Unit 5

THE AURAL-ORAL APPROACHES

"It is the province of knowledge to speak
And it is the privilege of wisdom to listen."

– Oliver Wendell Holmes
THE AURAL-ORAL APPROACHES

Introduction

Although François Gouin and others had brought inductive teaching with an emphasis on listening and speaking skills to the fore of the language-teaching field, their Direct Approach had significant drawbacks. The main problem was that few people traveled internationally in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a result, there was a shortage of the fluent second language teachers the approach required, and most learners did far more reading in their second language than listening or speaking. For these reasons, the field temporarily shifted to the Reading Approach, which focused on teaching reading skills rather than listening or speaking. Grammar was again taught through deductive teaching, but only insofar as it was required for reading comprehension.

Characteristic of the history of the second language teaching field, however, learners would soon again become frustrated that even after years of study, they could not carry on a conversation in their second language. The trend would shift again to a focus on teaching listening and speaking skills. What resulted were the Aural–Oral Approaches, which emerged in the United States and Britain in the 1940’s and in a matter of decades were very popular. In fact, elements of these Aural–Oral Approaches are still used heavily in many second language courses of today, just as the Total Physical Response (TPR) method remains in regular use as a vestige of the Direct Approach. This unit will discuss the historical background and prominent features of the Aural–Oral Approaches. We will then discuss the benefits and drawbacks of these approaches and how they can be adapted to be compatible with more contemporary language teaching approaches. Finally, we will explore a variety of teaching
The Aural-Oral Approaches

Theoretical & Historical Background

More than any other force, it was probably World War II that brought the second language-teaching field back to focusing on teaching listening and speaking skills. Suddenly, there was a great demand for international communication between allies, not to mention for people with the foreign language skills to listen in on the oral communications of the enemy. The latter was made possible by increased use of telephones and communication via radio signals. Also, after the war ended, world travel became popular, and international trade has continued to increase to this day. Although a wide variety of approaches have been experimented with since, listening and speaking have never again been ignored as they once were.

When the American military suddenly needed a quick and effective way to teach foreign language skills during World War II, they turned to professional linguists. The military's call for help came at a time when the science of Behaviorism was at its peak. (Behaviorism is discussed in greater detail in the unit on Early Childhood Development Theory.) The field of behaviorism included the work of classical conditioning behaviorists such as Ivan Pavlov (1849–1936) in Russia and the American operant conditioning behaviorist B. F. Skinner (1904–1990). One of Skinner's most famous experiments with operant conditioning involved training...
laboratory rats to repeatedly press down on a lever in order to receive food rewards. Behaviorism deeply affected the American linguists of the time. What resulted was a type of linguistics known as **structural linguistics**. Most structural linguists believed that the best way to master a new language was through repetitive practice with various language structures or sentence patterns. Learning a language, they thought, required the learner to form “speaking habits” that conformed to the structure of the **target language**.

The programs developed by the American structural linguists of the 1940’s, then, relied heavily on **oral drills** and **substitution practice** in order to form these speaking habits among language students. The result was an Aural–Oral Approach that became known as the **Audio–Lingual Method** or **ALM**, but it was not only the Americans who were busy at the time developing a new Aural–Oral Approach to language teaching.

In Britain, the somewhat similar **Situational Approach** to syllabus development emerged. Like ALM, the Situational Approach placed primary importance on the spoken language. In fact, the two new approaches were similar in many ways, but British linguists were not as heavily influenced by behaviorism as were their American counterparts. Britain had her own famous linguist, J. R. Firth (1890–1960), who focused more on the **meaning** of the language in a given context, or situation. Firth and his successors realized that exactly the same language structure can have different meanings in different situations. For example, if one young student shows another his or her solution to a math problem and asks, “Is that right?” the child truly doesn’t know if the solution is correct. If, however, the math teacher walks by, points to a student’s solution to a math problem, and asks, “Is that right?” it more likely really means, “That’s wrong; try it again.” This new attention to the
meaning of language within a given context would give rise to a new field of linguistics now known as **pragmatics**.

