

The Direct Method Introduction

As with the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method is not new. Its principles have been applied by language teachers for many years. Most recently, it was revived as a method when the goal of instruction became learning how to use another language to communicate. Since the Grammar-Translation Method was not very effective in preparing students to use the target language communicatively, the Direct Method became popular. The Direct Method has one very basic rule: No translation is allowed. In fact, the Direct Method receives its name from the fact that meaning is to be conveyed directly in the target language through the use of demonstration and visual aids, with no recourse to the students' native language. We will now try to come to an understanding of the Direct Method by observing an English teacher using it in a scuola media (lower-level secondary school) class in Italy. The class has 30 students who attend English class for one hour, three times a week. The class we observe is at the end of its first year of English language instruction in a scuola media. Experience The teacher is calling the class to order as we find seats toward the back of the room. He has placed a big map of the USA in the front of the classroom. He asks the students to open their books to a certain page number. The lesson is entitled 'Looking at a Map.' As the students are called on one by one, they read a sentence from the reading passage at the beginning of the lesson. The teacher points to the part of the map the sentence describes after each has read a sentence. The passage begins: We are looking at a map of the United States of America. Canada is the country to the north of the United States, and Mexico is the country to the south of the United States. Between Canada and the United States are the Great Lakes. Between Mexico and the United States is the Rio Grande River. On the East Coast is the Atlantic Ocean, and on the West Coast is the Pacific Ocean. In the east is a mountain range called the Appalachian Mountains. In the west are the Rocky Mountains. After the students finish reading the passage, they are asked if they have any questions. A student asks what a mountain range is. The teacher turns to the whiteboard and draws a series of inverted cones to illustrate a mountain range. The student nods and says, 'I understand.' Another student asks what 'between' means. The teacher replies, 'You are sitting between Maria Pia and

Giovanni. Paolo is sitting between Gabriella and Cettina. Now do you understand the meaning of “between”?’ The student answers, ‘Yes, I understand.’

Reviewing the Techniques Are there answers to the 10 questions with which you agreed? Then the following techniques may also be useful. Of course, even if you did not agree with all the answers, there may be some techniques of the Direct Method you can adapt to your own approach to teaching. The following expanded review of techniques provides you with some details, which will help you do this.

- **Reading Aloud Students take turns reading sections of a passage, play, or dialogue out loud. At the end of each student’s turn, the teacher uses gestures, pictures, realia, examples, or other means to make the meaning of the section clear.**

- **Question and Answer Exercise This exercise is conducted only in the target language. Students are asked questions and answer in full sentences so that they practice new words and grammatical structures. They have the opportunity to ask questions as well as answer them.**

- **Getting Students to Self-correct The teacher of this class has the students self-correct by asking them to make a choice between what they said and an alternative answer he supplied. There are, however, other ways of getting students to self-correct. For example, a teacher might simply repeat what a student has just said, using a questioning voice to signal to the student that something was wrong with it. Another possibility is for the teacher to repeat what the student said, stopping just before the error. The student then**

knows that the next word was wrong.

- **Conversation Practice** The teacher asks students a number of questions in the target language, which they have to understand to be able to answer correctly. In the class we observed, the teacher asked individual students questions about themselves. The questions contained a particular grammar structure. Later, the students were able to ask each other their own questions using the same grammatical structure.

- **Fill-in-the-blanks Exercise** This technique has already been discussed in the Grammar-Translation Method, but differs in its application in the Direct Method. All the items are in the target language; furthermore, no explicit grammar rule would be applied. The students would have induced the grammar rule they need to fill in the blanks from examples and practice with earlier parts of the lesson.

- **Dictation** The teacher reads the passage three times. The first time the teacher reads it at a normal speed, while the students just listen. The second time he reads the passage phrase by phrase, pausing long enough to allow students to write down what they have heard. The last time the teacher again reads at a normal speed, and students check their work.

- **Map Drawing** The class included one example of a technique used to give students listening comprehension practice. The students were given a map with the geographical features unnamed. Then the teacher gave the students directions such as the following, 'Find the mountain range in the West. Write the words "Rocky Mountains" across the mountain range.' He gave instructions for all the geographical features of the United States so that students would have a completely labeled map if they followed his instructions correctly. The students then instructed the teacher to do the same thing with a map he had drawn on the board. Each student could have a turn giving the teacher instructions for finding and labeling one geographical feature.

- **Paragraph Writing** The teacher in this class asked the students to write a paragraph in their own words on the major geographical features of the United States. They could have done this from memory, or they could have used the reading passage in the lesson as a model.