

LECTURE 6. TEACHING LANGUAGE SKILLS

6.1 Teaching listening

6.2 Teaching speaking

6.3 Teaching reading

6.4 Teaching writing

6.1 Teaching listening

The previous chapters dealt with the teaching of various aspects of the language, namely, pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. The knowledge of each of the aspects is of great importance to learners. However, when we say a person knows the language we first of all mean he understands the language spoken and can speak it himself. When we speak about teaching a FL we first of all have in mind teaching it as a means of communication.

	Listening	Dialogue
Oral language <	<	
	Speaking	Monologue

The syllabus requirements for oral language are as follows:

1. To understand the language spoken
2. To carry on a conversation and to speak a FL within the topics and linguistic material the syllabus sets.

This is the practical aim of teaching oral language. But oral language is not only an aim in itself; it is also a mighty means of FL instruction.

Difficulties in listening

When auditing a FL pupils should be very attentive and think hard. They should strain their memory and will power to keep the sequence of sounds they hear and to decode it. Not all the pupils can cope with the difficulties entailed. The teacher should help them by making this work easier and more interesting. This is possible on condition that he will take into consideration the following three main factors which can ensure success in developing listening skills.

1. Linguistic material
2. The content of the material suggested for listening
3. Conditions in which the material is presented.

Listening comprehension can be ensured when the teacher uses the material which has already been assimilated by pupils. However this does not completely eliminate the difficulties in auditing. Three kinds of difficulties should be overcome: phonetic, lexical, and grammatical: *the horse is slipping (sleeping); they worked (walked) till night; phrasal verbs put on, put off, put down; grammatical homonyms Past Indefinite, Past Participle.*

The content of the material also influences comprehension. The topic of communication should be within the ability of the pupils to understand. Difficulties should be explained (proper names, geographical names, terminology etc.)

Description is more difficult than narration. The pupils' readiness to listen and comprehend is very important. The title of the story may be helpful in comprehending the main idea of the text. Monologic speech is easier.

Conditions of the presenting are of great importance: the speed of the speech, the number of times of presenting the material. Pupils should be taught to listen to the text once. However they sometimes can grasp only 50% of the information and even less, so a second presentation may be helpful. The presence or the absence of the speaker is also an important factor.

Techniques the teacher uses to develop listening skills.

1. Conducting a lesson in a FL gives the teacher an opportunity to develop pupils' abilities in listening, to demonstrate the language as a means of communication, to provide favorable conditions for the assimilation of the language.
- 2 The teacher uses drill and speech exercises to develop listening comprehension.
- 3 The teacher organizes activities in listening to texts

Guidelines for organizing listening activities

1. Listening texts

Informal talk. Most listening texts should be based on discourse that is either genuine improvised, spontaneous speech, or at least a fair imitation of it. A typical written text that is read aloud as a basis for classroom listening activity is unlikely to incorporate the characteristics of informal speech and will thus provide the learners with no practice in understanding the most common form of spoken discourse.

Speaker visibility; direct speaker-listener interaction. The fact that in most listening situations the speaker is visible and directly interacting with the listener should make us think twice about the conventional use of audio recordings for listening comprehension exercises. It is useful to the learners if you improvise at least some of the listening texts yourself in their presence (or, if feasible, get another competent speaker of the language to do so). Video also makes a positive contribution to the effectiveness of listening practice, in that it supplies the aspect of speaker visibility and the general visual environment of the text.

Single exposure. If real-life discourse is rarely 'replayed' then learners should be encouraged to develop the ability to extract the information they need from a single hearing. The discourse, therefore, must be redundant enough to provide this information more than once within the original text; and where possible hearers should be able to stop the speaker to request a repeat or explanation.

2. Listening tasks

Expectations. Learners should have in advance some idea about the kind of text they are going to hear. Thus the mere instruction 'Listen to the passage ...' is less useful than something like: 'You are going to hear a husband and wife discussing their plans for the summer ...'. The latter instruction activates learners' relevant schemata (their own previous knowledge and concepts of facts, scenes, events, etc.) and enables them to use this previous knowledge to build anticipatory 'scaffolding' that will help them understand.

Purpose. Similarly, a listening purpose should be provided by the definition of a pre-set task, which should involve some kind of clear visible or audible response. Thus, rather than say simply: 'Listen and understand ...' we should give a specific instruction such as: 'Listen and find out where the family are going for their summer holidays. Mark the places on your map.' The definition of a purpose enables the listener to listen selectively for significant information - easier, as well as more natural, than trying to understand everything.

Ongoing listener response. Finally, the task should usually involve intermittent responses during the listening; learners should be encouraged to respond to the information they are looking for as they hear it, not to wait to the end.

Listening to texts

Before pupils are invited to listen to the text the teacher should ensure that all the words and grammar are familiar to the pupils. If there are some important words the teacher introduces them beforehand (the words on the board in the sequence they appear in the text). Then the teacher should direct his pupils' attention to what they are going to listen to. This stimulates their thinking and facilitates their comprehension of the text.

Pre-listening tasks stimulate the pupil's attention:

- Try to grasp the main idea
- Make a plan of the story

- Try to finish the story

Pictures can facilitate comprehension. After they have listened, the teacher may ask questions; make statements on the text for pupils to agree or reject them.

Extensive and intensive listening.

