Lecture 4: I-The Audiolingual Method (from the 1950s to the 1960s)

II-The Audiovisual Method (in the 1950s)

I-The Audiolingual Method

Introduction

During World War II (1939-1945), the weaknesses of the Grammar Translation Method, the Direct Method and the Reading Method became obvious, as the American military found itself short of people who were conversationally fluent in foreign languages. It needed a way of training soldiers in oral skills quickly. Therefore, it was called 'the Army Method'. So, audiolingualism emerged in the United States during World War II in response to the need of military personnel to learn languages quickly and effectively.

American structural linguists stepped into the gap and developed a programme, that lasted for two years (the Army Specialised Training Programme [ASTP], 1942), which was inspired by the Direct Method, especially its emphasis on listening and speaking. It drew its rationale from Skinner's behaviourism, which considered language learning as a result of habit formation in terms of stimulus-response reinforcement (verbal operant conditioning) to engender good habits in language learning through positive reinforcement/feedback; while errors are considered as deviated behaviours that must be avoided and corrected through negative reinforcement/feedback. In other words, if the behaviour (response) was successful, students received positive reinforcement and continued with the behaviour until it becomes a habit. If it was unsuccessful they received negative feedback to eventually stop the behaviour.

The Army Method included activities which were believed to reinforce 'good' language habits, such as close attention to pronunciation, intensive oral drills, a focus on sentence patterns and memorisation. In short, students were expected to learn through drills rather than through an analysis of the target language. The students who went through the 'Army method' were mostly mature and highly motivated, and their success was dramatic. This success meant that the method naturally continued on after the war, and it came to be known as 'Audiolingualism', a term that was

coined by Brooks in 1964 (p. 58). The Audiolingual Method was widely used in the United States and other countries in the 1960s.

1.Characteristics of the Audiolingual Method

Since the learning theory underlying this method is behaviourism, it includes the same principles and has the same objectives as the Situational Method. The types of learning techniques and activities used are dialogues and drills memorised through repetitions and the use of substitutions. Like SLT, grammar is taught inductively. Rivers specified the aims of this method as "developing listening and speaking skills first, as the foundation on which to build the skills of reading and writing" (1968, p. 23).

According to this method, language learning is essentially a question of habit training. As in the Direct Method, language is seen as a communicative tool, which must be produced spontaneously and automatically, but the form of the language becomes more important. The science of contrastive analysis had led linguists to detailed descriptions of the systems of different languages, which they compared for areas of difference and similarity. The list of forms present in a language became the syllabus, and fluency was equated with the mastery of these forms – the ability to use them spontaneously and automatically in speech. This process was seen as a matter of choosing the right pattern and filling the slots correctly. For example, here is a simple pattern consisting of four slots:

Subject	Verb 'like'	Verb+ING	Object

The slots in this pattern can be filled in a number of ways:

I	Like	playing	cards.
You	Like	reading	these notes.
Mike	Likes	riding	his bike.

The grammatical patterns identified by linguists were 'over-learned' using repetition exercises called drills that reproduced the Stimulus Response Reinforcement sequence prescribed

by the operant conditioning school. For language production, negative feedback meant correction. Positive reinforcement would either mean praise or lack of correction. So, in the behaviourist perspective, we learn a language by repeating correct language until it becomes a habit. With SLA there is the added complication that *we have already formed the habit of our first language*, which interferes with the habit of the second language. This meant that our new language habits have to be learned so thoroughly that they overrule the old habits; hence, the emphasis is on repetition.

According to Finnochiaro and Brumfit (1983, p. 7) "the fashion now was for long dialogues, usually centred on one or more carefully graded structures. Mimicry and memorization of the dialogue became the slogan for too many years, perfect pronunciation was sought often at the expense of anything else, and lexical meaning was considered unimportant". Moulton (1961) summarised the characteristics of the Audiolingual Method as follows:

1-Language is speech not writing.

2-A language is what its native speakers say, not what someone thinks they ought to say.

3-Languages are different.

4-A language is a set of habits.