The British syllabus design version of the Aural–Oral Approach emphasized language practice within a common situational context where communication is often needed. For example, lessons for adults might be organized around situations such as “at the supermarket” or “at the train station.” Although both of these Aural–Oral Approaches have been attacked more recently by advocates of the **Natural Approach** and the **Communicative Approach** (which are discussed in much greater detail in the two units by those titles), many modern language course books and syllabi are still organized situationally, and many language teachers, especially those who are not fully fluent in the target language themselves, still rely a great deal on the type of choral practice and substitution drills that are typical of ALM.

**Characteristics of the Audio–Lingual Method**

Being an Aural–Oral Approach, ALM focuses primarily on the spoken language—listening and speaking, especially with beginners. The teaching of reading and writing is postponed, but may be included once the students have reached a certain level of aural and oral proficiency. New language is usually introduced within a dialogue, and students are expected to do a great deal of memorization and oral mimicry of what the teacher says. Student errors are often corrected, and accurate pronunciation is expected from the very beginning.

The **input** that students receive is carefully controlled. Grammatical structures are presented in a logical order progressing from the most simple to the more complex. Although structures are sequenced, grammar is still taught inductively. Students are not overtly taught grammar rules, but rather expected to gradually come to understand them through repeated exposure to structures. Vocabulary is also
severely limited at first and expanded as the students progress. Often vocabulary to be taught in a certain lesson is selected according to how well it will substitute into the target sentence patterns. For example, if the target sentence pattern is *May I borrow a/an (noun)?* the words *pen, pencil, eraser,* and *ruler* may also be taught in the same lesson in order to allow substitution practice as follows:

T: Pen.
Ss: May I borrow a pen?
T: Pencil.
Ss: May I borrow a pencil?
T: Eraser.
Ss: May I borrow an eraser?
T: Ruler.
Ss: May I borrow a ruler?
(and so on)

This pattern of practice is called a **single-slot substitution** because the repeated structure is identical with the exception of the insertion of a single word or phrase, always in the same place or “slot.” As students become more proficient, the teacher may also engage them in **double-slot substitution** practice, using the following sort of pattern:

T: I/pen.
Ss: May I borrow a pen?
T: She/pencil.
Ss: May she borrow a pencil?
T: He/eraser.
Ss: May he borrow an eraser?
T: We/ruler.
Ss: May we borrow a ruler?
(and so on)

There are two sorts of drill practice that are common to traditional ALM teaching. The first is the **choral drill** in which
all the students respond to the teacher’s stimulus together. The other is a chain drill in which only one student at a time responds in turn-taking fashion. The latter is more often used to practice question and answer patterns:

S1: May I borrow a pen?
S2: Yes, you may. May I borrow a pencil?
S3: Yes, you may. May I borrow an eraser?
S4: Yes, you may. May I borrow a ruler?
(and so on)

One characteristic of ALM that the approach is very often criticized for is that language structures and vocabulary are often manipulated without regard to the context in which the language is to be used. For example, the preceding drills would be done regardless of whether or not any student really needed to borrow anything. At its worst, this context-free manipulation of language can result in the students being expected to say things that would not likely be said in real communication:

T: Desk.
Ss: May I borrow a desk?
T: Trashcan.
Ss: May I borrow a trashcan?
T: Door.
Ss: May I borrow a door?

This blatant disregard for context or situation is one of the factors that clearly distinguishes ALM from its British Aural–Oral Approach counterpart, the Situational Approach.

**Characteristics of the Situational Approach**

As with ALM, the Situational Approach places primary importance on listening and speaking skills. Teaching of reading and writing is intentionally postponed. New language may be presented within a dialogue or some other type of
spoken delivery, but in any case is first practiced by students orally. Grammatical structures and vocabulary are also strictly controlled and generally progress from simple to complex, but unlike ALM, a greater priority is given to those words and patterns that are most useful in common communicative situations. In fact, the organization of the course or the syllabus is designed around such situations. A few such situations were mentioned earlier, but when teaching children, the situations used should reflect the life of young learners, not adults. Rather than having situations like “at the train station” they would be along the lines of “in the lunchroom.” As with ALM, grammar is learned inductively.

