Toward An Individualized FL Instruction*

—Some Practical Appraches in Teaching Methodology—

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I wish to present in this paper some practical approaches and devices which would contribute to an extensive implementation of the individualized language instruction in the Korean Department, DLI, in the near future. I am hopeful that ideas and suggestions which are originally meant to be addressed to the future of the DLI Korean Course would become applicable to language programs in other DLI depaartments as well.

In introducing the new methods and approaches, I have constantly kept in mind feasibility and effectiveness as guiding considerations. For we must be fully aware of some of the given conditions at DLI to which we are expected to accomodate ourselves, even though certain details of those given conditions themselves are frequently subject to change.

Some of the conditions we cannot afford to change at the moment—whether the language program is to be individualized or not—are as follows: (1) the student's job-related, terminal skills objectives as spelled out. by the user agencies, (2) the fixed term of the language course as determined by the Services, (3) certain teacher-student ratio as dictated by the concept of a small class to achieve maximum effectiveness in teaching spoken language, and (4) availability of standard textbooks and other instructional media, which no language can dispense with.

As far as the fourth condition in the context of the Korean Course goes, some of the instructional materials are now being drastically revised or supplemented in order to meet changing needs of the user agencies. In addition, a textbook for the Aural Compre-hension Course is currently being developed with a long-range view to maximizing the effectiveness of the Korean language course at DLI in consonance with the realistic needs of the user agencies.

In considering these instructional materials as a constant factor in our context, my assumptions are that they provide the best available descriptions of the language to be taught, together with useful comparison between English and Korean, and that they are at their best in providing the organization of language-teaching items such as selection, gradation, presentation, and so on.

These relatively constant factors may be distinguished from some variable factors, because it is these variables which would in their improved forms lend a fresh impetus

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to the individuating processes of instructional operations and management and accordingly facilitate our efforts toward fully-implemented individualized instruction at DLI.

There are several areas in which variables could help increase the effectiveness of the indidualized instruction in the Korean language. Those areas are (1) teaching methodology, (2) supplementary instructional materials, and (3) grouping/scheduling. Since we are looking forward to the maximum usage of inidividualized-instruction approaches and since the realistic needs of the user agencies place more emphasis on two particular language skills (i.e., listening and reading), I shall limit my discussion to some variables in the area of teaching methodology in the light of various ways to improve the student's listening skills with extensive use of individualization approaches. For example, a new practical approach in teaching methodology will satisfy two demands at once: it must see the learning processes involved from the learner's viewpoint and on the basis of that awareness it must plan and provide a most appropriate and effective mode of teaching.

An individualized teaching requires a two-way process; it should involve a constant interaction between teacher and student. It would be a mistake to conceive that there is a single teaching method best suited to the individualized FL instruction. It would be also a mistake to think that searching for methods fit for individualization means completely discarding all currentiy-used methodologies, such as the audio-lingual method, the direct method, the cognitive-code method, the grammar-translation method, the reading method, and others.

What is, then, our approach as far as our new teaching methods are concerned? Our new teaching methods can take on many different forms, depending on specific language skills to be taught, on abilities and interests of student groups or individual students, on phases of language programs, and so on. In spite of this high degree of flexibility involved, one guiding principle should stand unchanged: it is that no responsible, effective teaching method is conceivably valid unless it analyzes the learning stages and problems and constructs teaching strategies on the basis of such analysis. Thus, the first steps we take in developing teaching methods appropriate to an individualized listening skill instruction should be to identify and understand the learning processes and problems of the student who learns that particular skill.

What are the learning processes and problems of the student learning Korean at DLI with primary emphasis on listening skills? The user agencies list several associated skills to be learned in listening: translation of spoken material, listening comprehension, number transcription, military terms, and romanization-response. We will attempt to identify and understand the student's learning stages and problems with particular emphasis on the first two skills in listening, that is, translation of spoken material into written English and listening comprehension in which the student, after listening to spoken material in the target language, is required to answer in English "WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY, and HOW" questions put in English.

1. Teaching the Sub-skill of Translating FL Spoken Material into the Native Language.

In learning how to translate spoken material in the target language into the first language, a DLI student has to undergo a number of learning stages. First, he hears a stream of undifferentiated foreign noises. Then he gradually perceives some pattens in the noise. The more he listens, the more will he become aware of familiar elements in the mass of the sounds. Indeed, he will soon measurably recognize differences in sound patterns. For example, he is able to indicate whether two or more sounds (intonations, breath groups, etc.) are the same or different. As he progresses further, the student is able to identify distinguishing sound elements in smaller segment (phonemes and salient phonetic features) and graphemes.

It is at this stage when a difference in sound could make for a difference to meaning that the student runs into some learning problems for the first time. The problems can be more widespread and serious if the phonemic systems of the first language and the target language do not coincide, as it so happens between English and Korean.

Aural discrimination exercises at the earliest stage are, of course, the best available device for this. In many cases, however, theses exercises are jettisoned too soon. As a result, it is not only that the new student often "mishears" utterances in the target language but also that his mishearing habits, once accumulated and fixed, will remain the cause of his inefficient learning and frustration through the course.

