



THE DECLINE OF AUDIOLINGUALISM

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ABSTRACT

This article is about the Audiolingualism holds that language learning is like other forms of learning. Since language is a formal, rule-governed system, it can be formally organized to maximize teaching and learning efficiency. Audiolingualism thus stresses the mechanistic aspects of language learning and language use. There are many similarities between Situational Language Teaching and Audiolingualism.

Audiolingualism reached its period of most widespread use in the 1960s and was applied to the teaching of foreign languages in the United States and to the teaching of English a second or foreign language. It led to such widely used courses as English 900 and the Lade English Series, as mentioned earlier, as well as to texts for teaching the major European languages. But then came criticism on two fronts. On the one hand, the theoretical foundations of Audiolingualism were attacked as being unsound in terms of both language theories short of expectations. Students were often found to be unable to transfer skills acquired and learning theory. On the other hand, practitioners found that the practical results fell through Audiolingualism to real communication outside the classroom, and many found the experience of studying through audio lingual procedures to be boring and unsatisfying,

The theoretical attack on audio lingual beliefs resulted from changes in American linguistic theory in the 1960s. The MIT linguist Noam Chomsky rejected the structuralize approach to language description as well as the behaviorist theory of language learning "Language is not a habit structure. Ordinary linguistic behavior characteristically involves innovation, formation of new sentences and patterns in accordance with rules of great abstractness and intricacy". Chomsky's theory of transformational grammar proposed that the fundamental properties of language derive from innate aspects of the mind and from how humans process experience through language. His theories were to revolutionize American linguistics and focus the attention of linguists and psychologists on the mental properties people bring to bear on language use and language learning.

Chomsky also proposed an alternative theory of language learning to that of the behaviorists. Behaviorism regarded language learning as similar in principle to any other kind of learning. It was subject to the same laws of stimulus and response, reinforcement and association. Chomsky argued that such a learning theory could not possibly serve as a model

of how humans learn language, since much of human language use is not imitated behavior but is created anew from underlying knowledge of abstract rules. Sentences are not learned by imitation and repetition but "generated" from the learner's underlying "competence."

Suddenly the whole audio lingual paradigm was called into question: pattern practice, drilling, memorization. These might lead to language-like behaviors, but they were not resulting in competence. This created a crisis in American language teaching circles. Temporary relief was offered in the form of a theory derived in part from Chomsky - cognitive-code learning. In 1966, John B. Carroll, a psychologist who had taken a close interest in foreign language teaching, wrote: The audio-lingual habit theory which is so prevalent in American foreign language teaching was, perhaps fifteen years ago, in step with the state of psychological thinking of that time, but it is no longer abreast of recent developments. It is ripe for major revision, particularly in the direction of joining it with some of the better elements of the cognitive-code learning theory.

This referred to a view of learning that allowed for a conscious focus on grammar and that acknowledged the role of abstract mental processes in learning rather than defining learning simply in terms of habit formation. Practice activities should involve meaningful learning and language use. Learners should be encouraged to use their innate and creative abilities to derive and make explicit the underlying grammatical rules of the language. For a time in the early 1970s, there was a considerable interest in the implication of the cognitive-code theory for language teaching. But no clear-cut methodological guidelines emerged, nor did any particular method incorporating this view of learning. The term cognitive code is still sometimes invoked to refer to any conscious attempt to organize materials around a grammatical syllabus while allowing for meaningful practice and use of language. The lack of an alternative to Audiolingualism led in the 1970s and 1980s to a period of adaptation, innovation, experimentation, and some confusion. Several alternative method proposals appeared in the 1970s that made no claims to any links with mainstream language teaching and second language acquisition research. These included Total Physical Response and the Silent Way. These methods attracted some interest at first but have not continued to attract significant levels of acceptance. Other proposals since then have reflected developments in general education and other fields outside the second language teaching community, such as Whole Language, Multiple Intelligences , Competency-Based Language Teaching , and Cooperative Language Learning. Mainstream language teaching since the 1980s, however, has generally drawn on contemporary theories of language and second language acquisition as a basis for teaching proposals. The current approaches and methods covered in Part II of this book, including Communicative Language Teaching, Content-Based Instruction, Task-Based Language Teaching, and the Lexical Approach are representative of this last group, as is the Natural Approach in Part III. The concern for grammatical accuracy that was a focus of Audiolingualism has not disappeared, however, and continues to provide a challenge for contemporary applied linguistics.

Audiolingualism holds that language learning is like other forms of learning. Since language is a formal, rule-governed system, it can be formally organized to maximize teaching and learning efficiency. Audiolingualism thus stresses the mechanistic aspects of language learning and language use. There are many similarities between Situational Language Teaching and Audiolingualism. The order in which the language skills are introduced, and the

focus on accuracy through drill and practice in the basic structures and sentence patterns of the target language, might suggest that these methods drew from each other. In fact, however, SLT was a development of the earlier Direct Method (see Chapter 1) and does not have the strong ties to linguistics and behavioral psychology that characterize Audiolingualism. To summarize, Audiolingualism reflects the view that speech can be approached through structure and that practice makes perfect. Errors are understood through contrastive analysis with the student's first language. SLT also approached language teaching through structure.

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