5-Teach the language, not about the language. (p. 63)

Consequently, there are many similarities between the Situational Method and the Audiolingual Method. They both introduce language skills in the same order, listening, speaking, reading, writing, and focus on accuracy through drills and the practice of the basic structures and sentence patterns of the target language. The methodological features of audiolingualism are indicated in the following table:

Table 1

Methodological Features of the Audiolingual Method

Content	Grammar structures
Objectives	In terms of separate skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing Priority of oral skills
Materials	Language Laboratory Recordings
Procedures	Direct techniques: without reference to the mother tongue Mimicry and memorization: mim-mem techniques Structural pattern drills: active and simple practice Artificial dialogues to introduce the structures
Assessment	Skill objective tests Multiple choice and cloze tests

Source: Molina et al. (2006). *Current approaches and teaching methods:*
Bilingual programmes (p. 12).

2.Techniques of the Audiolingual Method

The main focus is teaching grammar and developing grammatical competence through dialogues (without teaching the rules). Language was organised into grammatical patterns which were primarily designed to exemplify the target structure; within this scope, language learning was supposed to be a sequential/gradational process by reviewing previously learned structures. Dialogues were modelled by the teacher, then drilled for correct pronunciation, with errors immediately corrected, helping the student to memorise the dialogue at the same time. Vocabulary played the supporting role of creating a context for the dialogue. A series of drills such as substitution drills, chain drills, transformation drills and 'question and answer' drills involved the students in correctly filling one or more slots in the target pattern. Here are some examples:

Chain drill: **T:** What time do you get up?
S1: I get up at 7 o'clock. What time do you get up?
S2: I get up at 8 o'clock. What time do you get up?
S3: I get up at 8 o'clock. What time do you get up?

Substitution drill: **T:** I am going to the bank...... He.

Ss: He is going to the bank.

T: They.

Ss: They are going to the bank.

Transformation drill: (for negatives)   **T:** He is going to the bank.

S: He isn't going to the bank

T: It is 8 o'clock in New York.

S: It isn't 8 o'clock in New York.

T: It is summer in Uruguay.

S: It isn't summer in Uruguay.

3. Drilling in the Audiolingual Method

1-The teacher must be careful to ensure that all the utterances which students will make are actually within the practiced pattern. For example, the use of the auxiliary verb 'have' should not suddenly switch to 'have' as a main verb.

2-Drills should be conducted as rapidly as possible so as to ensure automaticity.

3-Ignore all but serious errors of pronunciation when drilling for grammar practice.

4-Use hand motions, signal cards, notes, etc. to cue response.

5-Use normal English stress, intonation, and juncture patterns (e.g. ice cream vs. I scream) carefully.

6-Drill material should always be meaningful. If the content words are not known, teach their meanings.

7-Intersperse short periods of drill (about 10 minutes) with very brief alternative activities to avoid fatigue and boredom (diversity).

8-Introduce the drill in this way: **a.** Focus (for example by writing on the board)

b. Exemplify (by mentioning model sentences)

c. Explain (if a simple grammatical explanation is needed)

d. Drill

9-Do not stand in one place; move and check different students' production in order to know who to give more practice to during individual drilling.

10-Use the "backward buildup" technique for long and/or difficult patterns. For example:

-tomorrow
-in the cafeteria tomorrow
-will be eating in the cafeteria tomorrow
-Those boys will be eating in the cafeteria tomorrow.

11-Arrange to present drills in the order of increasing complexity: imitation first, single-slot substitution next, then free response last.

4. Criticism of the Audiolingual Method

1-Audiolingualism allowed mastery of the grammar of the language in a very quick and easy way. However, when put to use in real life, this knowledge was ineffective because of the unpredictability of the communicative situation.

2-The method attempts to teach students to communicate in the target language without them ever trying to do so.

3-In reality, learning through the Audiolingual Method was not different from memorising a tourist phrase book. The social dimensions of language (sensitivity to other speakers, genre and register) were not learned by students.