According to the taxonomic classifications, aural discrimination sub-skill belongs to the lower rung of the psychomotor domain, which involves the conscious awareness of phenomena mainly through perception. Experience shows that at least at the lower ladder of the psychomotor domain many of the average and weaker students can manage fairly well whereas some highly intelligent students with powers of reasoning and induction often prove helpless in this area. An individualized instruction in aural discrimination sub-skill is one of the least emphasized aspects in our language program at the moment. It should be done continuously through the course with variations, depending on individual students' need, until the student's ear becomes well accustomed to the practically whole phonological system of the target language. This process of developing an auditory memory of the FL sound patterns, of course, implies efforts to increase quantitatively student contact with utterances in the language involved. These efforts should not be limited to listening activities alone; opportunities to practice making sounds will also help the student develop an auditory memory of the sound patterns. This can be particularly true of intelligent students who do not seem to perform well in the early stage of sound discrimination drills.

A DLI student who performs reasonably well in aural discrimination sub-skill has yet to undergo a few more learning stages—hence encounter more learning problems— before developing an ability to translate spoken material into the first language, which is

one of his first terminal skills objectives. First he will not even begin to distinguish the phonic and syntactic patterning unless he makes conscious efforts to learn some arbitrary associations of the target language (i.e., vocabulary and grammar). Learning vocabulary and grammar falls on the taxonomy of the cognitive domain, where the recall of specific and isolatable bits of information is required. This recall activity involves, first, passive efforts to bring to mind the appropriate material; then it increasingly emphasizes the psychological processes of remembering as the student progresses further up.

It is at this second stage that many of the less-gifted students begin to show poor performance. They fail to learn *quick enough* sound-symbol relationships, lexical items, morphemes of the target language (i.e., verb conjugations, function words, etc.) and facts of syntax. Or they appear to know these while in the classroom, but their retention of the appropriate material dose not last *long enogh.*

What can the teacher and the student do if the student is to retain as much of the required material as possible—and preferably retain it as long as possible? Plenty of practice with an active use of the student's mind is the answer here. The teacher can provide many opportunities in the classroom and the language laboratory for increased practice over the selected target material. In this case, spaced, active repetition or practice is generally considered better than concentrated, passive repetition or practice. By using rearrangements of familiar lexical items, the teacher can expose students to listening experiences of increasing complexity.

Just as important as this approach of increased practice in listening is to emphasize the importance of the psychological process of remembering itself. One of the crucial factors involved in remembering is the learner's intention to remember. Psychologists say that remembering depends to a great extent on the intention to remember; if a learner does not intend to remember, he probably will not. One may argue here that we cannot expect an already ill-motivated student to consciously intend to remember his material. But, on the other hand, a student who ever manages to make a breakthrough at this stage can become motivated—if one of the causes of his frustration had been poor performance in the cognitive domain. Thus, with regard to the slow student, the teacher's regular counselling on learning problems, particularly in this cognitive domain, is of utmost importance.

Sometimes one does not have to be a less-gifted student to have the same type of problem as illustrated above. For instance, he may understand everything as he hears the material but is unable to remember what he understood *long enough*—hence unable to translate the given spoken material with facility. In a case like this, it would be worthwhile for the teacher to look for the cause of the problem not so much in a personal failure of memory as in the student's material itself. For if the material is overloaded with elements to which the student is not sufficiently familiar, most of his attention or time could be taken up for identifying or recognizing those elements. At this recognition

level, the worst thing that can happen is that the student is provided with much ungraded and ill-designed aural material. Provided that the material is well-written, more time for practice should be given to the extent that the student's recognition of the material becomes automatic or the retention material can recirculate freely in his mind for full comprehension of the given material.

There are some problems, especially at the beginning stage, that have little to do with the student's knowledge of the target language. They are emotional problems which are directly connected with a listening-comprehension activity itself. It is not unusual to see students becoming overly tense particularly when they are not used to paying close attention to aural messages. But these emotional problems can be resolved gradually as the student is given much practice in listening to a limited amount of spoken material.

Once such learning problems as mentioned above are overcome through differing modes of individualized teaching strategy, the majority of the students should be able to perform with facility their first assigned objective: translation of spoken material into written English.

A student who reached this level may be said to be in the lowest functional level of understanding a spoken message in the target language. In this level the student knows what is being communicated—most of which relatively in short sentences. However, he is not yet able to relate facts known from certain utterances to some other facts known from adjoining utterances or see the implications arising from the inter-relationships of all utterances he heard.

The translation level of listening skill represents a very limited skill when it is seen in the light of the complexity of the student's future job in the Service. The language teacher should be aware of the limited nature of this skill. Furthermore, if this translation approach is exclusively used in the classroom or the language laboratory, the student could very easily develop a bad habit in this learning process. He will habitually attempt to analyze the elements of every target language utterance and compare them with what he considers—often wrongly—to be the closest equivalents in his native language. Granted that his comparisons are often accurate, the translation habit itself will prevent the student from developing facility in listening to a stream of sounds and in effortlessly forming an auditory image of the spoken material he hears.

