

REVIEWS

JAN RUSIECKI *O nauczaniu języków obcych*
Zarys metodyki ogólnej kursu podstawowego. PZWS, Warszawa 1964

The book is the first postwar Polish attempt to present all the problems connected with teaching modern foreign languages and although brief and schematic due to its popular character it is nevertheless welcome. The book is addressed chiefly to primary and secondary school teachers and to the lecturers of institutions of higher instruction. The author, who takes a moderately structural standpoint does not claim to consider any method within oral-aural approach as the only efficient one.

The book consists of two parts. The first one is entitled *Język i jego nauczanie — rozważania ogólne* (*Language and Language Teaching — general remarks*) and it contains a telegraphic summary of contemporary views on language and related views on the significance of descriptive linguistics in teaching foreign languages and in developing methods on which particular techniques of language teaching are based. This part also contains a traditional chapter devoted to aims, motives, and conditions as the elements underlying efficient use of the adopted methods in teaching foreign languages. The titles of the chapters of the first part of the book run as follows *Współczesne poglądy na język* (*Contemporary Views on Language*), *Językoznawstwo a metody nauczania języków* (*Linguistics and Methods of Teaching Languages*), *Cele, motywy i warunki nauczania języków* (*Aims, Motives and Conditions in Teaching Foreign Languages*).

The second part *Proces Nauczania* (*The Process of Teaching*) is devoted to selection of teaching materials in the areas of phonology, morphology, syntax and lexicon, and to classroom techniques as tools for introducing and explaining new material and for developing and fixing language habits. A separate chapter is devoted to aids and machines facilitating the process of teaching. The author does not touch upon any problems connected with testing the skills acquired by the students. The following are the titles of the chapters constituting part II: *Dobór materiału nauczania* (*Selecting the Teaching Materials*), *Układ materiału* (*Arranging the Material*), *Wprowadzanie i objaśnianie nowego materiału* (*Introducing and Explaining the New Material*), *Wyrobienie i utrwalanie nawyków językowych* (*Developing and Fixing Language Habits*), *Materiały i pomoce naukowe* (*Teaching Materials and Aids*). The book is provided with a rather arbitrarily selected and annotated bibliography containing works on general linguistics, applied linguistics, and methods of teaching foreign languages.

The author deals with teaching of only modern foreign languages: English, French, German and Russian. As a specialist in English he bases his considerations primarily on this language giving relatively little attention to French. Therefore a modification of the title *O nauczaniu języków obcych* (*On Teaching Foreign Languages*) should

have been made by adding an adjective „nowożytnych" (modern) or at least by making a mention to this effect in the introduction.

The book suffers from the author's misinterpretation the terms *approach*, *method* and *technique* as applied in teaching foreign languages. The above terms have been discussed at length (see e.g. the article by E.M. Anthony in *ELT*, XVII, 2, 63—66). *Approach* is a set of theoretical assumptions dealing with language teaching and language in general. These considerations are the domain of linguists and applied linguists. *Method* is the way in which teaching materials are prepared. There may be many methods within an *approach* depending on what languages come into contact in the process of teaching, as well as on the age and number of students who are to be taught. These problems are the domain of people working on syllabi, textbooks and teaching aids. And finally *technique* is a set of procedures in the classroom during a foreign language lesson, aimed at developing language habits. The problems connected with *technique* are the affair of the teacher. The teacher's duty is to familiarize himself with both, developments on the level of *approach*, and on the level of *method* in order to avoid any possible discrepancies, which does not, however, mean that he has to be an active linguist or an author of a textbook in order to fulfil his classroom duties perfectly well.

A misunderstanding of the above terms by the author of the reviewed book has resulted in a quite erroneous handling of certain problems. The very subtitle of the book *Zarys metodyki ogólnej (An Outline of General Methodology)* sounds dubious. From the preface we gather that the author iden-

tifies *method* with *approach* for he says: „It seems to me that it is impossible to write a methodology of teaching of English, which would differ in any considerable degree, in problems and their treatment, from, say „Methodology of Teaching of Russian." A preponderant majority of what is worth saying of teaching any foreign language may very well be applied to each one of them. What remains is *simply* (italics are my own) a methodological commentary based on a lecture of descriptive grammar and lexicology of a language..."¹ It is clear that the first part of the above assumption deals with general considerations on language and language teaching and is a matter of *approach*. The statement is true only up to the point where we carry on theoretical considerations that is on the level of *approach*. When, however, we get down to teaching a particular language in a particular group of students we have to develop particular methods for corresponding pairs of languages (native and foreign) and we cannot ignore the importance of this.

