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TEACHING VOCABULARY BY THE DIRECT METHOD

By ARTHUR G. BOVÉE

THE subject of this paper is the teaching of French vocabulary by the Direct Method, which means the teaching of French words without having recourse to the mother tongue. How can the meaning of French words be conveyed to the student without using their English equivalents? That is the question we must answer, and in so doing, I hope to be able to show that it is more effective to teach vocabulary this way than by the translation method.

In the early spring of 1913, it was my privilege to go to Europe to study the Direct Method. For four months I visited the classes in English and German in Paris. I found in practically all cases that *pictures* and *actions* were the only means employed to convey the meaning of words. The lack of logic, the lack of any *enchaînement* or *rapprochement* in the vocabulary taught, was everywhere quite evident. There was, however, a teacher of German in the Ecole Supérieure Arago, M. Louis Marchand,¹ whose writings speak much of an intuitive method with a very definite progression of vocabulary. Furthermore, his plans for a French text-book included etymological trees from Latin roots such as "scio" and "amo." Yet his own text for the teaching of German depends almost exclusively on drawings to convey the meaning of words. But M. Marchand's ideas were very advanced and his personality was most inspiring. In fact, it was M. Marchand and M. Dupré, a teacher of English in the Lycée Montaigne, who had the most constructive influence upon me. Unfortunately I did not meet M. Gourio, whose English texts are used pretty generally in Paris. The French consider M. Gourio an even more potent exponent of the Direct Method than Max Walter of Frankfurt. The fact is that in France the use of the Direct Method is imposed by minis-

¹ L. Marchand: *Les Bases de l'enseignement intuitif et méthodique de la grammaire allemande*, Paris, Paulin, 1909; *L'Enseignement des langues vivantes* (Extrait des *Langues Modernes*, Oct. 1910, Jan. 1911); *Deutsches Lehrbuch*, Larousse.

terial decree, while in Germany, it is only optional. I have been able, nevertheless, to get M. Gourio's point of view by using his little text in our school.² One of his strongest points is his constant use of the sentence as opposed to the single word.

From Paris I went to Marburg, where they were using a *Französisches Elementarbuch* by Köhn and Diehl.³ The vocabulary of this book, though eminently practical, admits of no logical development, no *enchaînement*. Subsequently I went to Frankfurt, to the Musterschule, of which Max Walter is the Head. The dominant note in the teaching at this school was *action*, which is the most striking characteristic of Herr Walter's personality. Hence, word meanings were conveyed mostly by action, though drawings and pictures were used as well. Of course there was some relation between the words, but I failed to find an *enchaînement* so systematic that the entire body of words learned would form one organic whole. It should be added, however, that the six year course, as carried out in the Musterschule, removes the imperative necessity for such rigorous progression of the vocabulary.

I returned in the fall of 1913, bringing, among other things, a pamphlet called *Méthodologie* by Schweitzer, and also a text for the teaching of French by Schweitzer and Simmonot (the latter of whom I saw teach at the Collège Chaptal). The pamphlet is the most inspiring and practical thing I have ever read on the question of the acquisition of vocabulary.⁴ It contains many helpful suggestions and develops admirably the interpretative resources of the Direct Method, especially as to effective classroom use of the principle of *mental evocation* of the object or idea. The devices suggested, though not exhaustive, are very clever and practical. Yet, the classroom text of M.M. Schweitzer and Simmonot, which one would naturally assume to be the practical application of these excellent principles, was in no way illustrative of their theories.

² E. Gourio, *La Classe en français*, Ferrand jeune, Marseille, 1913; *De la méthode directe*, Conférence faite à l'École Normale Supérieure; *La Classe en anglais*, The Green Series, Ferrand jeune, Marseille, 1912.

³ Velhagen u. Klasing, Leipzig, 1912.

⁴ Ch. Schweitzer, *Méthodologie des langues vivantes*, Paris, Colin, 1903; Schweitzer-Simmonot-Braunholtz, *Méthode directe pour l'enseignement de la langue française*; Schweitzer et Simmonot, *Méthodologie des langues vivantes*, Paris, Colin, 1917. The last is a development and extension of the original lectures of M. Schweitzer.

