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Sequential Practice for Active Oral Work: The Oral Approach Re-examined

Yoko Matano *

1. Introduction

Kaneda (2000) revisited Fries' Oral Approach theory to examine whether the appreciation of his method was appropriate or not. He appraised the Fries' theory from the viewpoint of grammar, language acquisition, and pattern practice. He observed that Fries' Oral Approach was introduced to Japan soon after World War II and it received much attention, but gradually declined in popularity without enough appreciation of its worth. The view of language has converted from structural linguistics to generative grammar since Chomsky's book (1957); however, Kaneda (2000) argues that Fries' view of language was in line with the theory of generative grammar. Fries was aware of the duality of structure, that is, grammar is finite and utterance is infinite. As for the view of language acquisition, Fries thought that it is not a simple imitative production but it is to acquire finite grammar. Chomsky's object of consideration was mental grammar (I-language), but Fries focused on externalized language (E-language). That is, the referent of the term language was different between them. Thus he concluded that as the trend of linguistics and psychology changes, even the Oral Approach's essential principles and techniques were abandoned without correct appraisal. It is worth while to re-examine the essence of the Oral Approach when we project the direction of English language education.

In this article, first, the author has extracted three aspects from the concept of the Oral Approach, which she thinks will be suggestive to the teachers of today. Next, a sequential practice was designed to embody the extracted aspects. Then a lesson was devised to activate the oral work. Thus, the sequential practice was applied in real classroom situations. The record of the actual teaching and students' perceptions are also described in this paper.

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2. Extracts from Fries' Theory

Here, the author selected three important aspects which we tend to overlook. They will give us valuable suggestions when we devise a teaching plan.

a. The Oral Approach intends for real communication.

Pattern practice is often regarded as mechanical. However, Fries and Fries (1961) state as follows:

The end and aim of the whole process of learning is that the pupil may develop an ability to use English for real communication. We must never be satisfied with any lesson in which the pupil is merely parroting memorized sentences in formal exercises. Even the simplest pattern practice should provide the context of a communication situation. (p.342)

Here, we notice that the aim of communication is stated clearly in the Oral Approach.

b. Opportunities for pupil practice are at the core of lesson planning.

Norris (1989) says that "it is important that practice is by the learner, not the teacher: pupil-pupil dialogs and productive pattern practice. Opportunities for pupil practice are at the core of lesson planning in the 'Oral Approach'" (p.24). From this we could say that the Oral Approach is learner-centered. As Fries and Fries (1961) describe, "the greatest possible amount of time should be devoted to practice, by pupils, of groups of live English sentences, which are thoroughly understood in the situation contexts of the dialog" (p.182).

c. Practices are set in sequence.

Fries (1955) writes as follows:

Imitation and repetition is of course the first step. The next step involves productive conscious choice among several patterns -- with the selection of the pattern as the point of attention. The third step aims at an automatic, spontaneous selection of a pattern with the attention not on the structural patterns themselves but on changing situations and shifted meanings, introduced by a variety of differing vocabulary items. (pp.12-13)

There is a suggestion here that pattern practice is more than imitation and repetition. We should strive not to stop in the practice stage but to continue to lead the learner to the level of production stage in which his or her handling of the target structure is automatic and unconscious.

3. A Scheme for Practicing the Concept

Language learning involves a cycle of PRESENT—PRACTICE—USE (see Fig. 1). Byrne (1986) also suggested that "the proportion of controlled

speech to free speech will change as the course progresses” (p.10).

As a scheme for practicing the concept stated in section 2, the author would like to adopt this cycle and devise a sequential practice from imitation to real communication. The author would like to contextualize the practice of English structures in meaningful and authentic situations. Pictograms, picture cards, photographs or posters of popular sports players, props, and so on are useful to attract the students’ attention and liven up the oral works.