The Situational Approach does not allow the language to be manipulated without regard to the context simply for the sake of substitution practice. Substitution practice may, however, be included in the Situational Approach so long as the situation in question truly allows for it. Following our previous example of a situation in the lunchroom, substitution practice may conform to the following pattern:

T: Rice.
Ss: May I have some more rice, please?
T: Juice.
Ss: May I have some more juice, please?
T: Fruit.
Ss: May I have some more fruit, please?
T: Milk.
Ss: May I have some more milk, please?
(and so on)

Although ALM discourages the use of the mother tongue in the classroom, use of the learners’ native language was strictly forbidden in the formal version of the Situational Approach.
Advantages of the Audio–Lingual Method

ALM has one significant advantage over its predecessor, the Direct Approach, in that it does not require teachers to have native-like competence in the target language. Because structures and vocabulary are strictly controlled in ALM, teachers only need to be proficient with the same language targets their students are learning. Although in modern times there are far more fluently bilingual language teachers available worldwide, in certain regions where language teaching has experienced a phenomenal recent growth in popularity, such as Asia and Latin America, there remains a shortage of teachers who have native-like fluency in the target language.

Especially in the case of English teaching, schools often address this problem by importing native speakers of the language from abroad to teach in their classrooms. Unfortunately, professional native English-speaking language teachers are not often eager to leave their family, friends, and mother culture behind and move to a new country to teach English. This problem is often compounded by economic differences between English speaking nations and those where English is being taught as a foreign language. Not only would such native-speaking teachers have to leave their home country, but also they would have to do so expecting to receive a lower salary. As a result, many schools resort to hiring non-professional teachers with an adventurous traveling spirit, simply because they are native speakers of English. In this way, schools often sacrifice teaching professionalism in order to have access to native speaking instructors. Because ALM does not require teachers to have native-like fluency, this demand for native speakers can be alleviated.

A second advantage of ALM is that it is a remarkably easy
approach to use, even with rather large classes. The approach’s heavy reliance on choral drills, chain drills, and simple single-slot and double-slot substitution practice helps to make this so. Furthermore, since the approach allows the language to be manipulated without regard to context, teachers can develop a variety of adaptable drill games and activities that can be used over and over again with nearly any set of target structures and substitution vocabulary. (See, for example, the selection of ALM techniques in the Applications section of this unit or the adaptable techniques described in the Flash Card Activities and Whiteboard Activities units of this course.)

Finally, ALM has the advantage that it endorses postponing the teaching of reading and writing, simplifying the teacher’s lesson planning needs and allowing beginning students to focus on just two skills. Opponents of ALM, however, argue that this focus on just two of the four primary skills is actually detrimental, even to the students’ aural and oral progress.

**Disadvantages of the Audio–Lingual Method**

Based only on the previous section, one might be led to believe that ALM is the perfect language teaching approach. Unfortunately, the approach, at least when used exclusively and in its most traditional form, also has significant disadvantages.

Some have criticized ALM, for example, for delaying the teaching of literacy skills. Many have argued that learning how to read and write a new language at the same time one is learning listening and speaking actually *helps* the development of the aural and oral skills. For one thing, when a student sees a written sentence, it is easier for him or her to see where one word ends and a new one begins than when depending only on aural input. For example, many students
who learn exclusively through ALM respond almost robotically to the question *How are you?* with what sounds to them like an answer of one long word, *imfinethankyouandyou* (*I’m fine, thank you, and you?*) Such students may not, however, really understand the meaning of the individual word “fine” (or even realize that it is a distinct word) and be able to use it effectively in a communicative context other than exchanging greetings.

Similarly, without seeing *I’m fine, thank you, and you?* in written form, would the student realize that their answer is really also a question? If not, when the student comes into contact with a native speaker, whose greetings may or may not conform to the “speaking habit” the student has memorized, the following sort of exchange could occur:

S: Hello. How are you?
NS: I’m fine, thanks. How are you?
S: I’m fine, thank you, and you?
NS: Um ... I’m still fine, thanks.

Additionally, if the only speaking habit response the student has learned to this greeting, is *I’m fine, thank you, and you?* how would he or she respond if asked, “How are you?” when feeling incredibly ill? Similarly, even though an ALM student may also have learned a structure that contains the word *today*, he or she is often thrown off when asked, “How are you today?” rather than simply, “How are you?”