It was altogether lacking in logical development of vocabulary and failed to stand the test of the class-room. I do, however, want to acknowledge, a great debt of gratitude to the writings of MM. Marchand and Schweitzer, as well as to the class-room technique of M. Dupré, for it was under their guidance that I started to experiment with the Direct Method, in an endeavor to make a *practical, concrete* application of its principles and theories.

It is indeed important to know how to teach vocabulary, but obviously we must determine *what* vocabulary we are going to teach before we can attempt to answer the question of *how*. All Direct Methodists agree that, at first, the vocabulary must be concrete, near the experience of the pupil, and capable of demonstration by means of objects and action. Yet it seems to me that it would be the part of common sense to choose the words in accordance with the needs of the student, not only in the class-room but also in his daily life. When a business man selects a location for his store, he selects the locality which the greatest number of people frequent; when a person buys a suit, he picks one which will give him the greatest service; and so it should be with the selection of words. The test of need and service should be applied to every word presented. In this way, we would escape such choice bits as: "There are many owls on my grandfather's farm," and "The corals of the girls are beautiful." Furthermore, there is an almost immediate need for the vocabulary which the teacher is to use in directing the class-room work or in giving simple explanations of grammar and pronunciation. In a word, the vocabulary used by the teacher should be included in that studied by the pupil, and we should avoid the anomalous situation of talking about French facts in English. Finally, the verb is undoubtedly the most important of all vocables, because it is the backbone of the sentence, makes the greatest impression on the pupil, and is absolutely essential to the expression of any complete thought.

Having considered roughly the contributions of some important thinkers on this subject and with the principles which are to guide in the choice of the vocabulary before us, I shall now proceed directly to the consideration of the question of the best method of teaching this vocabulary without resorting to the use of English.

I believe that the most satisfactory solution of this problem is to be found in the application of logical processes in the demonstration of the meaning of new words in the same way in which these processes are applied in the demonstration of a theorem in geometry. To prove a theorem in geometry one starts from the hypothesis and proves the theorem by means of construction, previous propositions, equation, axiom, etc. Then the theorem just proved is used almost immediately to demonstrate the following one. Thus we have a definite procedure: each theorem has a definite place and is constantly used in the subsequent work, making a logical progression, which gives a closely knit, well co-ordinated body of material. What mathematician would dream of proving a theorem in lines, then one on similar triangles, and then one on circles; yet our American-made French texts do just this thing as regards new words. Is it any wonder that our pupils do not remember words, when they are isolated and detached vocables having no logical connection with anything which had preceded nor with anything which is to come? Most introductory French texts group together "J'ai faim," "j'ai soif," "j'ai chaud," "j'ai froid," "j'ai peur," "j'ai besoin" merely because they resemble each other as to form. This grouping may be justified by grammatical considerations and may appeal to grammarians. For this very reason, however, they mean little in the life of the student, who is more attracted by the thought content. There is no logical sense connection between the expressions included within this group, nor, in turn, between any of them and what has preceded, or what is to follow. It is my conviction that just as in geometry, so in language study each new word should have a very definite relation to those which have preceded, and likewise should be a stepping-stone to those which are to follow. Let me continue to develop my analogy to geometric methods by an enumeration of what may be considered the linguistic counterparts of the geometric axiom, postulate, construction, etc., i.e., a fixed list of processes which are to be consistently employed in the demonstration of the meanings of new words.

Obviously the simplest methods for the demonstration of a new word are:

First: by showing the object to the pupil. Such things as fruits, clothing, parts of the body, objects in the class-room, etc.

Second: in lieu of the object, a picture may be shown: for example, a map of Europe, or a picture of a house.

Third: a question as to the utility of an object will easily indicate a verb. Qu'est-ce que vous faites avec la tête?—Je pense avec la tête. Qu'est-ce que vous faites avec les oreilles? J'entends avec les oreilles.

Fourth: gestures are readily understood by the student. By this I mean some gesticulation by the teacher which will either imitate the action or produce the mental evocation of the action or idea. For instance "voilà un fusil; moi, j'ai peur". (gesture) Or, "je joue au tennis" (gesture).

Fifth: action. By this I mean the actual performing of a complete action before the student, such as "Je ferme la fenêtre."

Sixth: the purpose of an action. "Pourquoi étudiez vous?—Pour apprendre. Pourquoi écoutez-vous?—Pour entendre. Pourquoi cherchez-vous quelque chose?—Pour le trouver.