A lack of any distinction between the contributions of a linguist, a textbook author, and a practising teacher to the process of teaching is another result of the faulty interpretation of the three fundamental terms. On page 36 the author is in the right when he states that "...efficient teaching must be founded on a strict and thorough linguistic analysis" without, however, mentioning the linguist and his contribution in making such an analysis. It is quite easy to overlook the obvious so for a while one gets an impression that the author does not mention the linguist simply because he considers the linguist's part as axiomatic. Unfortunately this is not the case as on p. 76, discussing the criteria of selecting

¹ This and the following citations from the reviewed book are quoted in my own translation from Polish.

teaching materials, the author tries to have the teacher do the job of the linguist when he thus addresses his readers. "Having prepared the list of material we next have to consider the relative importance and difficulty of particular elements. A comparison of the native language with the foreign language will be the basis for the selection." And again on page 80 he postulates similar actions for the teacher with respect to selecting rhythmic and intonational patterns. The author really demands too much from his reader when he expects him to be able, as a practising teacher, to conduct those necessary and, according to the author, "strict and thorough" linguistic analyses.

Another result of the misinterpretation of the terms is, on the level of method, a lack of any distinction between teaching children, teenagers and adults. The approach may indeed be the same, yet a separate method must be worked out for each of the three groups. The book under discussion deals with teaching foreign languages at the beginner's stage but in various age groups. On page 88 and the following the author quotes examples from textbooks for adult students (Eckersley, Hornby) and for teenagers (Smólska) but even on this occasion he leaves unmentioned the necessity of the teacher realizing the differences in methods in various age groups.

Let us now mention some minor details that attract the reader's attention as one reads the book. Surveying contemporary trends in linguistics it would have been worthwhile to introduce the term „metalanguage" when discussing models of language description just as the label „transformational grammar", when mentioning the name of Chomsky.

Discussing the influence of descrip-

tive linguistics on the methods of teaching languages the author mentions Charles C. Fries, entirely ignoring his closest collaborator and follower Robert Lado, who has no less than three works listed in the bibliography.

Dealing with life in England and the United States, on page 74 the author is mistaken when he claims that the greatest differences between British English and American English manifest themselves in the area of pronunciation as in fact the major differences appear in the area of usage and the meaning of words appearing on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. Strict examinations of British and American dialects revealed that isophones separating particular areas in the United States have their counterparts on the British Isles. In other words there exists no feature in the area of phonology characterizing particular American dialects, which could not be located somewhere on the British Isles. Obvious differences in pronunciation can be noticed only on comparing two selected dialects of the two variants of English². The author probably thought of the so called Received Pronunciation versus its American counterpart General American. Generally speaking the author seems to overestimate the significance of the differences between British English and American English in the process of teaching English as a foreign language and expects too catastrophic results in consequence of inadequate comprehension of these differences by the teachers.

On page 78, when discussing the selection of sounds the author uses the terms *phoneme* and *allophone*, which, although fundamental in the science of phonology, may be obscure for a good deal of his readers. In anticipation of this the author makes an attempt to explain them in a footnote.

² Cf. e. g. Herbert Pilch „Dialekte im amerikanischen Englisch" *Anglia* 75 (1957), 334—346.

It is unfortunate that the proposed definition does not really explain the difference between a phoneme and a phone as it ignores one of the fundamental things: the contrast of meaning. The author quotes an example from Polish: the phoneme /e/ has, according to him, two variants (allophones) the more open as in *sen* and the more closed as in *sień*. Their distribution is conditioned by the neighbourhood of unsoftened consonants in the first case and the softened ones in the second. To make this explanation clearer he should have added that substituting one allophone for another would not change the meaning of the word. It is immaterial from the point of view of communicating the corresponding meaning whether a speaker says in Polish [*sen*] or [*sen*]. In contrast with this, replacing of [E] or [e] (variants of one phoneme) with, for example, [a] will change the meaning of the word *sen* : *san*, which means that [a] belongs to another phoneme as it produces a contrast in meaning of the word it is an element of, compared with any variant of the phoneme /e/.

