Teaching particular languages

CHINESE
86–77 Rickerson, Earl M. (American Embassy, Copenhagen). Curriculum for proficiency: concepts to build on. *Unterrichtspraxis* (Philadelphia, PA), **17**, 2 (1984), 207–24.

This article reports experience in the writing (1974–9) and use in U.S. government schools of the course *Standard Chinese: A Modular Approach*. Important features included the formulation of proficiency definitions as a set of behavioural objectives, embodied in regular achievement tests; the primacy of situational considerations in syllabus design, with the grammar sequence emerging from these; and the introduction of new language in taped dialogues studied before the lessons, saving teacher time for supervising the creative expansion and communicative use of this language.

This methodology is strongly influenced by audiolingualism, which, though out of favour in academic circles, is alive and well in government classrooms. The crucial point is that dialogue memorisation and drills are not ends in themselves but a springboard for more creative, game-like activities.

Whilst there were some difficulties with the modular format of the course, and with teachers not using exercises as intended, key ideas such as proficiency goals and taped input were judged successful. *Standard Chinese* was also judged to be the first complete Chinese language course effective for self-study.

ENGLISH
86–78 Dickerson, Wayne B. (U. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign). The invisible Y: a case for spelling in pronunciation learning. *TESOL Quarterly* (Washington, DC), **19**, 2 (1985), 303–16.

The student whose rendering of *community* sounds like *come-moon-ity* and whose *ridiculous* rhymes with *tickle us* can be helped by the Invisible Y: this is the unwritten /y/ that is required in *continue*, omitted in *construe*, optional in *continuity*, and, in *issue*, combines to make /š/ in American English speech but remains /sy/ in some British English speech. Its apparent erratic behaviour is a point of frustration for ESL learners, for whom there is virtually no guidance. This article (1) shows that the learner's mistakes in this area ordinarily arise, not from a lack of articulatory skill, but from a lack of information about the system; (2) presents the simple rules governing the use of the Invisible Y, rules accessible to learners through standard orthography; and (3) discusses how standard orthography can be used as a pronunciation resource for learners.

86–79   Fitzgerald, M. J. (Croydon Education Dept.). *British Journal of Language Teaching*, **23**, 1 (1985), 42–51.

Provision and funding of English as a Second Language (ESL) for adults in Great Britain has lagged far behind that for schoolchildren, and there is still considerable variation between local authorities.

Adults require ESL for education, employment and using community services. Whereas English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is concerned with only a segment of the daily life of the language user, ESL permeates every facet of the day. ESL students differ greatly in age, educational background and perceived need for English. Economic, social and psychological factors cannot be ignored. Their need is not for language skills alone; content is also vital. The communicative approach has consequently provided the basis of many ESL courses. However, more attention needs to be paid to the grading and systematic presentation of communicative items in adult ESL materials. There is as yet no nationally available and acceptable examination for ESL learners. Television has played and will continue to play an important role in ESL. It is probable that in the future emphasis will shift from elementary to post-elementary students.

86–80   Houlton, David (Mother Tongue Project, Robert Montefiore Sch., London) **and King, Edith W.** (U. of Denver, CO). Mother tongue teaching in Britain and the United States: some current developments. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* (Clevedon, Avon), **6**, 1 (1985), 45–57.

There is an influx of immigrants into American schools in the 1980s which parallels the experiences of British schools in the 1960s. Maintenance of the pupils' mother tongue has come to be seen as highly important, hence various projects in Britain on language use, such as the Inner London Education Authority's Language Census, the Linguistic Minorities Project, and the Schools Council Project to help primary school teachers to extend their pupils' mother–tongue skills. For the latter project, Bengali and Greek trial materials were produced; the problem of transferability to other languages was approached by incorporating an element of intercultural exchange. Publications designed to help teachers bring language diversity into the classroom are described.