Listening of both kinds is especially important since it provides the perfect opportunity to hear voices other than the teacher's, enables students to acquire good speaking habits as a result of the spoken language they absorb and helps to improve their own pronunciation.

Extensive listening (the teacher encourages students to choose for themselves what they listen to and to do so for pleasure and general language improvement).

Extensive listening will usually take place outside the classroom, material for extensive listening can be found from a number of sources (tapes that accompany different books, songs, video-films).

Intensive listening are taped materials and material on disk. Most coursebooks include tapes and many teachers rely on tapes to provide significant source of language input. The teacher uses taped material at various stages in a sequence of lessons.

Types of listening activities

1. No overt response

The learners do not have to do anything in response to the listening; however, facial expression and body language often show if they are following or not.

Stories. Tell a joke or real-life anecdote, retell a well-known story, read a story from a book; or play a recording of a story. If the story is well-chosen, learners are likely to be motivated to attend and understand in order to enjoy it.

Songs. Sing a song yourself, or play a recording of one. Note, however, that if no response is required learners may simply enjoy the music without understanding the words.

Entertainment: films, theatre, video. As with stories, if the content is really entertaining (interesting, stimulating, humorous, dramatic) learners will be motivated to make the effort to understand without the need for any further task.

2. Short responses

Obedying instructions. Learners perform actions, or draw shapes or pictures, in response to instructions.

Ticking off items. A list, text or picture is provided: listeners mark or tick off words/components as they hear them within a spoken description, story or simple list of items.

True/false. The listening passage consists of a number of statements, some of which are true and some false (possibly based on material the class has just learnt). Learners write ticks or crosses to indicate whether the statements are right or wrong; or make brief responses ('True!' or 'False!' for example); or they may stay silent if the statements are right, say 'No!' if they are wrong.

Detecting mistakes. The teacher tells a story or describes something the class knows, but with a number of deliberate mistakes or inconsistencies. Listeners raise their hands or call out when they hear something wrong.

Cloze. The listening text has occasional brief gaps, represented by silence or some kind of buzz. Learners write down what they think might be the missing word. Note that if the text is recorded, the gaps have to be much more widely spaced than in a reading one; otherwise there is not enough time to listen, understand, think of the answer, and write. If you are speaking the text yourself, then you can more easily adapt the pace of your speech to the speed of learner responses.

Guessing definitions. The teacher provides brief oral definitions of a person, place, thing, action or whatever; learners write down what they think it is.

Skimming and scanning. A not-too-long listening text is given, improvised or recorded; learners are asked to identify some general topic or information (skimming), or certain limited information (scanning) and note the answer(s). Written questions inviting brief answers may be provided in advance; or a grid, with certain entries missing; or a picture or diagram to be altered or completed.

3. Longer responses

Answering questions. One or more questions demanding fairly full responses are given in advance, to which the listening text provides the answer(s). Because of the relative length of the answers demanded, they are most conveniently given in writing.

Note-taking. Learners take brief notes from a short lecture or talk. Paraphrasing and translating. Learners rewrite the listening text in different words: either in the same language (paraphrase) or in another (translation).

Summarizing. Learners write a brief summary of the content of the listening passage. Long gap-filling. A long gap is left, at the beginning, middle or end of a text; learners guess and write down, or say, what they think might be missing.

4. Extended responses

Here, the listening is only a 'jump-off point' for extended reading, writing or speaking; in other words, these are 'combined skills' activities.

Problem-solving. A problem is described orally; learners discuss how to deal with it, and/or write down a suggested solution.

Interpretation. An extract from a piece of dialogue or monologue is provided, with no previous information; the listeners try to guess from the words, kinds of voices, tone and any other evidence what is going on. At a more sophisticated level, a piece of literature that is suitable for reading aloud (some poetry, for example) can be discussed and analyzed.

6.2 Teaching speaking

Speaking a FL is the most difficult part in language learning because pupils need ample practice in speaking to be able to say a few words of their own in connection with a situation. This work is time-consuming.

The stimuli the teacher can use for developing speaking habits are often feeble and artificial. There must be occasions when the pupils feel the necessity to inform someone of something, to explain something and to prove something to someone (situational and communicative approach).

Of all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), speaking seems intuitively the most important: people who know a language are referred to as 'speakers' of that language, as if speaking included all other kinds of knowing; and many if not most foreign language learners are primarily interested in learning to speak.

Classroom activities that develop learners' ability to express themselves through speech would therefore seem an important component of a language course. Yet it is difficult to design and administer such activities; more so, in many ways, than to do so for listening, reading or writing. We shall come on to what the problems are presently, but first let us try to define what is meant by 'an effective speaking activity'.

Characteristics of a successful speaking activity

1. Learners talk a lot. As much as possible of the period of time allotted to the activity is in fact occupied by learner talk. This may seem obvious, but often most time is taken up with teacher talk or pauses

2. Participation is even. Classroom discussion is not dominated by a minority of talkative participants all get a chance to speak, and contributions are fairly evenly distributed

3. Motivation is high. Learners are eager to speak because they are interested in the topic and have something new to say about it, or because they want to contribute to achieving a task objective

4. Language is of an acceptable level. Learners express themselves in utterances that are relevant, easily comprehensible to each other, and of an acceptable level of language accuracy

In practice, however, few classroom activities succeed in satisfying all the criteria described above.

