

STANISŁAW P. KACZMARSKI

### **Do's and Dont's for the Teacher of Foreign Languages**

The subject covers quite a range of problems concerning general education, didactics, psychology, descriptive and comparative linguistics, and methodics in the exact sense of the word. Here an attempt will be made to briefly consider a number of points as regards the training and work of the foreign language teacher.

To understand the responsibility of the teacher and the importance of his work one should take into account the influence that a person may exert upon a group of people who are subordinated to him for a certain period of time. It is the teacher's personality and his ability to become a leader that contribute immensely to the successful cooperation with his students. If the teacher has studied the psychology of a social group and if he is able to base his techniques on sound principles of motivation and linguistic behaviour he will certainly achieve considerable results and succeed in satisfying the needs and interests of his students. In short he should know how to make them learn (that is, to give them the solid basis for their individual study), encourage and help them overcome all difficulties and possible handicaps by means of proper and systematic instruction and guidance. In other words his carefully chosen stimuli applied to the pupil should cause the latter to react to them, each stimulus and reaction making the pupil more proficient in using the language. The art of teaching consists essentially in making use of the right stimulus at the right moment. Of course this requires a thorough preparation of the instructor as concerns his knowledge of the subject to be taught, of teaching procedures and of all kinds of visual and mechanical aids to be used in class.

It is obvious that in order to make his students assimilate a foreign language the teacher himself must be proficient in it. Since most of the teachers are non-native speakers of Lt (language taught) — they should continue to be students of the language with the purpose of mastering it. This task is especially crucial when the assumption of the course or the teacher's ambition is to form productive skills in the spoken medium

of Lt in the students, and it can only be achieved by speaking. Therefore every teacher ought to keep in touch with the native speakers of the language, read widely in the language, attend refresher courses, listen to the records or broadcasts on the wireless and watch sound films in Lt.

It is not enough, however, to know Lt very well to become an efficient teacher. It is no wonder that a large number of the native speakers of the language often fail when it comes to teaching it to foreigners (particularly beginners). The teacher must be well acquainted with the mechanism, that is, the phonology and structure of both the Lt and the pupils' vernacular to base the process of teaching and learning on correct and scientific principles, to be able to understand the learners' specific difficulties and needs, and to find out the best means to solve their problems, to be consistent in making the students acquire linguistic habits by introducing the language material step by step in logical order, and give sufficient explanation when necessary. The teacher, then, should lose no opportunity of adding to his knowledge and should not stick to the same textbook year after year. On the other hand he ought to keep his own note-book going and collect examples of utterances, and concentrate on any point on which he may be lacking in confidence.

The teacher must be familiar with teaching materials in order to know to what extent he can rely on them, what he is supposed to do with his students within each term or semester, what sort of supplementary books or readings can be used and what degree of difficulty they represent. Besides he must be well acquainted with the syllabus of the whole course and know what kind of drills and exercises will be useful to help the learners memorize new constructions and vocabulary, and reinforce their actual knowledge of the language. He must also be aware of the possibility of certain changes or shifts in the course of teaching as far as the speech material is concerned in order to bring it as near real life as possible.

The teacher must be experienced in methods of teaching. It means that he should be given sufficient instruction and training on how to teach most effectively, that is, what classroom techniques can be used and how the whole teaching procedure ought to be organized to make lessons attractive, varied, economical and successful. In this connection it seems worth pointing out that the university programme of studies for foreign language teachers, as well as that in teachers' training colleges should be modified and include special classes devoted to the classroom procedures and use of audio-visual aids with regard to intensive language practice, the aim being the formation of instructors very well qualified technically and not only theoretically. The in-service and summer refresher courses for teachers should not only give them a chance to

study selected aspects of phonology, grammar and lexis but also primarily to brush up their practical knowledge of the Lt concerned through specially prepared language drills and exercises which at the same time would serve as examples of various teaching techniques.

The teacher should always be experimenting. He should make use of his own initiative and enthusiasm to design and practise new drills and exercises helpful to his students — often on the spur of the moment. Routine is a very important factor but there must be enough room for improvisation and fresh ideas in the instructor's work. Experimentation concerns both the teaching procedures and some general assumptions which every teacher is bound to make before attempting to tackle any language problem in the classroom. Therefore he must always be ready to introduce some modification and never stick to the same forms of work, even if they have proved efficient, because in a new situation it may happen that something else will be better and more appropriate. Besides what suits one group of people may be inadequate or not particularly helpful as far as others are concerned. That is why the more variety the teacher can bring into the classroom work the more fascinating the lesson becomes. It goes without saying, however, that everything the teacher introduces should be subordinated to both the ultimate and immediate objectives of teaching.

