

# Chapter 4

## The Audiolingual Method





# Background: Dissatisfaction

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● A modified version of the Direct Method or a reading-based approach recommended in the Coleman Report provided little attempt to treat language content systematically.



● That is, unlike the British Situational Language Teaching, there were in US no principles of selection, gradation and presentation of language content, such as grammar, sentence patterns and vocabulary.



# Background: New demand

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- The entry of the US into WWII put forward an urgent need to train military staff as interpreters, translators or code-room assistants.
- The US government commissioned universities to develop language programs for military purpose.
- The Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) was established in 1942.
- Objectives: train learners to attain conversational proficiency in a variety of foreign languages.



# The Beginning of ASTP

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- **ASTP started from a method developed by Leonard Bloomfield at Yale, as a part of their linguistic research, called the “informant method”:**



- **Purpose: train linguists and anthropologists to master American Indian and other languages.**



# The Beginning of ASTP

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- **Techniques:**

- no textbooks
  - a native speaker as the informant served as source of language content
  - A linguist, who did not know the target language, supervised, guided and took part in the learning experience;
  - Learners studied 10 hours a day, 6 days a week, with 15 hours of drill with native speakers and 30 hours of private study over 2-3 six week sessions.
- **This is the system adopted by the army, and in small classes of mature and highly motivated learners, excellent results, therefore, were achieved.**



# The End of ASTP

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- **ASTP lasted only about 2 years and attracted considerable attention.**



- **The suitability in regular language program was much argued:**
  - **Derived from intensity of contact with TL, not from a well-developed methodological basis**
  - **Innovative only in terms of procedures, not in approach**
  - **The value of an intensive, oral-based approach EFL learning was convincing.**



# Background: New demand

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- More linguists involved in EFL teaching as America became an international power



- Growing demand for EFLT expertise since foreign students entered US to study in universities

- These factors led to the emergence of the American approach to ESL— Audiolingualism.



# The Audiolingual Method: Beginning

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- In 1939, the Michigan University developed the first English Language Institute in the US, to train teachers as EFL or ESL.
- **Charles Fries**, director of the institute and a structural linguist, applied the principles of structural linguistics to language teaching.
- The starting point was grammar or “structure” of language: its basic sentence patterns and grammatical structures.
- Systematic attention on pronunciation and sentence patterns
- Students’ tasks: drill, drill, and more drill





# The Audiolingual Method: Emergence

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- More universities were involved in establishing similar programs and developing courses and materials for the teaching of English.
- More linguists became active in both home and broad supervising programs.
- In 1950, textbooks for teaching English to speakers of foreign languages were developed.
- “General form” of each lesson: pronunciation, morphology, grammar, drills and exercises.



# The Audiolingual Method: Emergence

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- In 1952, Guidelines were published, such as *Structural Notes and Corpus: A Basis for the Preparation of Materials to Teach English as a Foreign Languages*.



- Between 1953 and 1956, the famous *Spoken Language* series were published.
- Fries's principles in *Teaching and learning English as a foreign language* (1945): The problems of learning a FL were attributed to the conflict of different structural systems, such as grammatical and phonological patterns; contrastive analysis helps to detect problems of interference of NL.



# The Audiolingual Method: Emergence

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- The approach developed by Fries and others was known as the Oral Approach, the Aural Oral Approach, and the Structural Approach.



- It influenced the way of teaching languages in US throughout the 50s, and more materials were produced and widely used.

- Its linguistic principles incorporated the most advanced scientific approach to language teaching.



# Characteristics of the Aural-Oral Approach

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● Order of teaching a language: **aural** training first, then **pronunciation**, followed by **speaking**, **reading**, and **writing**



● Language was identified with **speech**, and speech was taught through **structure**.



# The Major Factors Promoting the Development

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- Need for a radical change and rethinking of FL teaching methodology



- Late 1950s, reaction to Sputnik, “quick learning” of foreign languages

- Increased attention and more intensive effort were given to FL teaching

- The National Defense Education Act (1958) provided funds for the study and analysis of modern languages.



# The Major Factors Promoting the Development

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● Teachers were encouraged to receive training.



● Language teaching specialists drew on experiences of the Army Method and the Aural-oral Approach, and add their insights from structural linguistic theory, contrastive analysis and behaviorist psychology. All these led to the Audiolingual Method.



# Effects of the Audiolingual Method

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- It was the incorporation of linguistic principles of Aural-Oral Approach with the state-of-the-art (最先进的) psychological learning theory in the mid-fifties that led the method to coming into being.
- widely adopted for teaching FL in North American colleges and universities.
- Guided by its principles, *Lado English Series* (1977), and *English 900* (1964) were published.
- Though beginning to fall in the late 60s, it continues to be widely used today.



# Approach: Theory of Language

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- Structural linguistics in 1950s as a reaction to traditional grammar



- The reaction was prompted by the movement toward positivism(实证主义) and empiricism (经验主义), promoted by Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* and by an increased interest in non-European languages.

- By the 1930s, the scientific approach to the study of language: collecting examples of what speakers said and analyzing them at different levels of structural organization--- phonemic, morphological and syntactic systems



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