Problems with speaking activities

1. Inhibition. Unlike reading, writing and listening activities, speaking requires some degree of real-time exposure to an audience. Learners are often inhibited about trying to say things in a foreign language in the classroom, worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism or losing face, or simply shy of the attention that their speech attracts.

2. Nothing to say. Even if they are not inhibited, you often hear learners complain that they cannot think of anything to say. They have no motive to express themselves beyond the guilty feeling that they should be speaking.

3. Low or uneven participation. Only one participant can talk at a time if he or she is to be heard, and in a large group this means that each one will have only very little talking time. This problem is compounded by the tendency of some learners to dominate, while others speak very little or not at all.

4. Mother-tongue use. In classes where all, or a number of, the learners share the same mother tongue, they may tend to use it because it is easier, because it feels unnatural to speak to one another in a foreign language, and because they feel less 'exposed' if they are speaking their mother tongue. If they are talking in small groups it can be quite difficult to get some classes - particularly the less disciplined or motivated ones - to keep to the target language.

The other factor is the fact that the pupil needs words, phrases, sentence patterns and structures stored up in his memory ready to be used for expressing any thought he wants to. In teaching speaking the teacher should stimulate his pupils' speech by supplying them with the subject and grammar they need to speak about the suggested topic or situation. The teacher should lead his pupil to unprepared speaking through prepared speaking.

What the teacher can do to help to solve some of the problems

1. Use group work

This increases the sheer amount of learner talk going on in a limited period of time and also lowers the inhibitions of learners who are unwilling to speak in front of the full class. It is true that group work means the teacher cannot supervise all learner speech, so that not all utterances will be correct, and learners may occasionally slip into their native language; nevertheless, even taking into consideration occasional mistakes and mother-tongue use, the amount of time remaining for positive, useful oral practice is still likely to be far more than in the full-class set-up.

2. Base the activity on easy language

In general, the level of language needed for a discussion should be **lower** than that used in intensive language-learning activities in the same class: it should be easily recalled and produced by the participants, so that they can speak fluently with the minimum of hesitation. It is a good idea to teach or review essential vocabulary before the activity starts.

3. Make a careful choice of topic and task to stimulate interest

On the whole, the clearer the purpose of the discussion the more motivated participants will be.

4. Give some instruction or training in discussion skills

If the task is based on group discussion then include instructions about participation when introducing it. For example, tell learners to make sure that everyone in the group contributes to the discussion; appoint a chairperson to each group who will regulate participation.

5. Keep students speaking the target language

You might appoint one of the group as monitor, whose job it is to remind participants to use the target language, and perhaps report later to the teacher how well the group managed to keep to it. Even if there is no actual penalty attached, the very awareness that someone is monitoring such lapses helps participants to be more careful.

However, when all is said and done, the best way to keep students speaking the target language is simply to be there yourself as much as possible, reminding them and modelling the language use yourself: there is no substitute for nagging!

Rules for the teacher (principles):

1. Speech must be motivated. It is necessary to think over the motives which make pupils speak. They should have a necessity to speak and not only a desire to get a good mark. **Rule:** ensure conditions in which a pupil will have a desire to say something, to express his thoughts, his feelings.
2. Speech is always addressed to an interlocutor. **Rule:** organize the teaching process in a way which allows your pupils to speak to someone, to their classmates in particular. When speaking a pupil should address the class and not the teacher or the ceiling as is often the case. When he retells a text nobody listens to him. The speaker will hold his audience when he says something new. Try to supply pupils with assignments which require individual approach on their part.
3. Speech is always emotionally coloured for a speaker expresses his thought, feelings, and his attitude to what he says. **Rule:** teach pupils to use intonational means to express their attitude, their feelings about what they say (prove, give your opinion).
4. Speech is always situational for it takes place in a certain situation. **Rule:** real and close-to-real situations should be created to stimulate pupils' speech.

Speech and oral exercises

Speech is a process of communication by means of language examples. Oral exercises are used for the pupils to assimilate phonetics, grammar, and vocabulary (making up sentences following the model). Oral exercises are quite indispensable to developing speech. However, they only prepare pupils for speaking and cannot be considered to be speech.

There are two forms of speaking: monologue and dialogue. In teaching **monologue** we can easily distinguish three stages:

1. the statements level
 2. the utterance level
 3. the discourse level
1. Drill exercises with the sentence pattern (substitution, extension, transformation, completion). When pupils are able to make statements in the FL they may learn to combine statements of various sentence patterns in a logical sequence.
 2. Pupils are taught how to use different sentence patterns in an utterance about an object, a subject offered. The pupil's utterance may involve 2-4 sentences which logically follow one another. At this stage pupils learn to express their thoughts, their attitude to what they say using various sentence patterns. Thus, they learn how to put several sentences together in one utterance.
 3. After pupils have learned how to say a few sentences in connection with a situation, they are prepared for speaking at discourse level. Free speech is possible provided pupils have acquired habits and skills in making statements and in combining them in a logical sequence. At this level pupils are asked to speak on a picture, a set of pictures, comment on a text, and make up a story of their own.

To develop pupils' skill in **dialogue** pupils are taught:

1. how to make responses:
 - 1) question-response
 - 2) statement-statement
 - 3) statement-question
 - 4) question-question
2. how to begin a dialogue, i.e. to ask questions, to make statements etc.
3. how to carry on a conversation, i.e. to start it, to join a conversation, to confirm, to comment using the following words and expressions: well, look here, I say, you see, do you mean to say, and what about,...to tell the truth, I mean to say...

