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GUIDING PRINCIPLES RELATING TO REPETITION
IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF READERS

Scholars and teachers in the field of second language teaching have shown concern for the problem of repetition of language forms in reading material. The concern they show has been mainly with the repetition of vocabulary and not with structural patterns. Another fact revealed by an examination of their writings and views is that they are concerned with frequency and distribution problems rather than with the means for gaining natural repetition of language forms.

Michael West insists that new vocabulary should be introduced gradually, at regular intervals, and repeated with systematic regularity. "In practice we may lay in down that each new word on its first appearance should occur at least three times in the paragraph and as often as possible in the reat of the lesson or story."[1]

A similar view is maintained by Peter Hagboldt in the popular Heath reading series. Hagboldt "tried to repeat each

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[1] Michael West, *Learning to Read a Foreign Language* (London).

new word from three to five times shortly after its firts occurrence. . .".[2]

I. Morris, in his methods book in the section dealing with the compilation of readers expounds a less exacting theory of repetition. He simply says that new words should be repeated as often as possible.[3]

Dunkol likewise favors a loss exacting theory relating to the repetition of language material. He points out that studies of retention have shown very clearly that material overlearned is retained much better than that mastered to the point of learning and concluded that, "As a result of these facts it is impossible to set a theoretical maximum for the number of repetitions desireable. This limit will be set merely by the ingenuity of the author, the space available and similar factors."

The consideration of repeating vocabulary is given much emphasis by the specialists. However, they have shown disregard for the necessity of repeating the structural patterns of language. We should not allow chance to accomplish for structure what it is in claimed chance cannot do for vocabulary. Although structural words tend to recur as any examination of word counts will reveal, there is no evidence as to the reoccurence in particular arrangements with other linguistic forms which in a sense are the structural patterns of English.

Fries and Traver in examining seven English word lists found almost 100% overlapping in all of the lists in respect to the words which Basic calls "operations".[5] They conclude that the structural words of the language are so essential to any use of the language that they must be included whether a list is based upon a frequency and range count or upon logical considerations.

Has is a common structural word but the mere repetition of *Has* does not insure its appearance in such arrangements or relationships as:

[2] Peter Hagboldt, Allerlei: (Book One The Heath-Chicago German Series Chicago, 1932).
[3] I. Morris, *The Teaching of English as a Second Language* (London, 1945).
[4] Harold .B Dunkel, *Second Language Learning* (Boston, 1948).
[5] Charles C. Fries and A. Aileen Traver, *English Word Lists* (Washington, D. C.: American Council on Education, 1940).

He *ha*s to go.
He *has* received the money.
Has he reccived the money?

Do, another significant structural word has various struc-tural uses. The mere repetition of *do* in any context will not in itself guarantee its appearance in such arrangements as:

Do you speak English?
I *do* not speak it very well.
Yes, I *do*.
I *do do* my work.

A study of the theories of foreign language learning brought to light the fact that the principle of repetition formed an important part of their language programs.

Otto Jespersen as early as 1904 said, "The oftener a piece is recited by a pupil, the more firmly are the single words and especially the word-combinations rooted in his memory; indeed it has even been attempted to base a whole system of instruction in this experience."[6]

1. Repetition of vocabulary, new or old, is necessary if the needed practice for reenforcement is to be afford-ed to the learner.

2. Repetition of the fundamental structural patterns is as necessary as the repetition of vocabulary since chance will not in itself provide for the reoccurence of specific grammatical arrangements.

Meaningful Repetition and Experiential Continuity

The preceding section of this article has shown the great concern on the part of specialists in the field of foreign lan-guage teaching for repetition of language forms. Further

[6] Otto Jespersen, *How to Teach a Foreign Language* (London, 1904).

examinations of the various recommendations concerning methodology reveal an almost complete disregard for meaningful practice as well as experiential continuity.

It is to Otto Jespersen's credit hat at the turn of the century, he devoted a whole chapter in his classic book on how to teach a foreign language to the problem that we might term experiential continuity. He points out that we ought to learn a language through sensible communications. "There must be," he continues, "(and this as far as possible from the very first day) a certain connection in the thoughts communicated in the new language. Disconnected sentences ought to be used, at all events, not in such a manner and to such an extent as in most books according to the old method."[7]

This suggestion for improving materials was taken into consideration by a good number of writers but in their attempts to do so, they failed to consider the need for linguistic similarities among the sentences. It may be said that most readers suffer on two accounts. First; they fail to give the learner sentences related linguistically. Second, they fail to provide for sentences related in idea and in situation.

