

72-15,991

HUGHES, George Herbert, 1929-
A SURVEY OF SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE
TEACHERS IN NEBRASKA FOR MAINTAINING AND BUILDING
THEIR FOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS.

The University of Nebraska, Ed.D., 1971
Language and Literature, modern

University Microfilms, A XEROX Company, Ann Arbor, Michigan

THIS DISSERTATION HAS BEEN MICROFILMED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

A SURVEY OF SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN NEBRASKA
FOR MAINTAINING AND BUILDING THEIR FOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS

by

George H. Hughes

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education
Department of Secondary Education

Under the Supervision of Professor Ward Sybouts

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 1971

TITLE

A SURVEY OF SUCCESSFUL PRACTICES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS
IN NEBRASKA FOR MAINTAINING AND BUILDING
THEIR FOUR LANGUAGE SKILLS

BY

George H. Hughes

APPROVED

DATE

Dr. Ward Sybouts, Chairman

20 July 1971

Dr. Vaughn Jaenike

20 July 1971

Dr. O. W. Kopp

20 July 1971

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE

GRADUATE COLLEGE

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

PLEASE NOTE:

**Some pages have indistinct
print. Filmed as received.**

University Microfilms, A Xerox Education Company

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to thank all the modern language teachers who participated in contributing data for this study, and who gave so generously of their time.

The author also wishes to thank the members of his committee for their help and advice. A special expression of appreciation goes to Dr. Ward Sybouts for his guidance and encouragement without which this study would not have been attempted.

Finally, the author wishes to extend thanks to his wife and family for their patience during the research and writing of this paper.

GHH

PREVIEW

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	4
Questions to be Answered	4
Importance of the Study.	5
Procedure	5
Review of Literature	5
Sample	5
Instruments.	6
Definition of Terms.	7
Assumptions	7
Scope and Delimitations.	7
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	9
Introduction	9
Preparatory Needs In The Subject Matter and Professional Areas.	12
Remedies For Deficiencies.	16
Testing of Prospective Foreign Language Teachers	16
Foreign Study and Travel	18
Foreign Language Houses.	20
In-Service	22
Professional Organizations and Publications.	25
Individual Practice Using Audio-Visual Aids.	27
Summary.	29

CHAPTER	PAGE
III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES	30
Introduction	30
Design	30
Procedures	31
Instruments Employed in the Study.	31
Sample Selection	31
Collection of Data	35
Analysis of Data	35
Summary.	36
IV. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA.	37
Introduction	37
Grade Levels Taught.	38
Languages Taught	39
Years Teaching Experience.	40
Amount of Graduate Study	40
Age at Which Foreign Language Exposure Began	44
Speaking and Listening Practice.	45
In the Classroom	45
Outside the Classroom.	47
Audio-Visual Aids.	50
Reading and Writing Practice	51
Experience in Foreign Countries.	51
Travel Only.	51
Study and Travel	52
Financing Foreign Study Abroad	54
Foreign Exchange Teacher or Student.	54

CHAPTER	PAGE
Foreign Language Houses and Summer Language Camps.	57
Rating of Activities	60
Summary.	62
V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.	64
Summary.	64
Purpose.	64
Procedures	65
Findings	66
Conclusions and Recommendations.	71
BIBLIOGRAPHY	75
APPENDIX A - Qualifications Statement prepared by the Steering Committee of the Foreign Language Program of the Modern Language Association	79
APPENDIX B - Cover letter sent with the questionnaire.	81
APPENDIX C - Questionnaire	83
APPENDIX D - Follow-up letter.	89

