

- MENU
- PRINTABLE VERSION
- HELP & FAQs

Updated Audio-Lingual Teaching

David A. Sell

Kyoto Institute of Technology

Research indicates that, in language use, formulaic language characterizes much of the wording in the spontaneous conversation of native speakers, and, in acquisition, forms the basis of grammatical development. It is also found that oral repetition of word sequences contributes to their acquisition. In application of these findings, formats of classroom practice are suggested which foster acquisition of word sequences through accurate hearing and repetition, and which contribute to grammar acquisition through oral manipulation of wording learned. Audio-lingual methods, adapted for these goals, were drawn upon for the formats of practice recommended.

さまざまな研究によると母国語の会話の大部分がくりかえし使われるありふれた表現の連続 (formulaic language) となっており、このような語句、短い文などを身につけることが文法能力の習得につながる。また第2言語習得においてそのような表現を覚えるためにくりかえすことが役に立つという研究結果もある。こういった結果の外国語教育への応用として、formulaic language を正確に聞き取って話すことができるため、また文法の発展のために、覚えた表現を変化させる練習方法を提案する。練習形式はオーディオリンガル教育法を改定したものである。

Introduction

In our native language, we repeatedly use a large stock of word sequences, or *formulaic language*, as they are, without composing them each time. These include sentences (*I don't know about that; That's OK with me*), phrases (*on the corner; in a way*), and sequences that cross syntactic boundaries (*What if...; I hope to...*). Such formulae have been the object of much research and should be of great interest to language teachers (see survey and references in Wray, 1999). The number of these “familiar collocations” is extremely large (Ellis, 2002, p. 157) and characterize the spoken language especially (p. 156). Shorter sequences occur more often, as we might expect (Wray, p. 214). A command of abundant, multi-word sequences, easily called up and pronounced, will free learners from many intricate considerations of grammar and collocation, as it does native speakers. In relation to SLA, it is held that the acquisition of grammar is dependent on acquisition (memorization) of word sequences (see Ellis, 1996, p. 93). Accelerating the acquisition of such sequences, then, should contribute directly to a faster acquisition of the language. It is also suggested that the memorization of wording is consolidated by oral repetition (Ellis, 1996, p. 108; Sell, 1995, p. 161).

I interpret these points as a recommendation to include the following three targets in the goals of our language teaching, especially at early levels: (1) foster an ability to recognize *a very large number* of typical word sequences when heard in the normal flow of speech; (2) foster an ability to produce from memory a selection of many short sequences (with an adequate pronunciation and at a natural speed of speaking); (3) develop a grammatical competence on the basis of sequences learned.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest a few concrete ways in which classroom teaching can be geared to promoting accurate hearing of wording, providing practice in repetition; and contributing to grammatical knowledge through listening and oral manipulation of familiar wording. Some of the formats of practice are inspired by audio-lingual methods, notably the substitution drill and the transformation (or conversion) drill, adapted here for the aforementioned purposes.

Formats of Practice

Accurate hearing: reverse substitution

The teacher reads out a list of sentences that evolve gradually in wording. In response, the learners (without the script) call back the new word(s) that come up in each successive sentence:

Teacher reads out:

There are a lot of people in Japan who speak a foreign language.

There are a lot of people in the U.S. who speak a foreign language.

There are a lot of people in the U.S. who jog every day.

There aren't many people in the U.S. who jog every day.

There aren't many people in England who jog every day.

There are hardly any people in England who jog every day.

There are hardly any people in England who wear a necktie.

There are quite a few people in England who wear a necktie.

There are quite a few people in England who use a bike.

Students say:

the U.S.

jog every day

aren't many

England

hardly any

wear a necktie

quite a few

use a bike

In a matter of a minute, perhaps, the learners come to hear, at a natural speed, the wording of the various constituent phrases (*a lot of people, there aren't any, jog every day*), and, thereby, the full sentences. There is no slowing down. If no reply is forthcoming from the class, the teacher just goes on to say the next sentence. If necessary, the sentences (a longer list) are read out again. Note that the words and phrases elicited from the students are not necessarily the targeted formulaic language; they are simply a means to focus attention on details of wording.

Repetition and manipulation of wording: substitution

Once sentences like the foregoing are understood at a natural speed, typical sequences are repeated and then manipulated. Here, pronunciation at a natural speed is practiced, especially in short substitution drills:

Teacher:

there are a lot
aren't
much

Students:

there are a lot
there aren't many
there isn't much

Teacher:

a lot of people in Japan
the U.S.
hardly any

Students:

a lot of people in Japan
a lot of people in the U.S.
hardly any people in the U.S.

Teacher:

wear a necktie
bike
hat
French
car

Students:

wear a necktie
use a bike
wear a hat
speak French
use a car

This last exercise may bring alternative replies (*use a hat, ride a car*), and the teacher can point out how typical or suitable they are.

Hearing focused on typical collocations

First, the learners listen to sentences and call back the verb they hear (one word):

Teacher:

I've never written poetry.
I've never ridden a horse.
I've never broken a bone.
I've never stolen money.