Virginia French who was responsible for the survey of language practices in teaching English as a secon language in the schools of Puerto Rico in 1950, has given more thought to the problems of meaningful practice, linguistic similarity, and experiential continuity than most authorities.

It would be most purposeful to quote from French's recommendations for improving the teaching-learning situation. "The practice of communication fundamentals should never be divorced from meaningful experience. It should also provide for continuity within real-life situations, rather than consist of disconnected fragments related only by linguistic similarities."

"What is meant by continuity can be seen by comparing the following two groups of sentences:

    I. Your sister wants to sing a song.

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[7] *Ibid.*, p. 11.

The doctor wants to go to the baseball game.
My father wants to buy a new car.

II. Antonio wants to be a doctor.
His sister wants to be a teacher.
Their cousin wants to be a nurse.

Both sets of sentences practice the form *want to.* The sentences in the first group are related only by structural similarity. The sentences in the second group are related not only in structure but also in situation and ideas: Someone is discuussing the vocational aims of three related persons. There is continuity in the second set and none in the first."[8]

The need for relating sentences structurally as well as in situation and idea should be given much consideration in the preparation of reading material.

Relating Dialogue to Dialogue

In addition to avoiding disconnected sentences, it is necessary to go a step further and attempt to avoid disconnected dialogues and situations. Thus an important criterion should be the repetition of meaningful situations so that the reader is allowed to participate in similar situations over and over again. Little evidence as to the importance of this considerations has been found, but this writer has found by actual use his own materials, that this is necessary if the practice is to be of value to the learner.

What is meant by connected dialogues and situations can be seen by observing the following two sets of materials:

I. I want a new hat for my birthday.
I also want a new suit.
And I want a new jacket.

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[8] Puerto Rico: Department of Education, *Education and the Future of Puerto Rico* (San Juan, 1950)`, pp. 432-33.

II. Joe and his friends are discussing what they want for Christmas.

Joe — I wan an erector set.
I want electric trains.
And I want a bat and a ball.

Jack — I want some things for school.
I want a fountain pen.
I want a briefcase and some notebooks.

Joe — And what do you want for Christmas, Charlie?

Charlie — I want a lot of things.
I want a dog and a dog house.
I want a radio and a television set.

Both the first and second sets are related structurally as well as in situation and idea. However, the second set relates one dialogue to the other thus insuring repetition of the same or similar elements in the situation.

Devices for Gaining Natural Repetition of Vocabulary and Structural Patterns

Joseph Morin in order to make his reading material more interesting to the Puerto Rican child and avoid making his material too monotonous, attempted to gain natural repetition by utilizing Mother Goose stories in which the main character of the story went from place to place or person to person giving the same information or requesting the same help.[9]

Despite this important concern for natural repetition, Algernen Coleman in examining and criticizing the Morin reader failed to recognize this important contribution.[10]

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[9] Joseph Morin, *The Morin Method First Reader* (N.Y., 1920).
[10] Algernon Coleman, *English Teaching in the Southwest* (Washington American Council on Education, 1940), p. 211.

The important problem of how to gain natural repetition without seeming extremely mechanical and monotonous, should lead writers of readers to the creation of various devices that would assure the needed repetition of vocabulary, structural patterns and situations.

Summary of Guiding Principles Relating to Repetition

Guiding principles relating to the repetition of vocabulary, structural patterns, and situation; in the construction of the readers are:

1. Vocabulary, new or old, should be repeated as often as possible.

2. The fundamental structural patterns should be repeated as often as possible.

3. The sentences repeated should be related structurally as well as in situation and idea.

4. The situations and the dialogues should be repeated as often as possible in order to insure the reappearance of the linguistic forms.

5. Devices for gaining natural repetition should be created to avoid extremely mechanical and monotonous repetition of vocabulary and structural patterns.

6. Those situations most appropriate to the needs of the learner should be repeated most frequently.