In acquiring necessary habits in carrying on a conversation pattern-dialogues may be helpful. When a pattern-dialogue is used as a unit of teaching there are three stages in learning a dialogue:

1. Receptive: They listen to the dialogue, then read it silently for better understanding
2. Reproductive: Pupils enact the dialogue. Three kinds of reproduction:
 - a) Immediate. Pupils reproduce the dialogue in imitation of the speech just after they have heard it. The pupils are asked to learn the dialogue by heart for their homework
 - b) Delayed. They enact the dialogue on persons. Before calling on pupils it is recommended that they should listen to the dialogue recorded again to remind them of how it sounds.
 - c) Modified. Pupils enact the dialogue with some modifications in its contents. They change some elements in it. Pupils use their own experience while selecting the words for substitutions.
3. Creative: Pupils make up dialogues of their own. They are given a picture or a verbal situation to talk about.

To make the act of communication easier for the pupils the teacher helps them with “props”. The pupil needs props of two kinds: props in content or what to speak about, what to say, and props in form or how to say.

Pupils’ speech may be of two kinds prepared and unprepared. It is considered prepared when the pupil has been given time enough to think over its content and form. He can speak on the subject following the plan made either independently at home or in class under the teacher’s supervision. His speech will be more or less correct and sufficiently fluent since plenty of preliminary exercises had been done before.

The main objective of the learner, however, is to be able to use the linguistic material in unprepared speech.

- 1) Speak on the text heard
- 2) Discuss a problem or problems touched upon in the text read or heard (to compare the system of education)
- 3) Have an interview with a foreigner (one of the pupils is a Londoner, the classmates ask him various questions and express their opinions on the subjects under discussion)
- 4) Help a foreigner, e.g. to find the way to the main street, or instruct him as to the places of interest in the town.

There are of course other techniques for stimulating pupil’s unprepared speech. In conclusion it should be said that prepared and unprepared speech must be developed simultaneously from the very beginning. The relationship between prepared and unprepared speech should vary depending on the stage of learning the language.

6.3 Teaching reading

Reading is one of the main skills a pupil must acquire in the process of mastering a FL in school. Reading is one of the practical aims of teaching a FL. Reading is of great educational importance. Through reading in a FL the pupil enriches his knowledge of the world around him. He gets acquainted with the countries where the target language is spoken.

Reading develops pupils’ intelligence. It helps to develop their memory, will, imagination. Reading is not only an aim in itself; it is also a means of learning a FL. When reading a text, the pupil reviews sounds and letters, vocabulary and grammar, memorizes the spelling of words, the meaning of words and word combinations and in this way he perfects his command of the target language. If the teacher instructs his pupils in good reading and they can read with sufficient fluency and complete comprehension he helps them to acquire speaking and writing skills as well.

There are two ways of reading: aloud and silently. People usually start learning to read orally. In teaching a FL in school both ways should be developed.

When one says that one can read, it means that one can focus one's attention on the meaning and not on the form. A good reader does not look at letters, nor even at words, one by one, however quickly; he takes in the meaning of two, three or four words at a time, in a single moment such reading is the end to be attained.

As a means of teaching reading a system of exercises is widely used in school which includes:

1. Graphemic-phonemic exercises which help pupils to assimilate graphemic-phonemic correspondence in the English language.
2. Structural-information exercises which help pupils to carry out lexical and grammar analysis to find the logical subject and predicate in the sentences following the structural signals.
3. Semantic-communicative exercises which help pupils to get information from the text.

Reading in the English language is one of the most difficult things because there are 26 letters and 146 graphemes which represent 46 phonemes. It is not sufficient to know English letters. It is necessary that pupils should know how this or that vowel, vowel combination, consonant, or consonant combination is read in different positions in the words. The teacher cannot teach pupils all the existing rules and exceptions for reading English words.

The most difficult thing in learning to read is to get information from a sentence or a paragraph on the basis of the knowledge of structural signals and not only the meaning of words. Pupils often ignore grammar and try to understand what they read relying on the knowledge of autonomous words.

Pupils sometimes find it difficult to pick out topical sentences in the text which express the main ideas.

To make the process of reading easier, new words phrases, and sentence patterns should be learnt orally before pupils are asked to read them.

Consequently in order to find the most effective ways of teaching the teacher should know the difficulties pupils may have.

Exercises

1. The first group of exercises is designed to develop pupil's ability to associate the graphic symbols with the phonic ones.

Teaching begins with presenting a letter to pupils, or a combination of letters. The use of flash cards and the blackboard is indispensable. The same devices are applied for teaching pupils to read words. In teaching to read transcription is also utilized. It helps the learner to read a word in the cases where the same grapheme stands for different sounds (build, suit).

2. The second group includes structural-information exercises. They are done both in reading aloud and in silent reading. Pupils are taught how to read sentences, paragraphs, texts correctly. Special attention is given to intonation since it is of great importance to the actual division of sentences, to stressing the logical predicate in them. Marking the text occasionally may be helpful. At an early stage of teaching reading the teacher should read a sentence or a passage to the class himself. When he is sure the pupils understand the passage he can set individual and the class to repeat the sentences after him.

This kind of elementary reading practice should be carried on for a limited number of lessons only. When a class has advanced far enough to be ready for more independent reading, reading in chorus might be decreased, but not eliminated.

