



## Deseret Language and Linguistic Society Symposium

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Volume 1 | Issue 1

Article 10

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4-8-1975

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#### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Bushman, Robert W. (1975) "Toward a Language Instructional Model," *Deseret Language and Linguistic Society Symposium*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 1 , Article 10.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/dlls/vol1/iss1/10>

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TOWARD A LANGUAGE INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL

Robert W. Bushman

Languages and Linguistics Symposium

*April 7-8, 1975*

Brigham Young University

## TOWARD A LANGUAGE INSTRUCTIONAL MODEL

Robert W. Bushman

The overall goal of language instructional design is, of course, the optimization of language learning. Though we most frequently discuss subordinate or peripheral concerns, the paramount issue in the back of our minds is how to best go about teaching language. We all alert on experimental results, nascent developments or even pure speculation which seems to offer some promise of a better way. The object of this paper is not to propose some better way, however, but to look at how we go about finding the better way. I don't pretend to have any grand answers to the question, how should language be taught, but I am concerned with the processes we use to go about answering that question. Somehow, it seems that the process of language curriculum development should occupy our attention, as well as the content, methodology, or results of that curriculum; for it may well be that our success with a language curriculum is as much a function of the developmental process itself as of our skill in applying that process. Indeed, as I consider the various processes which have been or are now being used, it seems that in general they are quite *ad hoc* -- that there is no single, considered system. Moreover, the processes are better characterized as intuitive than scientific. Perhaps the artistic endeavor is just as well, but there seems to be an idealistic need in me that reaches for some system that can actually generate answers to the question, how should language be taught. Perhaps that ideal reflects my need for structure, prediction or certitude in a domain that is far too complex to be dealt with in that way. Nevertheless, the ideal offers hope, and that hope leads me to explore here the possibility for success of a prescriptive model of language curriculum development.

To begin, I will model three general development procedures and assess them against the criterion of prescriptive power, the most demanding requirement for a model of this type.

### SIMPLEX MODEL

The first, most familiar and elemental model I have labeled the simplex model. If I may be somewhat judgmental, it takes a generally simplistic notion of what language is, and uses whatever instructional methodology that notion seems to suggest, *prima facie*. Some examples of the simplex model would be the puristic forms of grammar-translation, the natural or direct method, audio-lingualism, total physical response, St. Cloud, community language learning, etc.

Grammar-translation assumes that the essentials of a language have been adequately captured by a given grammar and lexicon, and therefore if one learns that grammar and lexicon, he will have essentially learned that language. It is very simple logic.

The direct method sees native language learning to have occurred not from academic exercise, but from a great deal of exposure, mimicry, and

interaction. Therefore, the way one should learn another language is by being bombarded with it, by mimicking it, and by being forced to cope with it. Direct logic, direct method.

Strict audio-lingualism holds language as a set of psycho-motor habits. Therefore, language should be taught through a sophisticated process of psycho-motor conditioning along the classical stimulus-response paradigm.

The St. Cloud, or audio-visual method, believes that conversational communication necessarily takes place in both auditory as well as visual media. Therefore, graphic illustrations are to be used in addition to aural-oral experiences.

Total physical response observes that children hear a great deal of language, indeed, follow a great many commands in their mother tongue, before ever uttering a word of it themselves. Obviously, then, language students should build up a large latent competency from listening comprehension before being required to produce utterances of their own.

In the view of community language learning, language is learned as a response to felt psychological and societal needs. It then lets students interact from those needs, querying an outside source for the foreign language data necessary to do so.

If these rather gross simplifications can be forgiven, these and other like methodologies may be characterized by the existence of some underlying philosophy of language, language use, or language learning from which is derived some face valid instructional approach. In this paradigm are two assumptions: 1) that the essence of language learning has been adequately captured by the philosophy, and 2) that the indicated methodology is truly valid for that philosophy. While it is typical that underlying philosophies are constantly challenged, the second assumption of method validity escapes much attention, though both are critical to overall validity of the model.

It should be said that whatever methodology of the simplex variety is used, students usually do learn language therefrom. But because an evaluation procedure is usually not built into the process, neither of the above assumptions are tested. It is therefore not known whether students learned whatever language they learned because of or despite the method used. The simplex model will generally be able to say, trivially, that language learning will result from an application of Method X, but is incapable of higher orders of questions, such as, "Does Method X work better than Method Y?" or, ultimately, "What is the best method?"

### PRAGMATIC MODEL

The next model I label the pragmatic model, because it is not necessarily founded on any particular philosophy of language, learning, or instruction, but dedicated to what works. It is

essentially an evaluation model, aimed at answering the question, "Does Method X work better than Method Y?" The model does not prescribe instruction, but from trial and error can identify the best available options. On the loose end of the line, this is contemporary eclecticism, using a bit of this here, and whatever seems to fit over there. On the tight end, this is experimental, educational research, carefully controlling variables, constructing valid and reliable measures, and analyzing results for statistically significant differences. A splendid example of this model in operation is our own LTM, which is now conducting simultaneously a variety of experiments to measure the relative effectiveness of certain methodologies. Without preformed biases or loyalties for any particular method, the LTM will be impressed with hard, empirical results, and not fancy trappings. In the end, the LTM will indeed be able to say with some confidence that Method X is better than Y, but not as good as Z.