4-Finally, there are humanistic criticisms of the method particularly because of the behaviourist orientation. Humans are not circus animals that can be conditioned to act in a certain way. The approach did not allow for students' self-expression, language was rarely personalised or given an affective value and most lessons follow the same pattern of presentation– drill – drill – drill...

Roulet's Criticism (1972/1975)

1-The description of the grammatical system is rather incomplete. It does not provide the rules needed to construct an infinite range of grammatical sentences.

2-It gives excessive weight to secondary grammatical facts, and thus neglects important generalisation.

3-Slight treatment is given to syntactic relations.

4-It does not provide the teacher with criteria to determine grammaticality of utterances (the rules), and thus it does not provide appropriate criteria for error treatment.

5-The exclusion of meaning prevents the necessary information for the systematic teaching of lexis and oral/ written comprehension.

6-The accent (emphasis) placed on formal criteria leads teachers and students to manipulate structures as an end in themselves while neglecting their application in real life.

7-It leads teachers to consider language as the only variable.

8-Creativity to apply rules is neglected.

Conclusion

Contributions of the Audiolingual Method deserve attention; However, neither structuralism nor behaviourism went too far, either as descriptive theories or as applied proposals through the Audiolingual Method. The consequence was that these linguistic and psychological theories were abandoned. Anyway, audiolingualism survived in various forms, it is still very popular around the world and particularly in the area of self-directed language learning. Aspects of the Audiolingual Method today include:

1-The use of dialogues to present new language.

2-The large variety of drills, which are popular in most language learning textbooks.

3-The over-reliance on "objective" techniques for language testing (multiple-choice questions, answering questions, completing dialogues...).

4-The sequencing of grammatical items in terms of their syntactic similarities rather than according to their pragmatic values.

II-The Audiovisual Method

Introduction

The audiovisual method appeared in France as the result of the conclusions derived from the CREDIF –Centre de Recherche et d'Étude pour la Diffusion du Français (1959) in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

1.Characteristics of the Audiovisual Method

The Audiovisual Method was founded on a behaviourist theory which claims that language is learned via the development of habits. It is based on the assumption that foreign language is essentially a mechanical process and is more effective if the spoken form precedes the written language. However, the audiovisual method rejects the emptiness of formal structures of language

and applies a meaningful and contextualized solution. It makes the FL recover its social and situational nature. The result is that communication is the aim through the use of audiovisual aids like films, clips, TV show programmes and newslines, and filmstrips (a series of images projected with recorded sound -speech or music- or written commentary) was an imaginative resource to make utterances contextualized and to give them plenty of meaning. Visual presentations have allowed teachers to bring native speakers' voices into the classroom. Consequently, the Audiovisual Method combines vision and sound which are very effective in foreign language learning. Visual learning can increase learners' motivation and raise their engagement in the classroom, especially when the visual medium helps learners develop real ideas about daily life situations. The following table indicates the methodological features of the Audiovisual Method:

Table 2

Methodological Features of the Audiovisual Method

Content	Everyday FL
Objectives	1 Basic linguistic variety 2 General topics and reading: newspapers... 3 Specialized discourses: ESP
Materials	Filmstrip + tape
Procedures	**1-Presentation:** Visual scenario for meaningful utterances & context **2-Explication:** Pointing Demonstrating Selective listening Questions/Answers **3-Repetitions & Memorization** **4-Exploitation** (development or transposition: changing positions) Role-play and new questions and answers Grammar
Assessment	According to goals

Source: Molina et al. (2006). *Current approaches and teaching methods: Bilingual programmes (p.13).*

2. Advantages and Disadvantages of the Audiovisual Method

The use of audiovisual technology is a great contribution to help teaching and motivate learners. Understanding and communication are principles which will stand out in coming approaches. The reference to meaning and context is a valuable advance. However, the connection between pictures and meanings can be misinterpreted. Another gap is that the linguistic sequences in some cases do not follow a tested model which could display a natural order of FL acquisition. In brief, these aspects are indicated below:

(+) Simplified social context.

(+) Meaningful & communicative.

(+) Meanings through visual aids (technology).

(-) All meanings inducted (introduced): misunderstanding.

(-) Rigid sequences: not tested.

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