Reading aloud as a method of teaching and learning the language should take place in all the forms. This is done with the aim of improving pupils' reading skills.

In reading aloud the teacher uses:

- 1) Diagnostic reading (pupils read and he can see their weak points in reading).
- 2) Instructive reading (pupils follow the pattern read by the teacher or the speaker).
- 3) Control (test) reading (pupils read the text trying to keep as close to the pattern as possible).

Silent reading

Special exercises may be suggested to develop pupils' skills in silent reading.

Teaching silent reading is closely connected with two problems:

1. Instructing pupils to comprehend what they read following some structural signals, the latter is possible provided pupils have certain knowledge of grammar and vocabulary and they can perform lexical and grammatical analysis.
2. Developing pupils' ability in guessing.

Grammar and lexical analysis helps pupils to assimilate structural words, to determine the meaning of a word proceeding from its position in the sentence, to find the meanings of unfamiliar words, and those which seem to be familiar but do not correspond to the structure of the sentence (I saw him book a ticket). Pupils' poor comprehension often results from their poor knowledge of grammar (syntax in particular).

Some examples of tasks:

- Read the following sentences and guess the meaning of the words you don't know.
- These sentences are too complicated. Break them into shorter sentences.
- What is the significance of the tense difference?

The third group of exercises help pupils to get information from the text. To read a text the pupil must possess the ability to grasp the contents of the text. The pupil is to be taught to compare, to contrast, to guess and to foresee events.

Before questions may be very helpful for reading comprehension. They direct the pupil's thought when he reads the text. The teacher instructs pupils how to get information from the text. Communicative exercises are recommended. They are all connected with silent reading. These may be:

- Read and say why...
- Read and find answers to the following questions
- Read the text. Find the words which describe.
- Read the text and say what made somebody do something.
- Read the text and prove that.

Comprehension may also be checked using the following tasks:

- Read and draw.
- Find the following information
- Correct the following statements
- Find the most important sentences in the text.

Some of the assignments may be done in writing.

If the text is easy enough the text uses those techniques which are connected with speaking, with the active use of vocabulary and sentence patterns (asking questions, making up questions, summarizing, discussing).

The work must be carried out in a way which will be of interest to pupils and develop not only their reading ability but their aural comprehension and speaking abilities as well.

If the text is difficult, i.e. if it contains unfamiliar words and grammar items the techniques the teacher uses should be different as intensive work is needed on their part.

The intensive work may be connected with:

- 1) Lexical work which helps pupils to deepen and enrich their vocabulary knowledge.
- 2) Grammar work which helps pupils to review and systematize their grammar knowledge and enrich it through grammar analysis.
- 3) Content analysis.

The exercises are mostly connected with recognition on the part of the learners (find and read, find and analyze, find and translate, answer the questions, read those sentences which you think contain the main information).

Unfortunately, some teachers have a tendency to test instead of teach and they often confine themselves to reading and translating the text. This is a bad practice. The procedure becomes monotonous and the work is ineffective.

Reading texts should meet the following requirements:

- Interesting and have something new for the learners.
- Deal mostly with the life of people whose language pupils study to achieve the cultural aim.
- Be of educational value.
- Easy enough for pupils' comprehension to get pleasure from reading.
- Should help pupils in enriching their knowledge of the language, in extending so-called potential vocabulary.

While reading pupils are taught to perform the following "acts":

- To anticipate the subject of the text. This may be done through the title and skimming are "selective reading"
- To search for facts in the text. This is done through before – questions and other assignments phrases and sentences by his own for the purpose. All this results in better comprehension. In this way they are trained to give a summary of the text read.
- To interpret the text. Pupils have to acquire necessary habits in interpreting the text (evaluating, giving their opinion).

6.4 Teaching writing

Writing as a skill is very important in teaching and learning a foreign language; it helps pupils to assimilate letters and sounds of the English language, its vocabulary and grammar, and to develop habits and skills in pronunciation, speaking, and reading.

The practical value of writing is great because it can fix patterns of all kinds (graphemes, words, phrases and sentences) in pupils' memory, thus producing a powerful effect on their mind. That is why the school syllabus reads: "Writing is a means of teaching a foreign language." Writing includes penmanship, spelling, and composition. The latter is the aim of learning to write.

Since writing is a complicated skill it should be developed through the formation of habits such as:

- (1) the habit of writing letters of the English alphabet;
- (2) the habit of converting speech sounds into their symbols — letters and letter combinations;
- (3) the habit of correct spelling of words, phrases, and sentences;
- (4) the habit of writing various exercises which lead pupils to expressing their thoughts in connection with the task set .

In forming writing habits the following factors are of great importance:

- 1 Auditory perception of a sound, a word, a phrase, or a sentence, i.e., proper hearing of a sound, a word, a phrase, or a sentence.
- 2 Articulation of a sound and pronunciation of a word, a phrase, and a sentence by the pupil who writes.
- 3 Visual perception of letters or letter combinations which stand for sounds.
- 4 The movements of the muscles of the hand in writing.

The ear, the eye, the muscles and nerves of the throat and tongue, the movements of the muscles of the hand participate in writing. And the last, but not the least, factor which determines progress in formation and development of lasting writing habits is pupils' comprehension of some rules which govern writing in the English language.

Since pupils should be taught penmanship, spelling, and composition it is necessary to know the difficulties Russian pupils find in learning to write English.