ALM students also sometimes have difficulty using a particular structure they have learned in one context when it is needed in a rather different situation. For example, if the structure *May I borrow a (noun)?* was taught exclusively with substitution drills involving classroom objects, it may not come naturally to the student to use the same structure to ask, “May I borrow a dollar?” or “May I borrow an umbrella?” Also, because ALM drill practice often presents an artificial
context, then practices substitutions with it until speaking habits are formed, students often begin to ignore the statement or question they hear because they already know what the question and the answer will be. Similarly, the students may actually be paying attention to visual cues rather than the language they hear in order to determine how to respond. A sure way to test if a student suffers from this tendency is to point to the classroom clock and ask the child, “What’s your name?” It is remarkable how many ALM students will answer with something like, “It’s three o’clock.”

Finally, when language practice is limited mostly to choral or chain drills, some problems may occur with classroom management. For example, if the entire class is chanting answers to questions in unison, as in a choral drill, it is very easy for less motivated or shy students to pretend they are responding while not really saying anything. Also, while doing choral drills, many teachers allow themselves to always fill the role of asking the questions while students always respond. This may result in language learners who can answer many questions fluently, but cannot ask any. This is certainly not conducive to true communication. Finally, if chain drills are done in a predictable pattern (up and down the rows of a traditional classroom, for example) students tend to not pay attention until it is nearly their turn to speak and quickly lose attention again once they have had their turn. Especially in a large class where a chain drill can take a long time to get all the way around, this sort of lack of attentiveness does not facilitate efficient language learning.

**Advantages of the Situational Approach**

Due to their many similarities, the Situational Approach enjoys many of the same advantages as ALM. The Situational Approach also does not require teachers to have native-like competence in the target language. Again, this is the result of
the target grammatical structures and vocabulary being carefully controlled.

As with ALM, the Situational Approach is also relatively easy to use. However, the approach is slightly more challenging for teachers than ALM because manipulation of the language without regard to the situational context for the sake of substitution practice is not permitted. Situational Approach teachers must make extra efforts to establish a wide variety of mock situations within their classroom, possibly using illustrations, props, role-plays, and so on. This fact also makes it more difficult to adapt drill games and activities for use from one unit to another.

Also like ALM, the Situational Approach advocates delaying the teaching of reading and writing skills, allowing teachers and beginning students to focus on the listening and speaking skills. As previously mentioned, however, it is debatable whether or not this is truly beneficial to the students' aural and oral development.

**Disadvantages of the Situational Approach**

Just as the Situational Approach and ALM share many advantages, so do they share many disadvantages. For example, the same critics who attack ALM for delaying the teaching of reading and writing skills have attacked the Situational Approach on the same grounds.

As with ALM, unless lessons following the Situational Approach take into account the possible variations that may exist within a given situation, students may never learn how to respond under certain circumstances. That is, just as with ALM, students of the Situational Approach need to learn more than one response to the question *How are you?* For example, in case they find themselves in a situation where there are asked the question when not feeling well.
Also, since the Situational Approach strictly controls and sequences the order in which particular grammatical structures are practiced, a given structure may only be practiced within a single situational context. A hallmark of Firthian linguistics, however, is the acknowledgement that the same structure can be and often is used in different ways in entirely different situational contexts. If a student has practiced a given structure only in one context, will he or she be readily aware of when it can be used in other situations?

Finally, because the Situational Approach forbids the use of the mother tongue in the classroom, students may sometimes not understand the lesson and do not yet have the language proficiency to formulate an appropriate clarification question in English. Similarly, the teacher may sometimes have a great deal of difficulty communicating the meaning of more abstract words such as sorry, memory, or believe.

**Overcoming the Disadvantages of the Aural–Oral Approaches**

Although the disadvantages to using the Aural–Oral Approaches have caused many SLA professionals to discount them entirely, many of these disadvantages can be overcome with awareness and careful planning of lessons, leaving us to enjoy their valuable advantages. Furthermore, elimination of the majority of the disadvantages even makes these traditional approaches rather compatible with more contemporary language teaching approaches such as the Communicative Approach, which is discussed in great detail in another unit of this course.

For example, the evidence supporting the teaching of the four primary language skills simultaneously is fairly convincing. Even so-called **four-skills approaches**, however, allow the teacher freedom to focus on certain skills during different phases of the lesson. Many of the techniques of the
Audio–Lingual Approaches, such as choral drills, chain drills, and substitution practice, can thus be used within a four-skills program during a single lesson phase while other phases of the lesson may focus on reading and writing skills involving the same language targets.

