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THE DIRECT METHOD APPLIED TO THE TEACHING OF SCANDINAVIAN IN AMERICA

Although there has for some time been much discussion in this country about methods of modern language teaching in general and especially with reference to German and French, there has not yet been published any study dealing with methods of language teaching with reference to the Scandinavian languages in American schools. To my knowledge the subject has not even been alluded to, except for a brief statement covering half a page in Miss Michelet's article *The Scandinavian Languages in Modern Language Study in the Schools*, which appeared in the *Publications of the S. A. S. S.*, Vol. III, p. 213, ff.

I need hardly say that it is of the greatest importance that our teachers of Scandinavian, those in high schools and colleges as well as in other schools, keep in close touch with the publications and discussions about modern language teaching. Perhaps some teachers of Scandinavian are a little too much inclined to think of "modern languages" as including only French and German, or in any case as excluding the Scandinavian languages. Our own organization and its publications should give us materials of more *direct* value for the teaching of Scandinavian than other modern language organizations and other publications can give, but many of the ideas expressed by persons working with other languages will either be useful for Scandinavian as well or they will suggest new ideas that will result in progress. It would be unwise for the teachers of Scandinavian to go back and pass through anew the development in language teaching that German and French language teaching has passed through during many years of plodding. We should establish for ourselves a foundation based on the present attainments of other modern language teaching and to this we should add, profiting day by day from the experiences of others as well as of ourselves. Much can be gained, then, if our teachers, besides keeping in close touch with their own organization, its meetings and published contributions, will also affiliate themselves with other modern language organizations and will look for suggestions and ideas in the growing literature on related subjects.

Some of our teachers may feel tempted to dismiss this matter with the thought that, as the Scandinavian languages are elected

almost entirely by persons already more or less familiar with the language concerned, the problems are entirely different, or with the thought that it is not strictly—in most cases—foreign language teaching. That there still are teachers who have not yet come to realize that Scandinavian teaching in this country is very different from the teaching of Scandinavian in Scandinavia is probably best shown by the fact that there are still a few teachers of Scandinavian who use in elementary classes grammars written for students in the schools of Sweden and Norway, probably later editions of the very book the teacher studied in those schools. It should be clear to everyone that the fact that so many of the students are already partially familiar with the languages does not free us from the problems of foreign language teaching though it may modify them. Moreover, as Professor Flom remarks somewhere in this number of the *Publications*, it is to be hoped that the Scandinavian languages will even more than now is the case be elected by persons not of Scandinavian descent. Nothing can help us more toward that end than the attainment of a high degree of perfection in methods of teaching.

The older method of teaching modern languages, modelled on the method used in the teaching of the classical languages (but which does not today stand uncontested even in this field), consists primarily of a detailed study of theoretical grammar, too often studied for its own sake, and of translation from and into the foreign language. This method is now being supplanted, gradually, to be sure, by one known as the *direct method*; this emphasizes the acquisition of a good and fluent pronunciation as a fundamental requirement, the attainment of the ability to understand the foreign language without the medium of translation (as we read and understand our native language), and some conversational attainments. Grammar is studied inductively from the texts read, and only as an aid towards the ends mentioned. Composition exercises as well as translation from the foreign language, not being conducive to the results aimed at, are not resorted to; at a late stage in the study of the language, if anywhere, there is a place for such exercises, but their object then becomes an entirely different one. It is aside from my purpose in this article to give more than a bare suggestion of what the nature of the direct method is. For more detailed and practical expositions of this question, I refer the reader to such recent publications as:

Carl A. Krause, *The Direct Method in Modern Languages* (Scribners, New York, 1916), E. Prokosch, *The Teaching of German in Secondary Schools* (Bulletin of the University of Texas, No. 41, Austin, Texas, 1915), and Carl Schlenker, *Bulletin for Teachers of German* (The University of Minnesota, Current Problems, No. 8, Minneapolis, 1916). These publications also contain extensive bibliographies of modern language methodology. Attention might also here be called to a quarterly journal devoted to the problems of the direct method which is mentioned in my Notes in this number of the *Publications*.

The opinion has been expressed (I am referring in part to Miss Michelet's article mentioned above) that the direct method has little or no application in the case of the Scandinavian languages as studied in this country under existing conditions, that is, by students more or less familiar from the start with the language studied. The reason given is that the ends we desire to attain would be seriously neglected under that method,—that what we need to combat is a slipshod and probably superficial knowledge of the languages concerned, and that we must pursue a method that holds the student down to very definite things. Now, I agree that slipshod teaching and learning is only too possible under the direct method, but good, definite, effective teaching is also possible, while also other methods of language teaching too frequently produce weak results. In other words, the difficulty does not lie in the method. I do not doubt but that those who speak of the necessity of holding the student down to definite things usually have in mind the grammar, theoretical grammar. But is not the detailed and accurate application of the grammatical principles in question far more important than the theoretical knowledge,—which, it should be understood, does not necessarily mean the ability to use them freely or even at all? What our Americans know of (American-)English grammar is, as we all know, very little, and yet they speak their language fluently and intelligibly,—in fact they are a part of the great body of language users who determine what this language is. The situation last mentioned could conceivably never exist in the case of speakers of Scandinavian in this country with reference to the languages of Scandinavia, but has it been proven (and not rather the contrary) that theoretical knowledge of grammar leads to fluent mastery of any language? The grammar teaching should be made practical, which does not

mean that it becomes in any degree less definite, nor that the grammatical requirements become less exacting. No doubt many a parent, perhaps remembering his own early studies in grammar, desires his children to study Scandinavian "to learn the grammar"; if I may make only one of various possible comments on this, the parent usually does not have in mind the same thing when he thinks of Scandinavian grammar as teachers of Scandinavian, dealing with the language from the American point of view, do. Our students are already fairly familiar with general grammatical system.