The situation in the United States is one of political and financial confusion. The law favours the promotion of pluralism and ethnic diversity, but where the money will come from and what status will be accorded to other languages and cultures is not clear. Four approaches being used in American schools are described: submersion classes, grammar-based ESL, communicative-based ESL and sheltered English classes. There are handbooks designed to help teachers which reveal a similar philosophy to that underlying the Schools Council Project in Britain. Immigrants themselves recognise their children's immediate need for English language proficiency but may doubt the value of being literate in their mother tongue. They may regret this when they find their children have forgotten the traditions of the mother country. On the other hand, some fear that ethnic minority children may become 'ghettoised' by receiving mother tongue teaching which mainstream pupils do not receive. Bilingualism can benefit all children.

86–81   Montgomery, Carol (La Guardia Community Coll. (CUNY)) **and Eisenstein, Miriam** (New York U.). Real reality revisited: an experimental communicative course in ESL. *TESOL Quarterly* (Washington, DC) **19**, 2 (1985), 317–34.

This article describes an experimental oral communication course (OCC) offered at a Community College in New Jersey, and reports the results of a pilot study to evaluate its initial success. The OCC was designed around weekly, structured field trips to sites where students typically need to communicate in English. Each field trip unit consisted of three related classes. In the class prior to a trip, students listened to tapes, practiced functional language, and decided on what information they wanted to obtain. The trip consisted of a tour of the site, followed by a discussion with a resource person. In the subsequent class, students evaluated the trip and reviewed the new language used and the information gained. Students taking the OCC were also enrolled in a required, grammar-based ESL course. They were compared with a control group taking only the required course. In general, the area of greatest improvement of the OCC group, as compared with the control group, was grammatical accuracy. In addition, a significantly larger number of OCC students passed the component ESL course. Learners evaluated the OCC experience favourably.

86–82   Rösel, Petr (U. of Mainz, FRG). On some of the forms and causes of pronunciation impairments. *IRAL* (Heidelberg, FRG), **23**, 1 (1985), 33–45.

Pronunciation errors of German speakers of English are used to illustrate the complex structure of the causes and forms of pronunciation impairment. Among the causal factors taken into account are: historicity (synchronic and diachronic), learner and environment related causes, the writing system as actuating latent dispositions (e.g. the English grapheme w for German-speakers), articulatory difficulty (e.g. the sequence /ðz/), auditory misperceptions, lack of corrective feedback, generalisation of systems, duration of influence, time of occurrence, conditions of occurrence, interlingual influence, motivation, learning conditions and personal disabilities. Research has scarcely come to grips with the complex interaction between these factors.

FRENCH

86–83   Brunet, Jean-Paul. Le langage des gestes. [The language of gesture.] *Canadian Modern Language Review* (Toronto), **41**, 3 (1985), 543–50.

This article deals with the importance of body language in everyday communication. Whether consisting of arbitrary and conventional signs particular to each culture, body language is necessarily inseparable from an articulated language. Although some gestures faithfully mirror human emotions, different behaviours between nations must be stressed. A few examples illustrated in accompanying photographs allow the Anglophone reader to notice, study and remember certain typical French gestures quite different from his own. With the help of a video cassette recorder, the French teacher will be able to make his students aware of the richness of these facial and body gestures, each providing their own intimate reflections of the soul of a nation.

86–84 Compte, Carmen (BELC). Professeur cherche document authentique vidéo…[Teacher seeks authentic video-document…] *Etudes de Linguistique Appliquée* (Paris), **58** (1985), 43–53.

Authentic video documents may be used for illustrative purposes, in order to motivate the student, or as a point of departure, from which it is possible to provoke some kind of reaction or interaction within the class. Much more video material is becoming available to teachers of French as a foreign language but there is little guidance of what to choose or how to use it. Intelligibility is a prime criterion in the selection of material – here the relation between words and images is the critical factor and can be assessed by viewing with the sound turned off. The length of the document conditions how it can be exploited in class. The appeal of a video document is destroyed if it is treated like a literary text.

86–85 Cridlig, Jean-Marie. Grammaire de texte et expression écrite. [The grammar of texts and written expression.] *Français dans le Monde* (Paris), **192** (1985), 72–7.