It is interesting that while the pragmatic model can decide which method is better-- a higher level of adequacy than the simplex model-- it is dependent on the simplex model for inputs, as it were. The pragmatic model does not generate its own methodologies, but merely weighs existing methodologies on the counter-balance. Furthermore, while the pragmatic model can show correlations of method and outcome, it does not work to posit causal relationships which predict or prescribe optimal language instruction. It should be said, however, that through a process of evaluation, LTM is producing hybrid methodologies, and thus goes beyond this model.

#### SYSTEMS MODEL

At the highest level of adequacy, we idealize the true prescriptive model, which I call the systems model, as it is characterized by a systematic problem solving approach. I do not claim that this model has working examples in the language world, but I would like to sketch what the model could look like, and possibly how it could be operationalized. The model bears outward similarity to the simplex model in that it begins with assumptions about language and proceeds to prescribe the instructional approach from those assumptions. The difference is that where the simplex model proceeds intuitively, or at best in an *ad hoc* manner, the systems model proceeds systematically, without necessarily seeing the end from the beginning. It is more like a mathematical algorithm which, proceeding step by step, leads to a result. The resulting language curriculum in this case cannot be as sure as the result of a mathematical formula, as we are dealing with causal relationships which we can only postulate, never prove; and we are dealing furthermore in a probabilistic domain, working with free agents. Nevertheless, the promise of obtaining results of some power through a methodical process seems sufficiently bright to warrant a major effort in this direction.

When we think of a system of curriculum development, we first think of the classical curriculum development model consisting of three general stages: 1) definition of behavioral objectives; 2) develop-

ment of instruction; and 3) validation of that instruction (Faust, 1974). The first stage sets the goals of the instruction in terms of student outcomes, focusing on what the student is supposed to actually be able to do when he exits the instructional process. The second stage analyzes those behavioral objectives into enabling objectives and classifies them by types of behavior: psycho-motor, affective, and cognitive, the last being further broken into memory, classification, rule using, and rule finding behaviors. Once the type of behavior is known for a given objective, then rules are applied which prescribe the type of known instructional design most appropriate to that type of behavior. The last stage of the process is a cybernetic loop which evaluates the end product against the criteria of the original objectives, and indicates where changes in the system are necessary. Actually, this stage may go on simultaneously with other stages, evaluating during as well as after those stages.

Though the middle step of instructional design seems to be able to prescribe rather thoroughly what should be done, it in practice leaves open many options, such as sequencing, presentation mode, media use, etc. In fact, there are some who maintain that the model lacks prescriptive power to any interesting degree (Clark, 1975). Indeed, when we apply this model in the language learning context, we find that language behavior is sufficiently complex as not to be so handily broken into pieces to be separately dealt with. We find that we must rely on sheer creative invention of presentational devices, for which we draw on the existing options created by the simplex model.

I suspect, however, that if this sort of situation results from the developmental process, that is, finding that our system lacks significant prescriptive power to deal with this most fundamental problem of design, then it could well be that we have not used the full power of the first stage--objective setting. Too often in education, objective setting turns out to be rather superficial activity, done not by empirical study, but by a few hours of thought, pulling goals out of the subliminal and setting them down in a form acceptable to contemporary behaviorists. If this is all the first stage consists of, the second is deprived of the very basis it requires for truly prescriptive power. In the model I am suggesting, the first stage could well account for the greatest portion of activity in the entire process.

Much groundwork has to be laid before we are in a position to define behavioral objectives; that groundwork being a "task analysis." This is a thorough inspection of what the final product person actually does or is intended to do in the real job environment. In the language context, is the issue "How is language used?" After the task has been made explicit, then the questions are asked, "How much of this task can the student already do?" and "What part of the remainder is to be handled through formal instruction, and what may be handled through other means?" Only after a very thorough task analysis can we be in a position to specify those behavioral objectives to be dealt with by our instruction.

It is my opinion that there has not yet been

a sufficient task analysis done on the type of language activity that we normally target. Linguistics has addressed only a subset of the problem, and moreover, is not fully equipped to deal with the whole problem, because the whole problem is not within its domain, but mostly without. Communication science, psychology, sociology and anthropology also deal with the problem, but each in its own limited way. What we have is a multidisciplinary problem, that requires a multidisciplinary approach (Politzer, 1972). We must come out of our cloisters and start talking with each other. We must sit down and work together, rounding out a full-blown model of language use. We must get outside and find out how it is actually done in the real environment.

In addition to the task analysis, I also propose an analysis of how adults actually learn a foreign language. Our studies are typically of the form: treatment application and result measurement, and not so much finding out specifically, longitudinally, and anecdotally what our students actually do when they are learning a language. We have been doing this with child language acquisition, why not with adults?

It strikes me that once we have thoroughly addressed the two issues, "How is language used?" and "How is language learned?" and have created explanatory models which we are reasonably comfortable with, then we will be in a position to generate optimal instructional approaches.

To review this discussion, it would seem that I am strongly biased toward the systems model. In fairness to the other models, though the systems model may hold the greatest hope of prescriptive power, the more fundamental criterion for any resulting methodology is its effectiveness. It could very well be that a method of the simplex variety will come along after all, where imagination and creativity thrive. It could just as well be that as a result of a lot of experience, and hard, empirical evaluation, the pragmatic model will be the shining light. Though the systems model may be the highest valued model per se, we admit we are not in the model building business, but the language training business, and models are useful only insofar as they serve that end. All three models lead to language learning, and together, provide a synergy which argues for vigorous pursuit on all three fronts.

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