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
I. Test Scores (Special Group)	34
II. Summary of Questionnaire Returns.	38
III. Earliest Grade Level At Which Foreign Language Was Offered in Sample Schools	39
IV. Modern Foreign Languages Taught by Those Teachers Answering the Questionnaire, and Number of Years Teaching Experience in That Language.	41
V. Number of Graduate Hours in Language Earned by Teachers . .	42
VI. Foreign Language Spoken in Home During Youth.	46
VII. Level at Which Formal Foreign Language Study Began.	46
VIII. Amount of Classroom Activity Conducted in the Target Language.	48
IX. Teachers Who Subscribed to, or Purchased Regularly, a Foreign Language Newspaper, Magazine, or Book	52
X. Practical Use of Foreign Language Skills Other Than Teaching.	53
XI. Travel in Foreign Countries (General Group)	55
XII. Travel in Foreign Countries (Special Group)	56
XIII. Study in Foreign Countries.	58
XIV. Should Teachers Receive Financial Aid for Study and Travel Abroad?.	59
XV. Foreign Experience as Exchange Teacher or Exchange Student.	60
XVI. Summary of Significant Differences Between the General Group and the Special Group	62

CHAPTER I

The United States has, since its inception as an independent democratic republic, been recognized throughout the world as a haven for immigrants of every conceivable national background. More than any other country on Earth, the United States reflects the totality of cultures extant today that represent the whole of mankind. Many communities with a common ethnic background have made a conscious effort to keep alive the language of their mother country because of a strong sense of pride in their heritage. For this reason most of the major languages of the world are in use at one time or another in some part of the United States. Added to this the fact that the United States plays an extremely prominent role in international politics and commerce, makes apparent the need to educate a large segment of our populace in the use of foreign languages and thus points to the importance of producing superbly trained foreign language teachers.

In the past we have not been successful on either score; that is, we have not been able to train a very large segment of our population in the use of foreign languages to any degree that could be termed adequate. In like manner we have fallen short of our goal to educate enough "superbly trained" foreign language teachers. They have too often been given a fine background in literature at the expense of not being taught to speak. Kenneth Mildenerberger, a representative of the Modern Language Association, listed as one of the principal difficulties in redesigning the modern foreign language program that too many teachers

lack speaking competency in their language.¹

Our failure to train large numbers of students to communicate in foreign languages has been due to more causes, however, than a shortage of qualified teachers. During the early stages of World War II, an "isolationist movement" became quite popular which gave rebirth to a latent prejudice against the study of foreign languages. John Latimer deplored the decline of languages as follows:

At a time when our need has been greatest, it is scarcely a proof of our foresight or our so-called practicality that in recent years nearly half of our high schools have offered no foreign languages at all. This has naturally been reflected in college, and it was only in 1955-56 that a slight increase of graduates with a major in foreign languages began to check the downward trend in numbers and percentage that began after 1947-48.²

It is interesting to note that after beginning the study of foreign language, a student generally loses his prejudice toward things "foreign." It is very difficult to despise a people whose language one is learning to speak.³

Saylor and Alexander echoed the hopes of many educators when they wrote,

We ourselves hope that future curriculum planning in secondary education may provide for substantially higher enrollments in modern languages. We believe that the great mobility of population and our growing international interests make it very important for larger numbers of our citizens to have some competence in communication through foreign languages.⁴

¹Kenneth Mildenerger, "The National Picture of Modern Foreign Languages in the High School," Modern Foreign Languages in the High School, (U. S. Office of Ed., Bulletin 1958, No. 16)

²John Francis Latimer, What's Happened to Our High Schools? (Washington, D. C.: Public Affairs Press, 1958, p. 131)

³Mildred R. Donoghue, Foreign Languages and the Schools; A Book of Readings, Wm. Brown Company, p. 62.

⁴J. Galen Saylor and William M. Alexander, Modern Secondary Education Rinehart and Company, Inc., p. 409.

Due in part to the exhortation of these and other prominent educators, many schools now offer classes in foreign language that formerly offered none, and most foreign language programs have experienced a substantial (though not dramatic) increase in enrollment. This has made necessary a recruiting program so that college students were made aware of the need for more language teachers, and has also caused some administrators to rely on teachers who were not completely qualified or whose minor field was foreign language. Many of these teachers are painfully aware of their inadequate language skills, especially their inability to speak with any degree of fluency. For these two latter groups, then, the following problem would seem to be even more serious than for a full-time, fully-qualified language teacher.