In the chapter *Introducing and Explaining New Material* the author gives examples of the first lessons of English. His method certainly is one possible arrangement of material for the beginners but it is not the most fortunate one as it introduces a construction of the type „This is my pen” in the very first lesson. The said construction is a source of many difficulties as it contains several phonetic problems in addition to the fact that the presence of the demonstrative pronoun „this” in the very first step must be immediately accompanied by introducing the remaining demonstratives „that”, „these” and „those” which are usually quite difficult for beginners to distinguish between. It is possible to arrange the material in such a way as to postpone these quite difficult (and in fact not

very useful) structures until some other, more important patterns like „I am a teacher”, „Mary has a book” have been introduced and assimilated by the students. On the other hand the French structure „C'est ma plume” is not so troublesome for the beginner and can be successfully introduced in the first lesson. The fallacy of the statement about „universal” methodologies is once again confirmed by the quoted example. In contrast with approach which is a matter of theory and can therefore discuss problems connected with learning a language in general, methodology is a matter of practise and is intrinsically connected with particular languages.

In the chapter *Teaching Materials and Aids* the author has failed to devote space to discussing the role of rimes, songs and language games in the process of teaching at the beginner's stage. When teaching children it is almost impossible to overestimate this role.

A few words concerning the bibliography will conclude our review. The author makes a reservation in the introductory note that his bibliography will not be exhaustive as certain works are unavailable in this country but what surprises the reader is the fact that he has included certain works which should not have been included in the bibliography of a book like the one under discussion. For example an excellent collection of linguistic essays by Kuryłowicz *Esquisses linguistiques* are beyond the understanding of the average practising teacher and thus absolutely useless. Similarly, including the recent work by Zabrocki *Wspólnoty komunikatywne w genezie języka niemieckiego*, while ignoring a number of his articles closely connected with teaching foreign languages is a mistake. One cannot really understand what lies behind listing Bastgen's *Jak uczyć języka angielskiego* published in 1948, instead of the much more recent work by the

same author *The Teaching of English* (PWN, Łódź, Warszawa 1957).

On the other hand certain works should have been included no matter how persistent the author's reservations might be. A pioneer work by Palmer *A Grammar of Spoken English on Strictly Phonetic Basis*, Cambridge, W. Heffer and Sons Ltd. 1939 has its lasting place in any bibliography devoted to applied linguistics. One of the best monographs on the subject *Language and Language Learning* by Nelson Brooks, published in New York in 1960 by Harcourt Brace was, too, surprisingly enough ignored by the author. The absence of a collected effort of the Soviet authors entitled *Mietodika naczelnowo obuczienija inostrannym jazykam (Methodology of Teaching Foreign Languages at the Beginners' Stage)* edited by I. W. Karpowa and I. W. Rachmanowa is hard to be excused. „*The Linguistic Reporter*”, *Newsletter of the Center for Applied*

Linguistics of the Modern Language Association of America, should have been listed among the periodicals.

It seems obvious that a work of this type should also devote some space to listing the most important current textbooks used in teaching particular languages with short comments stressing their advantages and shortcomings.

In conclusion, it is necessary to say that the discussed work treats of too many problems in too little space to be argumentative enough and convince those who are not converted to views similar to those of the author, and for the very same reason those „converted” are not likely to find anything new in the book. We are of the opinion that all possible future attempts in this area should be much more specified so that the material covered in them can be treated in a more exhaustive way.

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LESZEK SZKUTNIK *Ćwiczenia konwersacyjne do nauki języka angielskiego* (Warszawa 1961) Kluby MPiK „Ruch”, 16, pp. 331.

The book under review contains conversation drill materials being the result of the author's teaching experience carried away from the English classes for beginners organized at the International Press and Book Club (MPiK) in Warsaw in 1960/61. It is intended to complement a handbook proper. It must be said at the very outset that the booklet could also be useful in the second stage of a course started with an elementary oral practice without manual.

The main goal of an oral practice like that presented by the author, is to activate the basic structures of spoken everyday English, which cannot be done without a model and control of a teacher, possibly a native speaker. The value of the booklet is raised by

a detailed methodical introduction. Some of the assumptions expressed in it are worth quoting.

(1) „Mowa jest punktem wyjścia w nauce języka”. (2) „Mowy należy uczyć się przez mówienie (naturalne mówienie — słuchanie).” (3) „Kluczem do opanowania języka jest nauczanie się na pamięć (najlepiej ze słuchu) odpowiedniej ilości zdań — wzorców w sposób automatyczny”. (4) „Najtrudniejszym elementem w nauce języka jest nie samo zrozumienie wzorów, ale ich zapamiętanie (którego zrozumienie jest częścią)”. (8) „Wymiana elementów leksykalnych i wyrażeniowych zdania-wzoru przy zachowaniu niezmiennych treści gramatycznych zdania jako całości (szyk zdania, słowa strukturalne, elementy fleksyjne) jest właściwą nauką gramatyki rozumianej funkcjonalnie”.

For the specialist all this may be a matter of course, for an average teach-