The writing of the English letters does not present much trouble because there are a lot of similar letters in both languages. They are a, o, e, n, m, p, c, k, g, x, M, T, H. Only a few letters, such as s, r, i, h, l, f, b, t, j, I, G, Q, N, etc., may be strange to Russian pupils. Training in penmanship is made easier because our school has adopted the script writing suggested by Marion Richardson in which the capital letters in script have the same form as the printed capital letters. The small letters such as h, b, d, i, k, f, are made without a loop.

Pupils find it difficult to make each stroke continuous when the body of the letter occupies one space, the stem one more space above, the tail one more space below.

The most difficult thing for Russian pupils in learning to write is English spelling.

The spelling system of a language may be based upon the following principles:

1. Historical or conservative principle when spelling reflects the pronunciation of earlier periods in the history of the language. For example, Russian: кого, жил; English: busy, brought, daughter.
2. Morphological principle. In writing a word the morphemic composition of the word is taken into account. For example, in Russian: рыба, рыбка; the root morpheme is рыб; in English: answered, asked; the affixal morpheme is *ed*.
3. Phonetic principle. Spelling reflects the pronunciation. For example, in Russian: бесконечный - безграничный; in English: leg, pot.

One or another of these principles may prevail in any given language. In Russian and German the morphological principle prevails. In French and English the historical or conservative principle dominates (as far as the first 1000 words are concerned). The modern English spelling originated as early as the 15th century and has not been changed since then. The pronunciation has changed greatly during that time. Significant difference in pronunciation and spelling is the result. The same letters in different words are read differently. For example, fat, fate, far, fare.

Different letters or letter combinations in different words are read in the same way: I - eye; rode - road; write - right; tale - tail.

Many letters are pronounced in some words and are mute in other words: build [bild] - suit [sju:t]; laugh [la:f] - brought [bro:t]; help [help] - hour [aʊə].

The discrepancy that exists in the English language between pronunciation and spelling may be explained by the fact that there are more sounds in the language than there are letters to stand for these sounds. Thus, there are 23 vowel sounds in English and 6 letters to convey them.

In teaching English spelling special attention should be given to the words which present much trouble in this respect. The spelling of the words, for example, *busy*, *daughter*, *language*, *beautiful*, *foreign*, and others, must be assimilated through manifold repetition in their writing and spelling. In conclusion it should be said that it is impossible to master accurate spelling without understanding some laws governing it. Pupils should know:

(1) how to add:

- 1) -s to words ending in y: *day* - *days*, *stay* - *he stays*, but *city* - *cities*, *study* - *he studies*;
- 2) -ed to verbs: *play* - *played*; *carry* - *carried*;
- 3) -ing to verbs: *write* - *writing*; *play* - *playing*; *stand* - *standing*;
- 4) -er, -est to adjectives in the comparative and the superlative degrees: *clean* - *cleaner* - *cleanest*; *large* - *larger* - *largest*;

(2) when the consonant should be doubled: *sit* - *sitting*; *thin* - *thinner*; *swim* - *swimming*;

(3) the main word-building suffixes:

-ful: *use* - *useful*; -less: *use* - *useless*; and others.

Writing a composition or a letter, which is a kind of a composition where the pupil has to write down his own thoughts, is another problem to be solved. The pupil comes across a lot of difficulties

in finding the right words, grammar forms and structures among the limited material stored up in his memory. The pupil often does not know what to write; he wants good and plentiful ideas which will be within his vocabulary and grammar.

How to teach writing

Teaching writing should be based on such methodological principles as a conscious approach to forming and developing this skill, visualization and activity of pupils. Pupils learn to write letters, words, and sentences in the target language more successfully if they understand what they write, have good patterns to follow, and make several attempts in writing a letter (a word, a sentence) until they are satisfied that the work is well done.

Training in penmanship should proceed by steps.

1. The teacher shows the learners a letter or both a capital and a small letter, for example, *B b*. Special cards may be used for the purpose. On one side of the card the letters are written. On the other side there is a word in which this letter occurs.

2. The teacher shows his pupils how to write the letter. He can use the blackboard. For example, *V* and *W* are made with one continuous zigzag movement. *Q* is made without lifting the pen except for the tail, which is an added stroke. *L* is also made without lifting the pen. The first stroke in *N* is a down-stroke; the pen is not lifted in making the rest of the letter. Care should be taken that *r* is not made to look like a *v*: the branching should occur about two-thirds (*r*) from the bottom of the letter. The same applies to the letters *d* and *b*; *g* and *q*; *q* and *p* which are often confused by pupils. Then the teacher writes a word in which the new letter occurs. For example, *B b, bed*.

Whenever the teacher writes on the blackboard he gives some explanations as to how the letter is made, and then how the word is written. His pupils follow the movements of his hand trying to imitate them; they make similar movements with their pens in the air, looking at the blackboard.

Much care should be given to the words whose spelling does not follow the rules, for example, *daughter, busy, sure, usual, colonel, clerk, soldier*, etc. Pupils master the spelling of such words by means of repetitions in writing them.

The teacher shows his pupils how to rely on grammar in spelling the words. The more the pupils get acquainted with grammar, the more will they rely on it in their spelling.

For example, the pupils have learned the plural of nouns in the English language. Now they know that the ending *s* is added, though it sounds either [s] as in *maps* or [z] as in *pens*; in both cases they must write *s*.