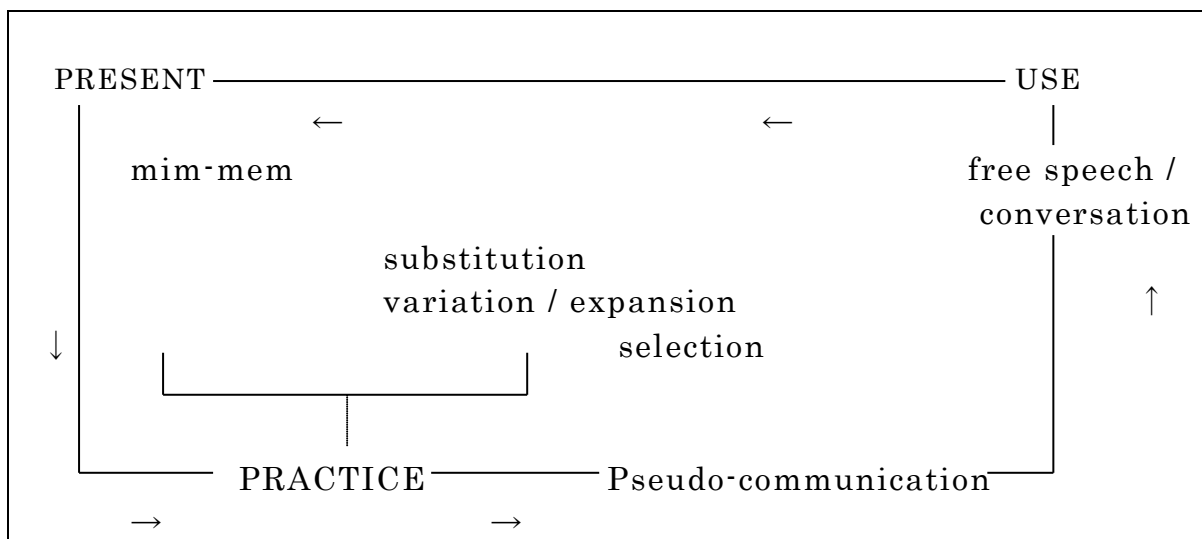


Figure 1. The PRESENT—PRACTICE—USE Cycle (Kaneda, 1993)

4. The Lesson Plan

Here, the author would like to show her lesson plan which involves the sequential practice. The plan is shown below.

Text: <i>NEW HORIZON English Course 1</i> Unit 3 “Ms. Green’s First Class”	
Allotment: 1 st period, Part 1	4 th period, Part 2 (today’s)
2 nd period, Part 1	5 th period, Part 3
3 rd period, Part 2	6 th period, Part 3
Aims: Students are to understand and produce the interrogative form of sentences, for example, <i>Do you like ___?</i> and its answer pattern, <i>Yes, I do. / No, I do not.</i> The general verbs of like, play, come, and walk are utilized to this end.	
Procedure: 1. Greetings	6. Reading
2. Warm-up	Model reading
3. Review	Reading aloud with comprehension
Pattern practice	7. Oral composition
4. Oral introduction	8. Language use practice
Comprehension check	9. Consolidation
5. Mim·mem	

5. Oral Work in This Lesson

Oral work involves mim-mem, oral introduction, pattern practice, reading aloud, question-answering, recitation, oral composition, dialog practice, outline-telling, and others¹⁾. Here, the author would like to select some of these works and suggest a teaching device for active oral work. In the following, the signs # and @ represent repetition and attempted response respectively.

5.1 Review

The students reviewed the target sentences (structures) through the pattern practice. It is “a drill which practices some aspect of grammar or sentence formation” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p.170).

Here we may examine Substitution and Conversion, which are two of the several techniques used in pattern practice.

5.1.1 Substitution

First, the author showed the students pictograms one by one and provided each sentence which explains the pictogram. The students substituted the subject *You* for *I* as follows.

Teacher	Students
(Showing pictograms of people playing different sports)	
I play soccer.	You play soccer.
I play tennis.	You play tennis.
I play baseball.	You play baseball.
I play basketball.	You play basketball.
I play table tennis.	You play table tennis.
I play badminton.	You play badminton.
I play volleyball.	You play volleyball.

Next, the author gave the students cues by pointing at the pictograms one by one with speed, or by showing picture cards one at a time as follows.

Teacher	Students
(Pointing at the pictograms put all together on the blackboard, rapidly and one by one)	
I play soccer.	(#)
tennis	(@)
baseball	(@)
basketball	(@)

table tennis	(@)
badminton	(@)
volleyball	(@)
like	(@)
soccer	(@)
tennis	(@)
baseball	(@)
(Showing another set of picture cards one at a time)	
swimming	(@)
music	(@)
I play the flute.	(#)
piano	(@)
guitar	(@)
violin	(@)

#: repetition @: attempted response

5.1.2 Conversion

The students converted the sentences by responding to the cues. The following is the extract of the drills in this lesson.