Seventh: logical sequence to an action: "J'ouvre la porte. J'entre dans la maison," or, "Je me lève; je m'habille."

Eighth: example: Chicago est une ville. Paris est une ville. La France est un pays. L'Italie est un pays. Ce sont des pays.

Ninth: the Reason for going to a place, as, Je vais au garage pour chercher l'auto. Nous allons au magasin pour acheter.

Tenth: contraries: le contraire du verbe acheter est vendre. Le contraire de laborieux est paresseux. Le contraire d'aller est venir. Le contraire de la preposition avec est sans. Le contraire de j'ai raison est j'ai tort.

Eleventh: definition. Assez signifie une quantité suffisante, beaucoup signifie une grande quantité; souvent signifie beaucoup de fois; faire voir signifie montrer; j'ai raison signifie ce que je dis est vrai et exact.

Twelfth: similarity to English, as décider, passer, une quantité, un train, une nation.

Thirteenth: synonym. Parler et causer; très et bien; brave et courageux; se dépêcher et se hâter; vite et rapidement; se mettre à et commencer.

Fourteenth: logical connection of cause and effect or condition. For instance, Il reste chez lui—Il est malade. Il reste chez lui parce qu'il est malade.

Fifteenth: proper time or place for an action. Qu'est-ce que vous faites la nuit? Je dors. Qu'est-ce que vous faites à midi? Je déjeune à midi.

Sixteenth: characterization of an object. Cette boîte-ci est petite, cette boîte-là est grande. Les tableaux au Louvre sont beaux.

Seventeenth: numerical processes, such as multiplication, subtraction, etc. Soixante minutes font une heure. Vingt-quatre heures font un jour.

Eighteenth: situation. Quand on dit "merci," je dois répondre "il n'y a pas de quoi." Quand je rencontre une dame, je dois ôter mon chapeau.

Nineteenth: manner in which an action happens. Je marchais vers l'école quand tout à coup, j'ai entendu une explosion terrible.

Twentieth: grammatical relation.

Verb to noun	}	ressembler
		ressemblance
Adjective to noun	}	bon, curieux
		bonté, curiosité
Adjective to adverb	}	lent, lentement
		ordinaire, ordinairement
Noun to verb	}	un voyage, voyager
		une visite, visiter

Twenty-first: context. a) *revenir*. Le Maître: Vous êtes en retard. Je ne peux pas vous permettre de rester. Vous devez aller chercher une excuse au bureau.

Les élèves: Nous irons au bureau et nous *reviendrons* tout de suite.

b) *oublier*. Un élève: Monsieur, j'ai appris cela hier, je le savais, mais je ne peux pas vous répondre aujourd'hui, parce que je l'ai *oublié*. L'idée m'est *complètement* sortie de la tête.

Here we have twenty-one very different processes or devices by which the meanings of new words may be rendered clear to the student.

We are now in possession of a perfectly definite mode of procedure for the demonstration of the meaning of new words. Let us observe, then, the actual operation of these principles when applied to concrete cases. The first concrete example will consist of the class-room demonstration of four new words or expression.

Imaginez-vous que c'est le matin. Votre père quitte la maison. Où va-t-il? Au cinéma? Certainement non. Il va à son bureau qui est en général au centre de la ville. Pourquoi va-t-il à son bureau? Pour s'amuser? Pour jouer? Non, au contraire, il y va pour *travailler*. Pourquoi travaille-t-il? Il travaille pour *gagner* de l'argent. Avez-vous bien compris le nouveau verbe? La classe: Oui, monsieur, j'ai bien compris. Le maître: Où est-ce que votre père va pour travailler?

Un élève: Il va à son bureau.

Le maître: Pourquoi y va-t-il?

Un élève: Il y va pour *travailler*.

Le M.: Quel est le contraire de *travailler*?

Un él.: C'est "jouer" monsieur.

Le M.: Pourquoi travaille-t-il à son bureau?

Un él.: Pour *gagner* de l'argent.

Le M.: Alors, votre père *travaille* à son bureau; votre mère *travaille* chez elle. Vous *travaillez* à l'école pour apprendre quelque chose. Moi, j'y *travaille* aussi. Votre oncle *travaille* à son bureau. Le directeur de l'école *travaille*. Le président des Etats-Unis *travaille*. Le maire de votre ville *travaille*. *Tout le monde travaille*. Comme vous voyez, *tout le monde* signifie "toutes les personnes." Par exemple, *Tout le monde* aime l'argent, spécialement les Américains, mais *tout le monde* n'aime pas *travailler* pour le gagner. Aimez-vous *travailler*, Charles?