In the words *famous, continuous* it is necessary to write *ous*, as it is an adjective-forming suffix. In the words *dislike, disadvantage* it is necessary to write *i* and not *e* as the negative prefix is *dis*.

Copying applies equally well to the phrase pattern and the sentence pattern with the same purpose to help the memory, for pupils should not be asked to write, at least in the first two years, anything that they do not already know thoroughly through speech and reading. Every new word, phrase or sentence pattern, after it has been thoroughly learnt, should be practised by copying.

Copying may be carried out both in class and at home.

In copying at home the pupils must be given some additional task preventing them from performing the work mechanically. The following tasks may be suggested:

- (a) underline a given letter or letter combination for a certain sound;
- (b) underline a certain grammar item;
- (c) underline certain words depicting, for example, the names of school things.

The additional work the pupil must perform in copying a text or an exercise makes him pay attention to the sound and meaning of the words. This kind of copying is a good way of ensuring the retention of the material. It must be extensively applied in the junior and in the intermediate stages.

Writing exercises

Dictation. This kind of writing exercise is much more difficult than copying. Some methodologists think that it should never be given as a test to young beginners. "It is a means of fixing

of what is already known, not a puzzle in which the teacher tries to defeat the pupil" (F. French). Dictation is a valuable exercise because it trains the ear and the hand as well as the eye: it fixes in the pupil's mind the division of each sentence pattern, because the teacher dictates division by division. For example, *Tom and I / go to school / together.*

Dictations can vary in forms and in the way they are conducted:

(a) **Visual dictation** as a type of written work is intermediate between copying and dictation. The teacher writes a word, or a word combination, or a sentence on the blackboard. The pupils are told to read it and memorize its spelling. Then it is rubbed out and the pupils write it from memory.

(b) **Dictation drill** aims at consolidating linguistic material and preparing pupils for spelling tests. The teacher dictates a sentence. A word with a difficult spelling either is written on the blackboard, or is spelt by one of the pupils. Then the pupils are told to write the sentence. The teacher walks about the class and watches them writing. He asks one of the pupils who has written correctly to go to the blackboard and write the sentence for the other pupils to correct their mistakes if they have any. The dictation drill may be given for 10—12 minutes depending on the grade and the language material.

(c) **Self-dictation.** Pupils are given a text (a rhyme) to learn by heart. After they have learned the text at home the teacher asks them to recite it. Then they are told to write it in their exercise-books from memory. So they dictate it to themselves. This type of written work may be given at junior and intermediate stages.

Writing sentences on a given pattern. This kind of writing exercise is more difficult because pupils choose words they are to use themselves. The following exercises may be suggested:

(a) Substitution: *Nick has a sister.* The pupils should use other words instead of *a sister*.

(b) Completion: *How many ... are there in the room? He came late because ...*

(c) Extension: *Ann brought some flowers.* (The pupils are expected to use an adjective before *flowers*.)

Practice of this kind can lead pupils to long sentences.

Writing answers to given questions. The question helps the pupil both with the words and with the pattern required for the answer.

The object of every kind of written exercise mentioned above is to develop pupils' spelling in the target language and to fix the linguistic material in their memory and in this way to provide favourable conditions for developing their skills in writing compositions. By composition in this case we mean pupils' expression of their own thoughts in a foreign language in connection with a suggested situation or a topic within the linguistic material previously assimilated in speech and reading. Progress in writing a foreign language is possible on condition that pupils have adequate preparation for writing. This preparation should nearly always be carried out orally, except late at the senior stage when it can be done from books independently as at this stage oral questioning need not precede writing. Writing compositions will not help much in the learning of a new language without careful preparation. If pupils have to rack their brains for something to say, or if they try to express something beyond their powers, the writing may be more harmful than helpful. Preparation may include:

(a) oral questioning with the aim of giving the pupils practice in presenting facts and ideas in the target language;

(b) the use of pictures and other visual aids to provide information for written work;

(c) auding an extract or a story which can stimulate pupils' thought; after auding there should always be some questions on the content;

(d) silent reading which can be used as a source of information for pupils, first, to speak about, and then for writing.

In teaching compositions the following exercises may be suggested:

1. A written reproduction of a story either heard or read. With backward classes most of the words that are habitually misspelt must be written on the blackboard.
2. A description of a picture, an object or a situation. For example:

- Write not less than three sentences about (the object).
- Write five sentences about what you usually do after classes.
- Write four sentences about what you can see in the picture of the room.
- 3. A descriptive paragraph about a text, or a number of texts on a certain subject. Pupils may be given concrete assignments. For instance:
 - Describe the place where the action takes place.
 - Write what you have learned about ...
 - Write what new and useful information you have found for yourself in this text (these texts).
 - Write what the author says about ... using the sentences from the text to prove it.
- 4. An annotation on the text read. The following assignments may help pupils in this.
 - Pick out sentences which express the main idea (ideas) in the text and then cross out those words which are only explanatory in relation to the main idea.
 - Abridge text by writing out only topical sentences.

— Write the contents of the text in 3—5 sentences.

- 5. A composition on a suggested topic. For example, “My family” or “Our town” or “The sports I like best”. Pupils should be taught to write a plan first and then to write the story to following the plan.
- 6. Letter writing. Pupils are usually given a pattern letter in English, which shows the way the English start their letters and end them.

The following assignments may be suggested:

- Write a letter to your friend who lives in another town.
- Write a letter to your parents when you are away from home.
- Write a letter to a boy (a girl) you do not know but you want to be your pen-friend.

