

THE BASIC SKILLS IN E. L. T. AS F. L. IN
SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL IN MEXICO*

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One considers as 'BASIC' those skills which are fundamental for the acquisition of a language, whether as native, second or foreign. A 'native' language is the mother tongue of the speaker as well as the official language of the area in which the speaker lives. In Mexico this would be Spanish. A second language is not the mother tongue of the speaker but is the official language of the area where the speaker lives. A 'foreign' language is neither the speaker's mother tongue nor the official language in the area where the speaker lives. In Mexico English is the 'foreign' language. The order or degree of importance of each skill depends on the type of language one is acquiring (N, S or without F) and the objectives one has in mind when teaching/learning it.

In Mexico with the general objective of communication, whether in the oral or the written form of the language the learner is acquiring, one has the following order: Listening Comprehension; Speaking Ability; Reading Comprehension; Written Expression. Such order reflects the way in which learners acquire their native tongue Spanish and in the SEP syllabus each skill represents a particular objective.

It is felt that one should be aware that these skills can be developed as such but can also be established as abilities in the learner. One talks about an ability when one considers inherited characteristics which will help learners achieve the skill with the minimum of proficiency necessary for communication. In the case of the skill, one has to eliminate inherited characteristics. The implications of this difference reside in the area of testing, where teachers tend to establish standard scales in the classroom. One would have to consider the effort the learner put into acquiring the target language, that is, the amount of language selected to be taught/learned in a given course. Learners with an innate ability can afford to almost miss classes and still be able to obtain the necessary grade in order to pass a given course. However, the learner with no innate ability, requires constancy and work in order to pass the course.

It is felt that skills are classified on the basis of 'cause and effect'. That is, a teacher helps learners develop listening comprehension in order to establish the necessary conditions for them to be able to speak; in the same manner, reading comprehension development in the

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learner familiarizes him sufficiently to be able to have the conditions needed for the development of written expression. One could consider that the first two skills are fully concentrated upon the oral form of the language while the latter two concentrate on the written form.

When one studies language acquisition skills, one gets involved in factors that determine the development of these skills in a formal teaching/learning situation, as it is the case of the secondary school in Mexico. Here, one considers three main aspects: objectives; stages; and levels. One could consider that objectives are established in the syllabus one is working with, whether these are of general, particular or specific nature. In the case of the stages, these are determined and carried through by the teacher when following a sequence established and designed by the teacher in the form of a lesson-plan. Levels, on the other hand, are the sole responsibility of the learner. That is, it is expected, when following certain objective(s) through an effective planification of the teaching process, that the learner, as his terminal behaviour, will reach a certain level of language acquisition which can also be considered learning. So, one has:

Objective(s) = Ministry of Education (SEP) through Syllabus(es) from C. N. T. E. *
 Stages: Teacher through "lesson-plan". It is a teaching responsibility.
 Levels: Learner, through practice and constancy. It is a learning responsibility.

True, one cannot state that one has taught if the learner has not learned. Therefore, one states that the teaching/learning process is simultaneous.

First Skill: Listening Comprehension. R E C E P T I V E

Objective: To familiarize the learner with the oral form of the language.
 Stages: Recognition of sounds.
 Levels: Perception
 Recognition
 Discrimination[~]
 Comprehension

Second Skill: Speaking Ability. P R O D U C T I V E

Objective(s): Establishment of language habits in the oral form. Application of such habits in communicative processes in the oral form.
 Stages: Drills
 Guided practice
 Directed first and latter free communication in the oral form.

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- Levels: Mechanic - mere repetition of what the teacher has presented.
 Productive - combination of material known with new providing new utterances.
 Creative - combination of known and new material to communicate original facts.

Third Skill: Reading Comprehension. R E C E P T I V E

- Objective(s): To train students to associate oral form with the written one.
 To enable learner(s) to extract information from written texts.
- Stages: Familiar material.
 Rearranged/recombined familiar material.
 Graded material (intensive and/or extensive reading).
 Authentic material.
- Levels: Exposure to written form: Awareness of conventional form.
 Identification of words drawing it from meaning or vice-versa.
 Meaning of words when used in context with a content (cohesion and coherence).
 Comprehension of content of authentic material in the written form: Idea(s) conveyed.

Fourth Skill: Written Expression. P R O D U C T I V E

- Objective(s): Association of the oral and the written form of the language.
 Train learner in the conventional form of the written language (spelling).
 Train students to communicate their ideas in the written form of language.
- Stages: Copying.
 Reproduction and recombination of known material with minor adjustments.
 Guided writing: known as guided composition.
 Composition: known as free composition.
- Levels: Mechanic - mere repetition of the written form of the language: no change.
 Productive - combination of known and new material in the written form.
 Creative - integration of material to communicate original information using the written form of the language, following its conventional rules.

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