Foreign language teachers seem to live with a problem that other teachers do not have to any serious extent, that of having to devise special means to maintain and strengthen their language skills, especially those of speaking and comprehending. Though perhaps no more difficult to acquire than math, science, or music skills, they do require constant exercise or they soon begin to atrophy.⁵ Finding or creating opportunities to engage in this exercise poses a definite problem for teachers in a state like Nebraska which is isolated from any national border. Nor are there sufficient polyglot areas in this state such as can be found on either the East or the West Coast that afford ready opportunities for social interaction between people of different ethnic backgrounds, although several areas do exist here that abound with people of

⁵Emma Birkmaier, "Extending the Audio-Lingual Approach: Some Psychological Aspects," International Journal of American Linguistics, Vol. 32, January 1966, p. 133.

Czechoslovakian descent. Unfortunately, Czech is not one of the languages commonly taught in our schools.

Repeated observations in foreign language classes of the Lincoln schools show that while some of the teachers have become rather inept, especially in their aural-oral handling of their language, others have managed to keep their skills active and viable.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine how Nebraska modern language teachers who are successful in maintaining their language skills achieve this success.

QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

1. In what specific activities do the modern language teachers engage for maintaining and building their language skills?
2. In what value order do they classify these activities?
3. What variables in the background of modern foreign language teachers can be examined that might be correlated with successful maintenance of language skills in later life?
4. Do the experiences of modern foreign language teachers reveal a pattern of behavior for maintaining skills which in turn might yield criteria for self-evaluation?

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The most widely used and enthusiastically endorsed system of teaching foreign language is popularly called "The Audio-Lingual Method." It has achieved growing acceptance across the nation since the early

1960's, and has, in fact, become so popular that recently graduated language teachers are expected to be well schooled in the techniques embodied in this method. The primary requisite for the audio-lingual teacher is oral fluency with the language because he must serve as a constant model for his students. To keep this skill acute, then, is very important if his model is to resemble closely that of the native speaker.

Students in the Special Teaching Methods class frequently ask how they can continue building their oral fluency, not only after they leave the University, but also during their last two or three semesters in college since most of their final courses are conducted in English. They apparently see the problem clearly, and their genuine sincerity and concern should be admired. It behooves the college instructor to supply them with all possible answers.

PROCEDURE

Review of Literature

The literature reviewed in this study pertained to maintaining and building language skills of foreign language teachers. It consisted mainly of studies and articles published in journals and dissertations. Books dealing with the general topic "Maintaining and Building Foreign Language Skills" were also investigated and their bibliographic references indicated additional literature to review.

Sample

A list was compiled of all of Nebraska's secondary and junior high schools that have three or more foreign language teachers. This

group of approximately 50 formed one population of the study. A random sample of 25 of this population was then taken, and the principals of these schools were asked to name a teacher (excluding native speakers) who they thought was very successful in maintaining and building his language skills. The MLA - Cooperative Foreign Language Test was then administered to these teachers. The results of this testing showed the correlation between the administrators' judgment of the teachers and the actual performance level of the teachers.

The remaining modern language teachers in the state formed a second population. A random sample of 80 was taken of this group of approximately 520. Their responses to a number of items obtained by means of a questionnaire provided a comparison of activities engaged in by the two groups in maintaining and building their language skills.

Instruments

There were two instruments. The first, a questionnaire, was sent to the foreign language teachers in the two groups selected by random sample. It sought answers to an array of questions concerning level of training, scope of training, years of experience, foreign travel or study, workshops, language use outside the classroom, i.e., any activity that might aid in maintaining and building language skills.

A pilot test was conducted involving selected language teachers in Lincoln in order to refine the questionnaire before it was administered.

The second instrument was the MLA - Cooperative Foreign Language Test which measures separately the four skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Language skills. Speaking, comprehension, reading, writing.

Aural-oral. Listening, (comprehension) then speaking.

Audio-Lingual Method. A method of teaching foreign language that emphasizes the importance of involving the student in speaking and listening first, reading and writing, second.

Fluency. The degree to which a linguist's language skills approach those of a native speaker as measured by the MLA - Cooperative Foreign Language Test.