Chas.: Mais oui, M., j'aime beaucoup *travailler*.

Le M.: Alors vous êtes un élève *laborieux*, parce que vous aimez *travailler*. Voilà quatre nouveaux mots. N'oubliez pas que *tout le monde* est obligé de *travailler* pour *gagner* de l'argent, et une personne qui aime *travailler* est une personne *laborieuse*.

Thus to establish "travailler," two of the devices already stated were used. "Travailler" came as the opposite of "jouer," as well as the reason why the father went to the office. Then "gagner" came as the purpose of "travailler." "Tout le monde" was demonstrated by the principles of example, context, and definition, while "laborieux" was reached through definition.

Let us now take up the group mentioned before, consisting of "J'ai besoin, j'ai froid, etc." To arrive at "j'ai besoin," it would seem more logical to start early in the course with "Il est nécessaire de." After a couple of weeks of practice, "il faut" can be easily substituted. When facility with "il faut" has been acquired by constant application with simple rules of grammar: as "il faut ajouter un 's' pour former le pluriel," then "il me faut" can be derived by the addition of "me" in sentences like "Il me faut de la craie"; "M., il me faut du sucre pour mon café"; "il me faut un crayon pour écrire." When "il me faut" is well established, it is perfectly safe to give "j'ai besoin" by definition and equation: 3(il me faut) = j'ai besoin de. Make the substitution in the sentence, "J'ai besoin d'argent pour acheter un nouveau chapeau," or, "Il fait froid aujourd'hui. Charles, vous avez besoin de votre pardessus." The equation 3(il me faut) = "j'ai besoin de" represents very definitely the relative force of these two expressions as used by the French. This progression can be terminated by "devoir," which clearly has a logical relation with "J'ai besoin de" and "il faut."

Just one more simple progression will further clarify this point.

Imaginez-vous une demoiselle en route pour l'école. Il n'y a personne avec elle. Donc, elle est *seule*. The new word is "seule"; the devices used were definition and context. "Seule" will give the adverb "seulement" by grammatical relation. J'ai reçu seulement 45 sur ma composition. "Seulement" will lead to "ne—que" by definition. By substitution in the example just cited, we have, "Je n'ai reçu que 45 sur ma composition." It must be perfectly clear from the two progressions, starting with "il est nécessaire de" and "seul," respectively, that each word is established or proved by definite means, and has a logical connection with what has preceded or is to follow immediately. To clinch the matter, each word appears in a sentence which bears a definite relation to some personal interest of the student.

Continuing the group from which I have digressed slightly, how shall we handle "J'ai faim?" Here is the proper situation. C'est le matin. Je me lève, je m'habille, je descends à la salle à manger. Je désire manger. Pourquoi désirez-vous manger? Parce que *j'ai faim*. The devices employed were: 1. The reason for an action, 2. The situation, and 3. Logical connection.

Perhaps it would be of interest to know at just what point "je suis" may be introduced. Here is the scene. Il est dix heures du soir. J'ai étudié longtemps. Je cesse d'étudier et je vais à ma chambre à coucher. Je vais me coucher. Pourquoi? Parce que *je suis fatigué*. The devices are: 1. Situation, 2. Logical relation, 3. Similarity to English, 4. Gesture.

Furthermore, "je me rappelle," at first thought, seems impossible. But when "oublier" has been well fixed and used for a period of ten days, "je me rappelle" comes very easily as the contrary, especially when accompanied by the appropriate gesture, and when applied to the proper situation.