In a step-by-step approach to the grammar of texts a series of excercises is proposed to overcome the difficulties which lie in the way of the acquisition of textual and discursive competence beyond the level of the single sentence. All aspects of the grammar of texts are included: punctuation; the physical arrangement of the words on the page; the lexical level; grammatical structures within sentences; grammatical repetition (articles, personal pronouns, possessives, demonstratives, etc.); ways of making connections between sentences; the organisation of ideas; linking the facts being presented; tenses; types of texts; overall structure – with the exception of spelling fully covered elsewhere. [Examples of excersises.]

86–86 Descamps, J.-L. (ENS, St Cloud-CREDIF). RUT. [RUT – a computerised language game.] *Cahiers de Lexicologie* (Paris), **45**, 2 (1984), 81–92

RUT (*remplir un trou* 'fill a gap') is a computer game designed to assist the independent learner to build up vocabulary and acquire ways of identifying the various types of bonds between a word-in-context and neighbouring ones. It can also be exploited by a teacher with a class to increase awareness of the variety of word bonds as a basis for analysis.

The player/learner is presented with ten contexts for the word to be guessed. The aim of the game is to encourage the student to search for and focus attention on the key-words which provide clues to the word to be guessed, and to be aware of the importance of the context in which the word is used. Literal word-for-word reading of the text is discouraged.

86–87 Pritchard, Rosalind M. O. (U. of Ulster). The teaching of French intonation to native speakers of English. *IRAL* (Heidelberg, FRG), **23**, 2 (1985), 118–47.

The systematic teaching of French intonation based on a contrastive approach is argued for. Stress, rhythm and intonation patterns are the pinciple components

involved. In French, stress, found on the group final syllable, is realised principally by duration while in English it is found principally on the first syllable of words and is realised mainly by pitch. French emphatic stress is placed at the beginning of the word and is in addition to any unmarked stress, while English emphatic stress occurs on the same syllable as unmarked stress. The number of French rhythmic groups varies according to the speed of utterance; there is no liaison between groups and their boundaries do not violate word boundaries as is the case in English feet. French is seen as a trailer-timed language (with increased tension towards the group final syllable); English is a leader-timed language. Pauses tend to occur between French groups, especially before or after short ones. There is a tendency for nearly equal syllable count in small rhythmic groups and for open syllabicity. Delattre's analysis of French intonation contours is compared with Halliday's account of English. Hints on teaching French intonation are given. An inductive approach is recommended for earlier stages; a deductive one for later stages. Visual aids are discussed and a simple system of notation and a graded programme of instruction are put forward.

86–88   Temple, L. (U. of New South Wales). He who hesitates is not lost: fluency and the language learner. *Revue de Phonétique Appliquée* (Mons, Belgium), **73/5** (1985), 293–302.

'Fluency' means different things to different people. Native speakers themselves, in spontaneous speech, pause, repeat themselves, make false starts, slips of the tongue and ungrammatical sentences. An average of 40–50 % of utterance time is occupied by pauses. Our expectations of students' performances should therefore be realistic; on the other hand, learners should be made aware of the nature of pausing in the target language. Hesitation patterns of individual students can give the teacher a clue as to the particular encoding difficulties being encountered. Hesitation in native speakers is likely to occur when verbal planning is taking place, at the level of content, syntax or lexical selection. Pauses occur either at grammatical boundaries or within these boundaries. The rate of pausing is the significant factor which differentiates individual speakers in their rate of speech production. More complex tasks require more pausing then simpler tasks. Pausing is related to the creative, as opposed to the automatic, part of production.

English and French rates of speech do not differ significantly, but with English pausing more often with slightly shorter pauses than French. French has longer segments between pauses (12 syllables in French as against 9·5 in English). French has more pauses marking the synthetic break at the end of a clause. If students are taught to use appropiate hesitation expressions they will be more relaxed about speaking French. It is essential that they should be exposed to spontaneous (authentic) speech.

GERMAN

86–89 Born, Renate (U. of Michigan). The German strong verbs in first and second language acquisition: a hierarchy for their introduction. *IRAL* (Heidelberg, FRG), **22**, 4 (1984), 239–52.

The German perfect tense forms can be derived by a small set of simple vowel alternation rules, whilst the preterite and second subjective are much more complex. But these last two tenses are rare in informal/colloquial German, and acquired late by native speakers (except for a very few verbs), the perfect tense and the *würde* from respectively being preferred. In beginner's courses, therefore, only the perfect tense form should be taught for active command. A frequency count suggests that 91 verbs are needed: tables show how to present these with minimum memory load.