In sum, a student with such facility in listening should be able to recognize without effort the necessary aspects of speech in shorter-sequence spoken material: sound patterns, grammatical features, levels of discourse, and certain expletives or hesitation expressions which can be ignored as irrelevant to the message.

2. Teaching the Sub-skill of Summarizing FL Spoken Material in the Native Language.

In the next higher level of listening skill, the student is required to identify, select

and rearrange the key points of longer-sequence communication material in the target language. Since this skill involves an ability to grasp the manifest or general meaning of a spoken message and to provide a summary of what has been said in the target language, one useful teaching procedure will be to ask the student in the course of his learning to answer "WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY, AND HOW" questions.

Needless to say, a student who reached the basic level of recognizing short utterances will encounter a few common difficulties before he develops this high-level listening comprehension skill. These difficulties can be enormous and even insurmountable if the student sets out for this skill without thorough training in selecting the appropriate elements from shorter streams of sound and recognizing the important elemets which determine the intent of the message.

There are at least two practical purposes for which the student atttempts to grasp the general meaning of a spoken message and provide a summary of what he heard. He wants to extract from the communication those elements which seem to express the purposes of the speaker(s) and/or those elements which he wishes to listen for for his own purposes. In either case, there are two demands the student has to meet. One is the demand of relevancy. The student has to draw out *relevant* elements or facts from the communication—*relevant* to the purpose of the speaker(s), *relevant* to elements or facts which precede or follow, and *relevant* to his own purposes. Another demand is that of speediness. In the longer-sequence communication, the student could encounter more and more "high-information" (or less familiar) items that emit in quick succession. The capacity to absorb these items with understanding and speed is of utmost importance in this level of listening skill.

Under this type of pressure, the student can make several kinds of error in the course of his learning. Even a good student can sometimes misinterpret some elements at the beginning of the message because those elements are not familiar enough to him or because he simply "misheard" them. As a result, he wrongly anticipates the intent of the message, selects elements accordingly and misinterprets the whole purpose of the speaker. What is the suggested solution? Each time errors are made, the teacher should talk to the student and determine the nature of such errors, so that the student's weak areas may be straightened out without creating unnecessary problems of inefficient learning and frustration.

With the average or weaker student, difficulties may be greater in intensity and in amount at this stage of learning. Perhaps he has a limited capacity to recognize relevant elements, to begin with. His knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar involved is so limited that he may totally miss some elements—hence fail to recognize the relevancy of the elements. Some students in this category may be capable of recognizing facts in certain portions of the communication. Yet, without sufficient power of auditory retention, they may be unable to relate the facts already recognized to some other facts that they will

recognize later. Here again, the teacher should talk to the student to find out the nature of errors made. If it is the student's limited knowledge of vocabulary and grammar that caused the problem, that area should be reinforced by assigning extra homework on the subject or by providing individual tutoring, if feasible. If it is the matter of auditory retention, the student should be provided with the appropriate instructional material for additional practice in listening at home or in school.

For many students the cause of errors can be a combination of several factors. If that is the case, the student should be instructed to eliminate those error-causing factors one by one in order of priorities, which can be established by the teacher for the student.

Is there any effective way for the language teacher to determine the range of these combined error-causing factors? At least it would be worthwhile for the teacher to keep his eye on the student's performance in terms of the following aspects of speech where the student could make errors. They are (1) sound patterns (sound discriminations affecting meaning, intonation patterns, word groupings), (2) grammatical sequences and tenses, modifiers and function words, (3) expletives or hesitation expressions which can be ignored as irrelevant to the message, (4) levels of discourse (colloquial or formal), (5) emotional overtones (excited, disappointed, peremptory cautious, angry utterances), and (6) regional, social, or dialectical variations. We would hope that attempts to solve the student's problms in these aspects of the target language will make for the student's masterly skill in listening in the end.

Postscript

What preceded in this paper represents an attempt to deal with some problems in teaching methodology that have bearing on an individualized listening skill instruction to be implemented at DLI, with special reference to the situation at the Korean Department.

Because of the limited purpose with which I set out, I have left out a good number of things to be included in a discussion of a fully implemented individualized language instruction.

First, the Korean language program at DLI involves something more than the development of listening skill, although the latter skill is the most important language skill to work for in the program. Reading, writing and area studies are additional areas in which a DLI student in Korean can be trained with, of course, lessening priorities. I wish to discuss in a separate paper certain pedagogical problems in these areas in the future. Reading, writing and area studies serve not only as important enabling skills but also as important motivating factors in the entire learning process of the student.

Second, an effective, individualized FL instruction requires something more than teaching methodology, although estabishing teaching strategies on the basis of the philosophy lying behind the individualization-approach would be one of the first important tasks.

In the future I wish to discuss some practical problems in the areas of supplementary instructional materials (multi-level exercises, progress tests, etc.) and grouping/scheduling. Without providing additional instructional materials and/or flexible grouping and scheduling, it would be inconceivable to expect a teaching method to serve all the needs in an individualized instruction.

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