Teacher	Students
(Showing a picture card of a person playing soccer)	
I play soccer.	(#)
You	(@)
Question.	(@)
Yes.	(@)
No.	(@)
(Showing a picture card that depicts music)I like music.	(#)
You	(@)
Question.	(@)
Yes.	(@)
No.	(@)
(Showing a picture card of a flute)I play the flute.	(#)
You	(@)
Question.	(@)
Yes.	(@)
No.	(@)

5.2 Oral introduction

The author introduced the contents of the text using picture cards, props, gestures, contexts, and so on as follows. The [W:] refers to a word or a phrase that is written on the blackboard. Phonetic method was used in introducing new vocabularies. For example, *come* is pronounced and

written c → co → come.

(Showing a picture of a school) Look at this picture. What's this? It's a school. It's a nice school. (Teacher puts the picture of the school on the blackboard and stands in front of the picture) Now I'm in this school.

(Showing a picture of Ms. Green) Who's this? Yes, it's Ms. Green.

She comes to school.

[W: come] (Writing and pronouncing the word) c → co → come

(Moving the picture of Ms. Green toward the school) [W: come to school]

How? (Showing a picture of a car) A car.

[W: come to school by car] (Writing and pronouncing *by* and *car*) b → by c → car
come to school by car

(Showing a picture of a bike) come to school by bike

(A train) come to school by train

(A bus) come to school by bus

(Two persons walking toward the school)

[W: walk to school] (Writing and pronouncing *walk*) w → wal → walk

walk to school

When does Ms. Green come to school?

Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
------	------	-------	------	--------	------	------

(The teacher puts five pictures of Ms. Green one by one.) [W: every day]

(Writing and pronouncing *every day*) e → eve → every d → day

come to school every day

(Showing pictures of Emi, Mike, Shin, and Ms. Green one by one) OK. This is Emi. This is Mike. This is Shin. This is Ms. Green. Emi, Mike, and Shin ask Ms. Green questions.

(Pointing to the picture) Do you play the piano, too? Yes, I do.

Do you come to school every day? No, I don't.

Do you come by bike? No, I don't. I walk.

5.2.1 Comprehension check

Question-answering, outline-telling, true-false test, and so on are used to check the students' understanding²⁾. In this lesson, the author used a kind of true-false test. The author offered a sentence and the students decided whether it is true or false. If it was true, they gestured *paper* in rock-scissors-paper game with their hand, and if it was false, they gestured *scissors*. Saying "One, two, shoot!" the students did rock-scissors-paper against the teacher.

Teacher

1. Ms. Green plays the piano, too.³⁾

(rock)

Students

(paper)

2. Ms. Green comes to school every day.³⁾

(paper)

(scissors)

3. Ms. Green comes to school by bike.³⁾

(paper)

(scissors)

5.3 Mim-mem

The students imitate the teacher's pronunciation with correct intonation and rhythm (Iino, 1985, p.120). It is a useful practice for the students to memorize the target sentences and internalize the meaning and structure of them (Nawa & Seki, 1987, p.116). The procedure is as follows⁴).

Full-choral single repetitions → Full-choral double repetitions → Half-choral double repetitions → (row practice).

Nawa and Seki (1987, pp.118-119) say that it is comparatively easy for the students to repeat the model one time immediately after the teacher; in contrast when they repeat the model twice in succession, it sometimes does not work well. This is because they have to repeat the model soon after listening to their own repetition. If they cannot succeed in the first repetition, second one will be unskillful. Therefore, the double repetition can be a test of their mastery of the word or the sentence. Also, the students' memory of the target word or sentence can be enhanced by repeating them correctly. As a sign of double repetition, the teacher shows two fingers. When the students finish the first repetition, one finger. Finally when they finish the second one, the teacher shows just his or her fist.

The following is an extract from the practice.

Teacher	Students
come to school by car	(#)
come to school by bike	(#)
come to school by train	(#)
come to school by bus	(#)

5.4 Reading aloud

Complete oral reading lays the foundation of language activities, therefore enough practice should be required in the classroom (Nawa & Seki, 1987, p.131). The procedure is as follows⁵).

Model reading
Intensive choral reading of each sentence after the teacher (using the backward build-up technique in case of lack of mastery)
Choral reading through the whole text after the teacher
Buzz reading
Individual reading
Choral reading of the whole text with a little prompting
Read and look up

One stage leads to the next stage, and we should give the students appropriate instruction through each stage.

5.5 Oral composition

The students looked at the picture cards and constructed questions based on the cues as follows.