The valid concerns over the Audio–Lingual Method’s willingness to manipulate the target language for practice’ sake without regard to context is actually answered by her sister approach. The Situational Approach only allows substitution practice and choral and chain drills if the substitutions used are suitable to the situation being presented in the lesson. In this sense, the Situational Approach was clearly superior to ALM and effectively eliminates ALM’s greatest criticism.

Concerns over students finding themselves in communicative contexts for which they did not specifically practice can largely be overcome by teachers and curriculum developers consciously thinking through the full range of variations any particular situation may take and giving students practice with language to suit these situational differences. Following the previous example, then, students would not only be taught the response *I’m fine, thank you, and you?* but also responses such as the following:

I’m great!
I’m OK.
I’m a little tired.
I’m not so good.
I’ve got a cold/headache/stomachache/the flu.

The teacher should also intentionally introduce a variety of forms the accompanying question structure might take, depending of course upon what tenses and grammatical structures they have studied in the past. For example, variations of *How are you?* may include the following:
How are you today?
How are you this morning?
How were you last night?
How have you been?
How have you been lately?

Similarly, curriculum developers or teachers might concentrate the practice for a given structure within a certain situational context, but then round out the lesson by introducing other situations in which the same structure might also be useful. For example, although the structure *May I borrow a/an (noun)?* might be introduced within the situation of borrowing classroom materials, the teacher should extend the lesson by presenting other situations such as the following:

T: You went to your friend’s house when it was sunny, but now you want to go home and it’s raining.
Ss: May I borrow an umbrella?
T: You’re at your friend’s house, and you need to call your mom.
Ss: May I borrow your telephone?
T: You want to go to the park. Your bicycle is broken, but your sister has one.
Ss: May I borrow your bicycle?
T: You’re with a friend and want to buy a soda, but don’t have any money.
Ss: May I borrow (a dollar)?
T: You’re bored at home, but your brother has lots of toys that you like.
Ss: May I borrow your (video game)?

Presenting the above contexts, however, would be challenging in a beginning class where the teacher was not allowed to use the mother tongue to set the scene. To address this issue as well as the concern for students being unable to ask questions in the mother tongue if they become confused,
the teacher can establish some sort of visual cue that indicates when it is and is not acceptable to use the native tongue to ask questions or provide descriptions of situational contexts. For questions or provide descriptions of situational contexts. For example, a small red flag can be displayed in the classroom during activities or lesson phases when the mother tongue is forbidden, but a green flag would indicate that the teacher and students are free to use the native language when necessary for purposes of clarification. Similarly, the teacher may want to set aside five minutes at the beginning and at the end of each class session during which the day’s structure and vocabulary objectives will be introduced in the mother tongue and students will be allowed to ask questions in their native language about previous lessons or the lesson they have just experienced.

Finally, classroom management issues during choral and chain drill practice can also be largely eliminated. For example, it is easier for a teacher to listen to be sure that all students are responding during choral drills if the class is broken into smaller groups and only one group responds at a time. Such grouping can also be an effective way to increase student practice of the question structures instead of the teacher usually asking the questions. One group can ask the target question, and another group can respond. To avoid students ignoring the aural input of the question, assuming they already know what it will be, the teacher should randomly interject other questions the students have previously studied and make sure the students respond to the question asked, not just to the lesson’s primary question target.

In the case of chain drills, they should never be done in a predictable pattern unless done within an activity that will ensure all the children pay close attention, even when it is not their turn. Teachers should also occasionally call on some
students to respond more than once in a given drill so that those who have already responded do not assume they can then lose focus because they will not be called on again. Another technique is to do chain drills in continuously rotation fashion in smaller groups. For example, students can be divided into groups of four and the four students in each group engage in rotating practice in the following sort of pattern:

S1: May I borrow a pen?
S2: Yes, you may. May I borrow a pencil?
S3: Yes, you may. May I borrow an eraser?
S4: Yes, you may. May I borrow a ruler?
S1: Yes, you may. May I borrow an umbrella?
S2: Yes, you may. May I borrow a dollar?
S3: Yes, you may. May I borrow a...
(and so on)

Another way to ensure that students maintain their attention during chain drills is to go back around the classroom a second time, challenging students to remember responses given by various other students before them. If students know in advance that this will occur, they will be motivated to pay very close attention to the response made by each and every classmate, even after they have had their own turn in the initial drill.