Another interesting series is the one that starts with the numbers and is developed according to the principle of numerical processes. From the numbers, we can learn time by using a dial. Having taught the pupil to tell time, we can establish the divisions of the day: le matin, midi, l'après-midi, le soir, la nuit. Then the appropriate activities of the student for the various divisions of the day fit in very easily. From the hours, we can derive a day, and from the day, the days of the week. The days of the week give us aujourd'hui, hier, and demain. Definition will also give

“aujourd’hui” as “ce jour-ci”; “demain” = “le jour après aujourd’hui,” and “hier” = “le jour avant aujourd’hui.” The series “hier,” “aujourd’hui,” “demain,” are the hypothesis on which we can establish tense relations. For example: “Avez-vous préparé votre leçon hier soir?” “Je vous rendrai vos devoirs demain.” To continue, days of the week will give us months, and “douze mois font une année; trois mois font une saison; quatre saisons font une année. Les trois mois décembre, janvier, février font une saison. Cette saison s’appelle l’hiver. Quel temps fait-il en hiver? Il fait froid (geste). Quand il fait froid j’ai besoin d’un pardessus. Si je sors en hiver sans mettre mon pardessus j’ai froid (geste). Le contraire de l’hiver est l’été. Quel temps fait-il en été? Il fait chaud (geste) qui est le contraire de l’adjectif froid.”

To end the list of practical applications, it seems proper to present a connected passage. The following story fits in just after breakfast when the student is getting ready to go to school.

L’Histoire du Chapeau perdu.

Je finis de déjeuner et je sors de table. Je tire ma montre de ma poche et je la regarde. Il est temps de partir pour l’école. Je vais à l’entrée chercher mon par dessus, mon chapeau, mes gants, et mes livres. Je trouve toutes mes affaires excepté mon chapeau. Je vais à ma chambre à coucher. Je le cherche sur ma table. Il n’est pas là. Je le cherche sous mon lit. Il n’est pas là. Je le cherche dans mon placard. Il n’est pas là non plus. Je le cherche partout dans ma chambre. Mais j’ai beau chercher. Je ne peux pas le trouver. Que faire? Evidemment il me faut mon chapeau pour aller à l’école. Je vais voir ma mère. Je lui demande, “Avez-vous vu mon chapeau?” Elle me répond, “Je regrette, mais, je ne l’ai pas vu. Où l’avez-vous cherché? Je lui reponds, “Je l’ai cherché partout dans l’entrée et dans ma chambre.” Elle me dit, “Adressez-vous à la cuisinière, Annette, parce que tout de suite après votre retour de l’école hier après-midi, vous avez mangé un gâteau dans la cuisine. Je vais trouver Annette, la cuisinière. Je lui demande aussi, “Avez-vous vu mon chapeau!” Elle rit de moi parce que j’ai demandé la même chose hier matin, et elle me répond, “Regardez un peu sur le piano dans le salon. Je pense l’avoir vu là ce matin de bonne heure.

Je remercie Annette. Je vais au salon chercher mon chapeau, et en effet, le voilà sur le piano derrière quelques morceaux de musique exactement où Annette a dit de chercher. A ce moment, ma mère arrive et elle me demande si j’ai un mouchoir propre. Je regarde dans ma poche et je trouve que je n’ai pas de mouchoir.

Alors je vais dans ma chambre chercher un mouchoir dans mon tiroir. Enfin, j'ai trouvé toutes mes affaires et je suis prêt à partir pour l'école.

Je dis au revoir à ma mère et à mon père. Avant de sortir, je mets mon *pardessus* et mon chapeau. Mon père me dit de bien *boutonner* mon *pardessus* parce qu'il a regardé le *thermomètre* qui marque *zéro*; quand le thermomètre marque *zéro* il *fait froid*. Mais, naturellement, mon père *a beau me dire* de *boutonner* mon *pardessus*. Je ne fais pas ce qu'il me dit de faire. Je pars pour l'école sans *le boutonner* ni mettre mes gants. Je sors de la maison et j'arrive dans la rue.

The material given in this paper may seem rather disconnected. Because of the obvious limitations of the presentation, I have been obliged to select only the most representative and typical illustrations. The unifying element is the fact that the life of the pupil, from the moment he awakes in the morning to the time he retires at night, forms the background for the systematic development and logical connection of all the words studied.

Having clearly before us the concrete details of this theory, we may properly inquire why it is more effective. In the first place, since the vocabulary which the teacher can use coincides with that learned by the pupil, there is a constant absorption and assimilation in the very operation of conducting the class. Again, since each new word appears in terms of those already learned, there is continual review and accumulation which is bound to result in power and accuracy. Finally, by the application of the reasoning processes, we make the same appeal to the logical faculties as does the study of mathematics. We develop not only the memory and the perceptual powers, but also the reason, and thus increase the mental disciplinary value of the study of modern languages.

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