In order to help his students learn the language the teacher must:

- a. give them a reliable model to imitate, that is, he must be both a "guide" and an "informant",
- b. be able to adjust and adapt his "methods" to the particular teaching situation and use those techniques of work which are best at the moment (flexibility of teaching procedures),
- c. make the students stay interested by arranging situations which require active participation. One more important thing is to give the pupils some encouragement often by helping them realize how much progress they have already made in their study. This is just what stimulates them best and thus the whole process of learning becomes more enjoyable. The teacher's primary task, then, should be to practise the group and simple sentence patterns with the pupils as early and as thoroughly as possible, so that they could master the material and assimilate it for good.

In most cases the teaching of a foreign language takes place only during the lesson and there are practically very few occasions for the learners to speak the language outside the classroom. That is why the teacher should realize the necessity of giving them the opportunity to hear sentences used often and significantly enough for the patterns of sounds, rhythm and intonation to form in their minds and make durable impressions there, that stand for something when they are repeated.

Besides he should make his students use the patterns themselves to explore the situation they are in with the new tools of perception. It means that language teaching should be situational in so far as possible and the teacher ought to know how much time it will take the pupil to absorb a new word or sentence pattern before he can use it.

To compensate for any inadequacies in his own pronunciation or fluency the teacher should make use of aural aids such as tape-recorder and gramophone with the view of achieving a very intensive use of Lt in the classroom. Therefore it seems to be worth mentioning that there ought to be more instruction and above all practice than testing in language teaching. Constant repetition makes the assimilation of the material easier and more effective as it helps the students avoid the forming of bad habits and reinforces the newly acquired good habits and skills. In this way memorization becomes an unconscious process to some extent. At the same time, however, the teacher must be aware of the importance of immediate and tactful correction of the learners' mistakes in any circumstances. It is worth adding that teaching a language through speech makes it possible for the instructor to adapt all that he teaches to the needs, interests, experience and capabilities of whatever class faces him.

Let the article be concluded with some statements referring to the practical aspect of the teacher's work, that is, when he finds himself in the classroom:

a. The particular phases of teaching the language material should always be in the following order from the point of view of the learner:

1. auding
2. speaking (mimicry and repetition with necessary explanations plus practice in production by analogy)
3. reading aloud (imitating the model — further practice in fluency plus explanation if needed)
4. silent reading
5. speaking on the basis of the given text (intensive oral work and limited oral composition, that is, drills of all kinds, question-answer technique, guided conversation, simple interviews and short talks)
6. writing: (a) easy exercises of the repercussive type, (b) controlled written composition.

This principle, taking into account the following four elements of the process of learning a new speech unit, i.e. perception, recognition, imitation and reproduction, concerns all stages of the fundamental course (3—4 years with three or four hours per week).

b. The teacher should aim at the students' overlearning, that is, a complete mastery of the presented patterns and functional words as well as a considerable number of carefully selected content words at

every stage of the study instead of leaving the pupils in the state of uncertainty or confusion.

c. The teacher should make all his students take equally active part in the lesson and aim at getting them to have their talking time three times as long as that of his.

d. He should carefully introduce and drill all new sentence patterns or linguistic items and use them in various contexts preferably in familiar vocabulary; he ought not to use unknown structures when talking to his pupils if he wants to make his speech clear and intelligible.

e. The teacher should remember that his primary task is the forming of language habits in the students.

f. He should not confuse his role with that of the textbook by teaching everything from the unchanging texts and acting as an interpreter of them.

g. The teacher should be an actor, stage-manager and conductor when necessary, that is, he should be able to arrange situations to give his students the opportunity to practise new group or sentence patterns and the whole speech material that has already been acquired.

h. Every lesson should be a link between what has been done and what is going to be taught but it ought to be a complete unit in itself at the same time and make a contribution to the pupils' growth in habits, skills and knowledge.

i. Grammar should be taught through context supported by drill, thus making the process of assimilation as easy and near real life situations as possible, and not by means of consciously formulated rules based on purely theoretical considerations. Grammar should be the recognition of pattern.

j. Explanations can be given by any means: 1. example, 2. context, 3. definition, 4. translation or 5. short discussion in the students' vernacular (grammatical points) — to make the meaning of the text or the use of the given structure clear to everyone and save time.

k. The teacher should do his best to make the students' pronunciation intelligible by means of ear-training drills, use of phonetic transcription instead or along with traditional spelling in the first stages of learning as well as articulation, intonation and rhythm drills.

l. Nothing should be given to the students as an assignment that has not yet been practised thoroughly in class.

m. The teacher should know how and when to take advantage of all the obtainable audio-visual aids (language laboratory included) but he should also remember that nothing can replace him in the course of teaching.

n. He should know how and when to have his students do both the intensive and extensive reading and practise the material in class.

o. The teacher should treat his group as a unit and a collection of individuals at the same time and thus try to combine what suits everybody with what is needed by a particular pupil.

p. He should never mock his students' mistakes. On the contrary he should help them acquire sound linguistic habits in a friendly way and stimulate them to further work.

The above remarks express some basic principles of the writer's belief and approach to teaching with reference to his own experience in conducting English language classes for adult learners.