86–90 Meyer, Helmut. *A Long Tale/Tail* und kein Ende. Erfahrungen bei der Erstellung und Erprobung einer sprachspielorientierten Textbearbeitung von Lewis Carrolls *Alice in Wonderland*. [A long tale/tail with no end. The preparation and experimental use of language-game materials based on the text of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*.] *Die Neueren Sprachen* (Frankfurt au Main, FRG), **84**, 2 (1985), 131–51.

According to little Alice, there is no use in books without pictures or conversations. In Carroll's books we find more than enough of both; they are self-explanatory. No wonder that words in *Wonderland* develop 'a life and will of their own' (W. H. Auden). As readers, we are called upon to take an active part in this dynamic process. This project, which was carried through with fifteen-year-old German pupils, is meant to provide material for just such an active/dynamic approach. For classroom-purposes, one of the main concerns of *Alice in Wonderland* – the inadequacy of language to explain all things – is dealt with in five communicative situations: Alice's meetings with the White Rabbit, the Dodo, the Mouse, the Caterpillar, and the Cheshire cat. Following the Dodo's life-principle ('the best way to explain it is to do it'), the pupils learn about the tricks that words play on Alice (and us) by working with, respectively, passages from the text (reader), illustrations, diagrams, worksheets, and a song. In so doing they are able to understand and produce labels, puns, portmanteaus, minimal pairs, and visual images of verbal communication. These activities help them to discover, enjoy, and avoid the pitfalls of language.

86–91 Reeves, Nigel. The uses of literature. Reflections on the role and future of literary study in foreign language syllabuses. *Modern Languages* (London), **66**, 1 (1985), 17–26.

Students are disenchanted with literary studies; schools are also unhappy about the heavy emphasis on literature at A-level. Languages may lose good students at 16 because languages have assumed a feminine (or effeminate) image. Foreign languages are both practical and theoretical: it is unfortunate that liberal education divided the two. When foreign language literature is put before a sixth-former, he must be able to identify with the work. An essential part of first language acquisition is a period

of avid reading: reading with ease should be the first vital step in L2 reading also. The next step is the evolution of critical distance, which we normally try to foster much too early. This is a fundamental vocational tool, as is learning to read intensively.

The key to reform lies in the choice of texts in the sixth form. In the early stages, the classical cannon should be abondoned in favour of contemporary works published for adolescents, so as to maximise identification. The medium for discussion of these works should be the foreign language. Books currently available in Germany are (1) stories and novels about adolescents' families, friends and school, (2) detective stories and (3) science fiction [examples]. An introductory course on approaches to literature would be important in this transitional stage, and accompanying courses on the history, politics and economics of the country, so that the study of foreign language literature is returned to its proper context.

RUSSIAN

86–92   Baker, Robert L. (Middlebury Coll.). Computer-assisted instruction: an overview of the state of the art with particular reference to Russian. *Slavic and East European Journal* (Madison, Wis), **28**, 4 (1984), 511–20.

Some materials designed mainly at American universities for teaching Russian by computer are briefly reviewed. There is little commercially available Russian software. Extant materials display greater ingenuity than pedagogical soundness. It is important that items should display authentic language used in context.

SPANISH

86–93 Lee, Barbara (National Foundation for Educational Research, Slough, Berks). Performance in Spanish as a first foreign language at age 13. *Vida Hispánica*, **34**, 2 (1985), 21–4.

A survey of 35 schools offering Spanish as a first foreign language carried out in 1983 for the Assessment of Performance Unit (APU) is described. Each school administered a variety of tests, all focusing on language use, and progressing from simpler tasks to more demanding ones. Pupils attempted to perform even the most difficult tasks, even though most were unsuccessful. Pupils performed better in tasks where they had to respond to questions than in those where they were required to initiate language, which suggests that they need more opportunities to use the foreign language independently.

The evidence from the survey presents a picture of positive performances in some of the simpler tasks, produced in circumstances which are less favourable than those in which French is learned as a first language.