In testing pupils’ skills in writing the teacher should use those kinds of work pupils get used to and which they can do because they must be well prepared before they are given a test. Every pupil should feel some pride in completing a test and be satisfied with the work done. Tests which result in mistakes are very dangerous. They do no good at all. They do a very great deal of harm because pupils lose interest in the subject and stop working at their English. Indeed, if the results of the test are poor, for example, 50% of the pupils have received low marks, they testify not only to the poor assimilation of the material by the pupils, but to the poor work of the teacher as well. He has given an untimely test. He has not prepared the pupils for the test yet. This is true of all kinds of tests in teaching a foreign language.

In teaching writing the following tests may be recommended to measure pupils’ achievements in penmanship, spelling, and composition.

1. The teacher measures his pupils’ achievement in making English letters in the right way by asking individuals to write some letters on the blackboard. Or else he may ask the pupils to write some letters which he names in their exercise-books. Then he takes the exercise-books for correction.
2. The teacher measures his pupils’ achievement in penmanship and spelling by administering dictation tests or spelling test. The teacher dictates a word, a phrase, or a sentence standing in front of the class for the pupils to hear him well. If the teacher dictates a sentence, it is not recommended to repeat it more than twice. Constant repetition of the sentence prevents pupils from keeping it in memory. If the dictation is based on a text whose sentences are logically connected it is necessary to read the whole text first and then dictate it sentence by sentence. When the pupils are ready with writing, the teacher reads the text once more for them to check it.

The amount of material that might be included in a dictation depends on the form, the stage of teaching, and the character of the material itself.

A spelling test may be given either at the beginning of the lesson, or in the second half of it. Thus, if the teacher handles the class well, it makes no difference when he gives it. If he does not handle the class well enough to hold his pupils' attention, it is better to administer a test in the second half of the class-period, the first half of the class-period being devoted to some other work. Otherwise he will not succeed in making his pupils work well. They will be excited because of the test.

3. The teacher measures his pupils' achievement in composition:

- by asking them to write a few questions on the text;
- by answering questions (the questions are given);
- by making a few statements on the object-picture or a set of pictures given;
- by describing a picture illustrating a situation or topic in written form;
- by writing a few sentences on a suggested topic;
- by giving a written annotation on the text read;
- by writing a descriptive paragraph;
- by writing a letter.

In conclusion, it should be said that everything a pupil writes as a test must be easy for him because he is asked to write only those things which he already knows thoroughly.

It cannot be stressed strongly enough that none of the above types of tasks can be used as tests if the pupils were not taught to do them in the process of learning the target language.

There is one more problem which deals with writing that is the correction of mistakes in pupils' exercise-books.

Modern methodologists believe that the essence of correction lies in the fact that a pupil must realize what mistake he had made and how he must correct it. That is why many teachers and methodologists, not only in this country and abroad, consider that the teacher should just mark (underline) a wrong letter, or a form, or a word, etc.

In this way he will make the pupil find the mistake and correct it. Learners must acquire the habit of noticing mistakes in their own writing. This habit can be acquired if pupils are properly trained, if teachers will develop these habits in their

pupils. The training that will help pupils to become aware of their mistakes has to be gradual and continuous. When a pupil is made to find his mistakes and correct them he has to apply his knowledge in spelling, vocabulary, and grammar of the target language and this is far more useful for him than the corrections made by the teacher. The effect of the teacher's corrections on the pupils is usually very small. Therefore pupils should be trained to correct mistakes that have been made. The better the teacher trains his pupils, the less work he will have to do in the marking.

In carrying out the training the following techniques may be recommended.

1. Pupils should read through their own written work before handing it in, and correct any mistakes they can find. The habit of revising written work is a useful one, and every pupil has to acquire it.

2. Pupils can correct the sentences themselves looking at the blackboard where the correct answers to exercises are written.

3. Whenever pupils are writing, the teacher can walk round looking through the work they have done and putting a dot at the end of those lines which contain a mistake. The pupil has to find the mistake and correct it. When the teacher comes round again, he crosses out the dot if the mistake has been corrected, if not, he leaves the dot. This takes very little time, because teachers are usually quick in finding mistakes. With small classes (he teacher can get an exercise almost completely corrected).

4. When written work has to be handed in, the teacher asks his pupils to read through their work and count up the mistakes. They should put down the number at the bottom of the page. Then they correct the mistakes. The teacher might give the class three to five minutes for this work. The exercise-books are then collected and the teacher corrects the mistakes. He puts the number of mistakes he finds at the bottom of the page.

5. The teacher can ask his pupils to change exercise-books with their neighbors. The latter look through the work and try to find the mistakes which have been missed by their friends. They put the new number at the bottom of the page.

Thus the teacher varies the procedure keeping the class guessing about what he will want them to do. With the techniques described above the teacher stimulates his pupils to keep a sharp eye for mistakes and, in this way, develops their ability to notice their mistakes and correct them.

Since writing is a mighty means in learning a foreign language pupils should write both in class and at home. For this they need (1) two exercise-books for class and homework (the teacher collects the exercise-books regularly for correcting mistakes and assigns marks for pupils' work in the exercise-books); (2) a notebook for tests (the teacher keeps the notebooks in class and gives them to the pupils for a test and corrections).

The exercise-books must meet the general school requirements established by unified spelling standards.