

Pedagogy and Curriculum Innovations

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First Semester

Week 3:

Lecture 5:

The Audio-lingual Method



The Audio-lingual Method (ALM): Historic Background

The Audio-lingual method was developed in the United States during World War II. The aim was to supply the US government with personnel who were fluent in German, French, Italian, Japanese, Chinese, and other languages, and who could work as interpreters, code-room assistants, and translators, it was necessary to set up a special language training program. Thus, The Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) was started in 1942. Fifty five American universities were involved in the program by the beginning of 1943.

The need for a radical change and rethinking of foreign language teaching methodology was prompted by the launching of the first Russian Satellite in 1957. The US government at that time acknowledged the need for a more intensive effort to teach foreign languages in order to prevent Americans from becoming isolated from the scientific advances made in other countries.



The Audio-lingual Method (ALM): Historic Background

The Audio-lingual method has a strong theoretical base in linguistics and psychology. Charles Fries (1945) of the University of Michigan led the way in applying principles from structural linguistics in developing the method, and for this reason, it has sometimes been referred to as the 'Michigan Method.' Later in its development, principles from behavioral psychology (Skinner 1957) were incorporated. It was thought that the way to acquire the sentence patterns of the target language was through conditioning- helping learners to respond correctly to stimuli through shaping and reinforcement, so that the learners could overcome the habits of their native language and form the new habits required to be target language speakers.



The Audio-lingual Method (ALM): Principles

1. Foreign language learning is a process of mechanical habit formation.
2. Language skills are learned more effectively if they are learned in spoken form (drills) rather than written form.
3. Language must be learned in context of the linguistics and culture.
4. The native language and the target language have separate linguistic systems. They should be kept apart so that the students' native language interferes as little as possible with the students' attempts to acquire the target language.
5. Language learning is a process of habit formation. The more often something is repeated, the stronger the habit and the greater the learning.
6. The purpose of language learning is to learn how to use the language to communicate.



The Audio-lingual Method (ALM): Principles

7. It is important to prevent learners from making errors. Errors lead to the formation of bad habits. When errors do occur, they should immediately be corrected by the teacher.
8. Positive reinforcement helps the students to develop correct habits.
9. Students should learn to respond to both verbal and nonverbal stimuli.
10. Each language has a finite number of patterns. Pattern practice helps students to form habits which enable the students to use the patterns.
11. Students should 'overlearn,' i.e. learn to answer automatically without stopping to think.
12. The major objective of language teaching should be for students to acquire the structural patterns; students will learn vocabulary afterward.



The Audio-lingual Method (ALM): Principles

13. The learning of another language should be the same as the acquisition of the native language. We do not need to memorize rules in order to use our native language. The rules necessary to use the target language will be figured out or induced from examples.
14. The major challenge of language teaching is getting students to overcome the habits of their native language. A comparison between the native and target language will tell the teacher in which areas her students will probably experience difficulty.
15. Speech is more basic to language than the written form. The 'natural order' (the order children follow when learning their native language) of skill acquisition is: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.



What are the goals of teachers who use the Audio-Lingual Method?

Teachers want their students to be able to use the target language communicatively. In order to do this, they believe students need to overlearn the target language to learn to use it automatically without stopping to think. Their students achieve this by forming new habits in the target language and overcoming the old habits of their native language.



Teacher's Role

1. The teacher is like an orchestra leader, directing and controlling the language behavior of the students. He is also responsible for providing his students with a good model for imitation.
2. The teacher is central and active.
3. The teacher takes on the role of a Model of the target language.
4. The teacher controls the process of learning.
5. The teacher monitors and controls the learner's performance.



Students' Role

Students are viewed as organisms having reactive role to the stimuli. They can be directed by skilled training techniques to produce correct responses. They are imitators of the teacher's model or the tapes s/he supplies of model speakers. They follow the teacher's directions and respond as accurately and as rapidly as possible. Thus, they have little control over the content, pace or style of learning. They lack creativity in their use of language. They are not encouraged to initiate interaction, because this may lead to mistakes.



Characteristics of the teaching/learning process

New vocabulary and structural patterns are presented through dialogs. The dialogs are learned through imitation and repetition. Drills (such as repetition, backward build-up, chain, substitution, transformation, and question-and-answer) are conducted based upon the patterns present in the dialog. Students' successful responses are positively reinforced. Grammar is induced from the examples given; explicit grammar rules are not provided. Cultural information is contextualized in the dialogs or presented by the teacher. Students' reading and written work is based upon the oral work they did earlier.



The Nature of Interaction

There is student-to-student interaction in chain drills or when students take different roles in dialogs, but this interaction is teacher-directed. Most of the interaction between the teacher and the students is initiated by the teacher. The interaction is teacher-dominated.



View of Language and Culture

The view of language in the Audio-Lingual Method has been influenced by descriptive linguists. Every language is seen as having its own unique system. The system comprises several different levels: phonological, morphological, and syntactic. Each level has its own distinctive patterns. Everyday speech is emphasized in the Audio-Lingual Method. The level of complexity of the speech is graded, however, so that beginning students are presented with only simple patterns.

Culture consists of the everyday behavior and lifestyle of the target language speakers.



Emphasis of Language Areas and Language Skills

Vocabulary is kept to a minimum while the students are mastering the sound system and grammatical patterns. A grammatical pattern is not the same as a sentence. For instance, underlying the following three sentences is the same grammatical pattern:

'Meg called,' 'The Blue Jays won,' 'The team practiced.'

The natural order of skills presentation is adhered to: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The oral skills receive most of the attention. Students' writing exercises are based on what they have first been introduced to orally. Pronunciation is taught from the beginning, often by students working in language laboratories on discriminating between members of minimal pairs.



The Role of the Students' Native Language

The habits of the students' native language are thought to interfere with the students' attempts to master the target language. Therefore, the target language is used in the classroom, not the students' native language. A contrastive analysis between the students' native language and the target language will reveal where a teacher should expect the most interference. For example, in our situation, we expect the grammar of Arabic language interferes as students try to speak or write in English. Teachers should identify these areas of interference and work on eliminating them.

Examples of areas of interference between English and Arabic:

- Sentence structure
- plural, dual, singular
- Noun-adjective order



How is evaluation accomplished?

Evaluation is discrete-point in nature, that is, each question on the test would focus on only one point of the language at a time. Students might be asked to distinguish between words in a minimal pair, for example, or to supply an appropriate verb form in a sentence.

How does the teacher respond to student errors?

Student errors are to be avoided if at all possible, through the teacher's awareness of where the students will have difficulty, and restriction of what they are taught to say.