**Applications**

Here we will recommend a variety of activities that can help to keep students actively engaged during the choral and chain substitution drills typical of the Aural–Oral Approaches. First, we will present activities that are useful for whole-class or group choral practice. Then we will introduce activities that are useful for whole-class or small-group chain drills. Although these activities are adaptable for use with a wide variety of target structures and substitution vocabulary,
teachers are reminded that it is best to try to provide at least one situational context in which the structures being practiced are commonly used.

**Choral Drill Activities**

The Choral drills are an excellent way to give every student in the class a great deal of oral language practice. This is because all the students, or at least a group of students, can practice simultaneously. Choral drills are also less intimidating for children than are chain drills because they do not put individual students on the spot to produce new language targets in front of their peers. For this reason, choral drills are a good way to begin production practice of new targets.

If the language targets include question and answer patterns, it is important to engage the class or groups in producing the questions as well as the answers. To facilitate this, the teacher may want to post a large question mark in the room or draw one on the whiteboard. The teacher can simply indicate which group is to ask the question, then point to the question mark and count to three. At “three” the indicated group should chorally ask the question being practiced in the day’s lesson, then another group should chorally provide the answer.

In choral drills, there must be some source of substitution vocabulary that will indicate to students which key vocabulary word or words they are to insert in the target structure in either single-slot or double-slot substitutions. The teacher can simply provide these words orally, as was done in many of the examples given in this unit, or they can be provided using pictures or actions. They could also be provided by students, as is the case in some of the activities that follow. These latter two methods of providing substitutions give students additional practice in identifying
vocabulary items.

Here we will begin by describing some choral drill activities that require no special materials. We will then move on to activities that require materials that teachers can easily make themselves.

*Show Some Emotion*—The teacher presents the target structure then provides a suitable substitution vocabulary word or calls for students to provide one. First the class chants the structure and substitution chorally in a normal voice. Then the teacher calls out an emotion (e.g., angry, sad, excited, scared). The class then chants the structure again, but does so in a voice that reflects the given emotion. Practice continues with other substitution vocabulary and emotions.

*High, Low, Fast, & Slow*—The target structure and a substitution vocabulary word is provided. The students first chant it chorally in a normal voice. They then stand on their toes and chant it in a high-pitched voice. Then they squat down and repeat it in a very deep voice. Finally, they lean to the right and repeat it as quickly as possible, then to the left and repeat it very, very slowly. The process is repeated with other vocabulary substitutions.

*Tennis*—The classroom and students are divided into two opposing sides. The teacher presents the target sentence patterns to be practiced, then calls out a category of words that will make suitable single-slot substitutions. For example, if the target structure is *May I have some (nouns)*? the teacher may call for substitutions that are names of foods. (If the students have a fairly extensive vocabulary, the teacher might want to provide a narrower category such as fruits.) The teacher then motions to one side of the classroom. Any student on that side of the classroom can call out a substitution vocabulary item that fits the category (e.g., *apples, bananas, oranges*). When the teacher hears an
acceptable word from one of the students, he or she repeats the word loudly, and all the students on that side of the classroom chorally insert it into the target pattern. If it is a question, the opposing team answers:

T: Fruits!
S: Apples!
T: Apples!
G1: May I have some apples?
G2: Yes, you may.

The teacher then motions to the other side of the room. The second group must name a different vocabulary item that fits the category. Again the teacher picks out a word provided by a student and repeats it. This group then chants the target structure inserting the new substitution word. The teacher then goes to the first group again for a substitution word not yet called. Play bounces back and forth between the two groups until one group gets stumped and cannot come up with a word fitting the category that has not already been called. The other team has won a point. The teacher can then provide another category (e.g., drinks, vegetables, school supplies) and another round is played.

