA OF THE ENTIRE TEXT AND THE TASKS
ARE APPLIED TO AN INTENSIVE READING PASSAGE FROM THE TEXT.