I think the question of what method it is best to use should not be discussed until one has clearly in mind the purpose of the language course. The aim is not the same in all countries and for all languages, nor for all conditions. For German and French in this country, especially in classes that are made up principally of students who do not know anything of these languages in advance, the end in view should, in my opinion, be the acquisition of a reading knowledge which, based on a good and fluent pronunciation, would enable the student to understand without the medium of translation a previously unseen reading passage of a degree of difficulty that corresponds somewhat with the degree of advancement of the student; that is, that he would be able to read and understand a new passage in the foreign language just as he would read and understand an English passage that had for him a corresponding number and degree of difficulties. In my opinion this is a high enough aim (as far as the mere language learning is concerned, and, if carried out far enough, as a basis for later literary study); it is an aim that is not frequently attained as a direct *result* of the grammar-translation method, though it may be achieved in spite of the method. The direct method does lead directly toward this end, and its various devices should be so employed as most effectively and most quickly to lead to the desired result. Conversational ability need, in my opinion, not for this country be an aim in itself, but as conversational practise leads directly and effectively toward the acquisition of a good reading ability, there should be much talking of the foreign language by the students; although it need thus not here be set down as an end in itself, the student cannot fail to attain a considerable conversational ability.

What is the end desired from the study of the Scandinavian languages in this country? While the students are so prevalingly Scandinavian-speaking, and in so close association with Scandinavian-speaking persons, it would not be possible to confine ourselves to the acquisition of a reading knowledge (using the word reading knowledge in the sense indicated above, that is, the ability to read the language concerned approximately as the student reads English). In addition to a good and fluent pronunciation and a reading knowledge, which, like the matters about to be mentioned, can with our students usually within a given period of time be developed to a point of proficiency much higher than that usually attained by students of French and German, it seems to me that we should expect the following attainments: (1) fluent conversational ability, because there will be both necessity and opportunity for this in the student's later associations as well as in visits to the Scandinavian countries, which are more likely to take place than are visits to France or Germany on the part of the student of these languages; (2) the ability to translate from Scandinavian accurately and into idiomatic English, for which there may well be plenty of occasion; (3) the ability to translate from English into idiomatic Scandinavian for the same reason. I need hardly call attention to the desirability of learning as much as possible about the country concerned and its people, their history and institutions, and this from the very beginning of the course. When the students have attained a good reading knowledge of the language, they should proceed to the study of literature as such, but not before. For the attainment of the reading knowledge only such texts should be read as best lead to that end; works whose importance for the student lies chiefly in their literary study should not be undertaken until the student has acquired the foundation as stated. The various matters to which I have just called attention are of equal importance also for the study of other languages. I have not mentioned grammar here, and the reason is that grammar knowledge cannot be considered an end in itself in a language course of this kind. Grammatical study can only help toward the attainment of the aims stated above. To a certain small extent grammatical knowledge could, perhaps, in the case of Scandinavian languages in this country be considered as a possible end in itself; it would seem to me that theoretical knowledge of the grammar might to a very limited extent be of

practical value to the students in later life, not exclusively, although chiefly, in helping somewhat to perpetuate their language. The value that such knowledge would have in this direction is, however, trifling, and the knowledge that the student gains in the Scandinavian course where the other ends mentioned are attained will be more than sufficient for situations of the kind referred to. For good direct method teaching does not neglect grammar; it teaches it in a different way and omits matters that do not lead toward the goal.

It is not my purpose to discuss at the present time the merits of the direct method as a language method; for such discussions I must refer the reader to the publications mentioned above and to the not inconsiderable literature noted in the bibliographies contained in them. It is my own conviction, however, that foreign language teaching, to attain reasonably good results along the lines indicated, must follow pretty well the principles of the direct method.

And what I want to say chiefly in this brief article is that I can see nothing in the details of the direct method that cannot be used in the teaching of Scandinavian under present conditions. Some of the details of the method have to be employed differently, of course, more attention must be paid to some phases and less to others than in the case of other modern languages, the first year classes will not be very uniform in the stage of advancement, "preparation" of the next day's reading lesson in class would probably in no case be necessary (since most of the students already have the non-translating attitude), in general the students will be on a different plane, the treatment of pronunciation will be complicated partly because of the necessity of eradicating Scandinavian dialectical traces, and partly owing to the already fixed Americanization of sounds, etc. In using the direct method for Scandinavian in this country, one must, accordingly, take account of the difference in the results desired, as compared with those of other modern language study, and one must also consider the different plane of the student, the somewhat uneven make-up of the class, and other conditions. There is no danger that the work will be over-easy for the student if the course is carefully planned in advance to suit existing conditions.