Teacher	Students
(Showing cues in the form of picture cards)	
(Instructs students to ask questions)	
(A bike)	Do you come to school by bike?
Yes, I do.	
(A train)	Do you come to school by train?
Yes, I do.	
(A bus)	Do you come to school by bus?
No, I don't.	

After that, the students practiced these sentences with the rhythm from the CD⁶). The pictures and rhythm from audio media are of assistance to attract students' attention and likely to intensify their retention.

5.6 Language use practice

This is the stage in which the students use the sentences mastered through pattern practice in communicative situations. In this lesson, the students did pupil-pupil dialog⁷). The following is the dialog pattern.

A: Excuse me.
B: Yes?
A: I like _____.
Do you like _____, too?
B: Yes, I do. / No, I don't.
A: I see. Thank you.

To be easily referred to by the students, the author put the sentence cards on the blackboard one by one. The added expressions of *Excuse me.*, *Yes?*, *I see.*, and *Thank you.* were reviewed in the process.

The following is the chart used in this activity.

I like...
Friends' names ① ② ③

The students filled in the chart with their favorite comic, game or music title and asked if their friends liked it, too, while referring to the dialog pattern. They wrote down the names of the people who answered, "Yes, I do." Before the pupil-pupil dialog, the students practiced each sentence intensively after the teacher. The teacher placed various words in the underlined part while showing photographs or posters of popular sports players, as well as some props such as a soccer ball, a Disney character, and so on. These props attracted the students' attention and aroused their interest. After filling in the chart, some pairs presented their dialogs in

We see from Table 1 that this lesson generally produced positive outcomes for the students. They have participated in the sequential practice with interest and have perceived that their understanding of the target sentence pattern has improved through the exercises. The following represent the students' overall impression of the lesson⁹⁾.

I understood <i>Do you...?</i> and its answer pattern well.
I was able to speak with appropriate loudness and speed.
I think that my pronunciation has improved.
It is fun to speak in English.
I was able to practice the <i>Do you...?</i> pattern fairly well.
It was enjoyable to do dialogs in English with my friends.
It was interesting to speak a lot of English.
It was fun to present our dialogs in front of our peers.
I did my best for this lesson.

From these quotes we could conclude that easy, smooth, oral production¹⁰⁾ leads to the students' confidence or sense of achievement. This sense of achievement could lead toward a favorable evaluation of sequential practice.

7. Conclusion

So far the author has re-examined the concept of the Oral Approach and devised a lesson which involves a sequential practice.

In this lesson, the material was introduced in the context using pictograms, picture cards, photographs or posters of popular sports players, props, and so on. These were useful to attract the students' attention and enhance their oral participation. The students also took an active part in practicing the structures with rhythm. The author brought the students from the stage of pattern practice to the place where they could practice dialog in the context of social situations. When a new ALT visits our class, the students will be able to interview him or her using the *Do you ...?* pattern. This will be real communication.

Foreign language education involves fundamentally indispensable factors, and effective practice is one of them. The appraisal of the technique and essence of the Oral Approach will give us suggestions in planning for the future direction of English language education.

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Notes

1. 垣田直巳編(1981)『教科教育の基礎用語シリーズ 英語科重要用語300の基礎知識』p.115. 東京: 明治図書出版.
2. 垣田直巳編(1981)『教科教育の基礎用語シリーズ 英語科重要用語300の基礎知識』p.91. 東京: 明治図書出版.
3. These sentences were originally given in Japanese. They were translated into English to be consistent with the language used throughout the paper.
4. 飯野至誠著、清水貞助改訂(1985)『英語の教育〈改訂版〉』p.120. 東京: 大修館書店.
5. 名和雄次郎・関典明(1987)『中学英語の指導技術〈意欲を高める工夫と実践〉』pp.128-134. 東京: ELEC.
6. 『平成18年～21年度版中学英語ニューホライズンイングリッシュコース1年指導用CD』東京: 東京書籍.
7. 笠島準一他. 2006. *NEW HORIZON English Course 1*. p. 27. Your Turn. 東京: 東京書籍.
8. The questionnaire was originally written in Japanese. It was translated into English to be consistent with the language used throughout the paper.
9. The students' comments were originally written in Japanese. They were translated into English to be consistent with the language used throughout the paper.
10. The easy, smooth, oral production of the basic sentence patterns of English becomes the test of whether they have been sufficiently learned. (C.C.Fries: *ELEC Lectures*, p.13)

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