Students:

written
ridden
broken
stolen

To facilitate memorization, the students are then challenged to recall the collocations and complete them:

Teacher:

I've never written...
I've never ridden a...
I've never broken a...
I've never stolen...

Students:

poetry
horse
bone
money

Accurate hearing: dictation from a recording

From a recorded conversation being practiced, select sentences for dictation. Broadcast a recording of the conversation, and stop it at the end of the first selected sentence. The students write down (only) the last sentence they hear. Continue on to the next sentences selected for the exercise until the entire conversation has been heard. This procedure—and this is the point—fosters very careful listening to *all* of the sentences; the students do not

know where the recording will be stopped. If used for testing, this format encourages very close listening in preparation. Lengthy conversations are suitable, too.

Full sentences for listening (shorter versions for repetition)

Shorter sentences and other word sequences for repetition can be gleaned from even difficult conversation material. Based on the conversation, make up a list of sequences that the learners will be able to repeat. The example here shows part of a conversation, which takes place in a hospital, followed by a list of sequences for repeating and memorizing:

From the original conversation:

Patient: Do you mind if I have a private telephone put in so my office can call me if they have any problem?

Doctor: You don't seem to realize, Mr. Mason, that you have suffered a heart attack. Probably the main reason you suffered that heart attack is stress. And most of that stress comes from your work.

Patient: No private telephone?

Doctor: No.

Patient: I'm an active man, doctor. I always have been. Sitting in this bed all day is driving me crazy. Could I ask my wife to bring in a television?

Doctor: All right. Provided you keep the volume low and don't disturb the other patients.

Patient: Thanks. You have to understand, Doctor, that I've never been in this situation before. I've just never been so helpless. Is it all right if I get up?

Shorter wording for repetition:

Do you mind?
 have a telephone put in
 my office can call me
 they have a problem
 you don't realize
 suffered a heart attack
 the main reason is stress.
 that stress comes from your work
 I'm an active man
 I always have been
 sitting in this bed
 driving me crazy
 could I ask my wife
 bring in a television
 don't disturb the patients

These phrases are meaningful to the learners, who are familiar with the original conversation.

Manipulating sentences for a new situation

Manipulation set in a situation: You are in the patient's room talking to the doctor on the phone, relaying everything between them:

Teacher (what the patient says):

I'm an active man.

I always have been.

Sitting in bed is driving me crazy.

I've never been so helpless.

Is it all right if I get up?

Students (relaying it to the doctor):

He's an active man.

He always has been.

Sitting in bed is driving him crazy.

He's never been so helpless.

Is it all right if he gets up?

Manipulating sentences: active to passive

The *transformation drill* of audio-lingual teaching works well with sentences that are short enough to handle. Suppose that the following sentences are familiar to the learners:

They tip taxi drivers in the U.S.

They import soy beans in Japan.

They don't allow you to park there.

Are they fixing up your office?

Will someone invite her to the party?

Transforming these to their passive forms will of course be easier with shortened wording at first:

Teacher:

They tip drivers.

They import beans.

They don't allow you to.

Are they fixing it up?

Will someone invite her?

Students:

Drivers are tipped.

Beans are imported.

You're not allowed to.

Is it being fixed up?

Will she be invited

Note that the passives elicited, in any case, do sound like typical uses of the passive. In that sense, simply repeating them has a value. Still, the challenge to "create" them will help the learners develop their grammar.

Hearing more difficult material

In the case of material that is beyond the learners' hearing ability, a detailed true/false quiz helps. For example, the following are sentences taken from a conversation for practice:

"And Roberto's really worried about buying a wedding present for his brother and his new wife. He says he's going to buy something when he arrives in the States. But he wants to know what American people usually buy for wedding presents."

True/false quiz (to be read out at a natural speed):

Roberto is hoping to buy a wedding present.
 Roberto is thinking of buying a wedding present.
 It's for his new wife.
 It's for his brother and his brother's new wife.
 He's going to buy something in the States.
 He wants to know how much to spend.
 He wants to know what to get.
 He wonders what Americans usually buy.

Listening to these sentences makes the original much easier to follow when heard again.

Conclusion

Research on formulaic language points to an extremely large number of very familiar and repeatedly used word sequences in native language speech. And grammar is seen as developing as a result. Acquisition of such wording becomes an important goal, then, in learning a new language. Studies also indicate the role of oral repetition for the acquisition of wording. In application of these findings, formats of classroom practice were suggested which foster acquisition of word sequences through accurate hearing and repetition, and which contribute to grammar acquisition through oral manipulation of wording learned. Audio-lingual methods, adapted for these goals, were drawn upon for the formats of practice recommended.

References

- Ellis, N. (1996). Sequencing in SLA. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 18, 91-126.
- Ellis, N. (2002). Frequency effects in language processing. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 24, 143-188.
- Sell, D. (1995). Abstract grammar and concrete wording in L2 communication. *Linguistic Research*, 14, 153-163.
- Wray A. (1999). Formulaic language in learners and native speakers. *Language Teaching*, 32, 213-231.