ASSUMPTIONS

It is possible for certain key administrators to judge accurately which of their language teachers is most successful in maintaining and building his language skills. It is also possible to determine why a language teacher is successful in maintaining his language skills by analyzing the activities in which he engages to exercise these skills. It is further assumed that the sample in this research is characteristic of all foreign language teachers throughout the state.

SCOPE AND DELIMITATION

This investigation was concerned basically with the improvement of foreign language instruction in Nebraska's schools. The intent was to help accomplish this through identification of all activities and practices then being employed by the most successful junior and senior high school foreign language teachers to retain and improve their four language skills. It was hoped that through the course of this study

new and untried possibilities might be suggested. This investigation was not concerned with methods of teaching, styles of teaching, or specific materials used, except in individual cases where these played an integral part in maintaining or building language skills.

PREVIEW

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

By every language you learn a new world is opened before you. It is like being born again; and new ideas break upon the mind with all the freshness and delight with which we may suppose the first dawn of the intellect to be accompanied.

Emilio Goggio

The message is clear enough: After learning a second language, one should embrace the study of a third and then a fourth. Probably any modern language teacher would agree that, upon learning his second language, a new world was indeed "opened before him." He would enjoy pursuing the study of a third or fourth language. There are scholars and teachers throughout the world who do proceed to learn several languages and even acquire great fluency in each. They can accomplish this generally because of their geographic location. In Europe they need travel a relatively short distance to find ample opportunity to practice a variety of languages and dialects and therefore find little difficulty in building their language skills. In Nebraska, however, the modern language teacher finds little time even to consider studying more languages because he is forever confronted with the frustrating task of maintaining his skills in even one foreign language. For some teachers these skills were never developed in college to a performance level deemed acceptable according to the proficiency scale established by the Modern Language Association.¹

¹Modern Language Association proficiency chart, Appendix A.

During the 1960's when many thousands of language teachers were retrained at government expense, the directors of the NDEA institutes were often shocked by the low level of proficiency displayed by the applicants, especially in the areas of speaking and comprehension.² Little correlation was found between the high grades received in undergraduate and graduate work, and the ability to speak or understand the spoken language. Modern language departments often attack schools of education for requiring too few hours of preparation in the language for certification. But when pressed to name specific courses that should be added to the teacher education program, they usually recommend more courses in 18th century French or Spanish poetry which consist of lectures in English.³ Surely it can be agreed that these lectures do little or nothing to aid the student in building his oral skills. Freeman of Middlebury College concurs in a comment about the heavy record of failures among those applicants who take New York's and Connecticut's examination to test their fitness to teach a language. Even many fail who had good grades in college and Freeman laments this as a "sad commentary on the ineptness of the college training program."⁴

The solution to this aspect of the problem is more elusive than it would first appear to be. Most liberal arts colleges wish to make courses in literary history and literary criticism open to all students, not just language majors, and so justify lectures and

²Edward D. Allen, "The Education and Re-Education of Foreign Language Teachers," The Modern Language Journal, 48:259, May, 1964.

³Ibid.

⁴Stephen A. Freeman, "What About the Teacher?" The Modern Language Journal, 33:261, April, 1949.

discussion in English.

Hardly a dozen colleges in this country offer a course in stylistics or really advanced composition at senior level, and those that offer even one semester of phonetics would probably admit that it is watered-down and combined with some work in vocabulary and conversation. We might generalize from observing either the programs in existence or the lack of specific programs, that most of the large universities and liberal arts colleges are not really interested in preparing people to teach beginning language courses.⁵

The taxpayer has a right to demand experts as teachers for his children, but if the modern language teacher is inadequately trained or inefficient in his teaching, it is not always the teacher's fault. The courses that helped him most are simply not offered in his senior year for credit. Also the training of the modern language teacher takes longer and so requires a larger expenditure of money than for most other teachers. Language habits take many years of concentrated study to build. Whereas many teachers of the sciences, history, philosophy, or economics often began the study of their subject area in college, the student who begins foreign language study in college rarely makes a good major, and subsequently, a successful teacher. The training of a foreign language teacher usually represents an investment of a minimum of seven years. If we add to this investment the cost of foreign travel which is thought by most to be an essential part of his preparation, the foreign language teacher should indeed

⁵Ibid., p. 262.