The direct method condemns translation, both composition work and translation from the foreign language, as not leading

toward the desired ends. But it does not condemn translation when this is relegated to its proper place. It should be undertaken much later than has usually been the case, and only after the student's knowledge has been developed sufficiently along other lines. Work in translation must not be undertaken with false ideas as to what end it leads toward:—the chief end of translation, if not necessarily the only one, is the development of facility in translating. When, in the plan of the course, it is considered desirable to attack the problem of making the student proficient in the art of translation, that is the time to have exercises of this kind. For Scandinavian that time would normally come sooner, perhaps, than for German or French (under ordinary conditions).

The student should, then, before approaching translation into English or composition, in the first place have a thorough foundation in pronunciation; this should be made to accord with the best standard of the country concerned both in the matter of sounds and of stress and accentuation (distinction between acute and grave accent), all of which would of course not be employed mechanically, but in accord with the meaning of the texts read. As already pointed out, the pronunciation of those already partially acquainted with the language would have to be watched both from the point of view of dialect and of Americanisms. Secondly, the student should develop a good ability to read and understand the language studied (if possible, not only the language of *belles lettres*,—in addition in any case the language of the newspapers). For students who already possess the ability to read and understand without thinking of English equivalents, and practically all of those who can read at all will be in this category, the chief concern will be to increase the vocabulary and to make as many as possible of the new words they meet into an active vocabulary. The latter will be accomplished principally through the medium of conversation, which is the third point. The students will in their conversation work and in their reading among other things learn Scandinavian words for many ideas to express which they have been in the habit of using American loans; these Scandinavian originals, and many other words that will extend their previous home-vocabulary, they will practise and make their own. Both reading and conversation work (which should be well-directed) will of course go hand in hand with the study of the grammar and training in forms and syntax. Scandinavian,

under existing conditions, should prove to be an excellent field for the inductive study of grammar. And extensive written work (paraphrases of text, answers to questions, etc.) together with much conversational work—especially the latter—will most effectively fix in the student's mind all the details of grammar to which there is any necessity of his devoting his attention. As I have already pointed out, I cannot see that it is necessary in any degree to condemn the direct method for Scandinavian on account of the need of emphasizing details and of holding the student to definite things;—they can in this way be held down to definite things by actually learning to apply them, and not merely learning them. Whatever can not be learned in this way is not worth learning as a means toward the desired end; such inapplicable materials would belong only in a late study of grammar for its own sake. The grammar instruction can without difficulty be conducted in the foreign language, in fact there is an especial gain in doing so, because the student then becomes familiar with the style of books of this type, differing so much from the style and language of most of the literature that will be read in the course, as well as from the conversational style of the oral work.

At a later stage the written work takes the form of freer composition, reproduction, etc., and the conversation can even at an early stage, for Scandinavian, take the form of connected reproduction of text. Only after satisfactory proficiency has been attained along all the lines mentioned should the turn come to translation from Scandinavian into English and from English into Scandinavian, and the purpose of such exercises should be clear both in the mind of student and teacher. Practise in translation into English does, of course, as Miss Michelet points out in the article to which attention has been called above, also exercise the student in his English, especially in the choice of synonyms, for which it is excellent training. But to make that in any degree a reason for a more favorable opinion about the use of translation as a class exercise seems to me to be most undesirable. The aim is *proficiency in the foreign language*. It is a fact, moreover, that translation in class is practised chiefly as a means for finding out how well the student understands the meaning of the day's assignment in reading. The direct method not only has as its main issue the avoidance of the interpretation of the foreign language through the medium of the native language, considering this

detrimental, but it also provides a means for testing the student's knowledge of the assignment and at the same time drilling him in the application of grammar and exercising him in the use of words.

Much that appertains to the direct method it has not been possible to mention here even in its application to the teaching of Scandinavian,—for instance, dictation exercises, loud reading of the lesson in home preparation (in regard to this, see the brief contribution on *Directions for the Study of a Foreign Language Reading Lesson* in this number of the *Publications*), etc.

Having, as we do, both in graded schools, high schools, and colleges almost exclusively teachers of Scandinavian who are able to speak fluently the language they teach (though unfortunately some Swedes are attempting to teach Norwegian, and vice versa) it seems to me that we have right now the best opportunity to lay a good foundation in effective teaching of our languages. Such a result cannot be accomplished without close attention to pedagogical matters nor without hard work.

I have in this article merely wanted to call *attention* to methods of teaching, and especially to the use of the direct method; I hope this will arouse both thought and discussion. I have not wished dogmatically to assert that the direct method *is* the best method for foreign language instruction, although I am convinced that it is, nor have I wanted to imply that my interpretation of this method in its application to Scandinavian is more than a first fragmentary suggestion along this line. But I have tried to emphasize the desirability of our determining for ourselves, and as soon as possible: (1) what the aims of Scandinavian teaching in this country are and (2) how those aims can best be attained.

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