**High Hurdles**—On the whiteboard, draw three columns of boxes. The first column is only three boxes high; the second is four high; the third is five boxes tall. These are “hurdles” that the students must get over. In each box, write a vocabulary word that will work in the target sentence structure. (For preliterate students place vocabulary pictures in the boxes using adhesive tape or magnets if your whiteboard is magnetic.) Put the words that the students need the most practice with near the bottom of the taller columns. Divide the class into two teams and place a colored magnet or some other type of marker for each team next to the shortest column. Give the first student on one team a die and have
them roll it. If the die roll student on one team a die and have them roll it. If the die roll is a three or higher, the team will clear the first hurdle. Their marker is moved next to the first box of the first column and the students on that team must chant the vocabulary word or target sentence structure with the word inserted. Then move the marker up to the second box and have the students repeat using that word. Then go on to the third. Once they clear the third, have them all shout “Wheee!” as their marker slides down the other side to the base of the second hurdle. If, however, they don’t roll a high enough number to clear the hurdle, they go up the number of boxes rolled, then slide back down to the bottom on the same side of the hurdle and must try it again on their next turn (see Figure 2). If a team does a poor job of chanting in unison or if any student on the team is not joining in, they also slide back down to the bottom, regardless of whether or not they would have cleared the hurdle otherwise. Play then rotates to the next team. The first team to clear all of the hurdles wins, but it is a good idea to let all the teams play out to the end so that
every student gets a chance to practice every word. To add suspense to the activity, have the students throw the die behind a blind where only the teacher can see it. In this way they cannot tell what they have thrown prior to working their way up a hurdle.

**Roll-a-Word**—Make a vocabulary die that shows six vocabulary words that will substitute into the target sentence pattern. Place a matching six vocabulary words or pictures on the floor. Divide the class into two teams. Have the first student on one team roll the die. The entire class chants the word rolled within the target structure, and the rolling team picks up the matching vocabulary word or picture from the floor. Then the other team gets a chance to roll. The class again chorally inserts the rolled word into the target sentence pattern and the team picks up the matching word, if it remains. The turn then goes back to the first team. Once all the words or pictures have been picked up, a winning team is determined according to which one collected the most words.

**Museum**—Make a vocabulary die showing six words that will substitute into the target pattern. Write the same six words down the center of the whiteboard. Separate the class into two teams. Write one team’s name above and to the left of the list of vocabulary words and the other team’s name above and to the right of it. The objective is for the teams to collect all six words for their “museum.” Give the first student in one team the die and have him or her roll it. The entire team chants out the target pattern, inserting the word rolled into the substitution slot, and the space on the board next to that item under the team’s name is marked with an X. Then the other team gets a chance to roll. Play alternates back and forth with the players trying to roll any of the words their team has not yet rolled. The winners are the first team to successfully roll all six words, thus completing the collection in their museum.
Die by Die—Make a die showing five words that will substitute into the target pattern. The sixth side of the die should show a deadly animal such as a cobra or a tiger. Arrange the students in a circle. Explain that the deadly animal will attack the children if they roll it. Give a child the die and have them roll it. If they roll the killer animal, they must feign being attacked by it and fall to the floor dead. If, however, a substitution vocabulary word is rolled, all “living” children chant the target structure inserting the word into the appropriate slot. Continue quickly around the circle having each child roll the die. Then start a second round and a third and so on. Continue play until most of the students are dead on the floor. Those remaining are declared the champions.

Shoe Dice—Prepare two identical vocabulary dice. Go around the room assigning each student one of the six vocabulary words shown on the dice. Hand both dice to the first player. The player throws the dice one at a time. On each throw, the class chants the thrown word within the target sentence pattern. Once both dice have been thrown, any child who was assigned to one of the vocabulary words showing must remove one of their shoes and toss it into the center of
the room. Play continues as other players throw the dice. Any time a child’s word is thrown, they must throw another shoe into the center of the room if they have any left. If, however, a matching pair of words is thrown by a student, all of the children assigned to that word are given both their shoes back. (It is always fun to try to give students shoes that clearly are not theirs.) After each student has had a turn throwing the dice, anyone who has both their shoes on is a winner. (Note that in some cultures, students are very reluctant to give up their shoes. If this will cause a problem, do the activity by having students toss in any two personal possessions that they will be able to identify later.)

**Chain Drill Activities**

Unlike choral drills, chain drills require students to respond individually in turn-taking fashion. For this reason it is better to do chain drill activities after students have had some practice through low-stress choral drills. That said, however, chain drills provide an excellent opportunity for the teacher to verify that each child is producing the target language correctly. Some of the activities that follow are designed for whole-class chain drills while others are better for engaging students in motivating small group chain drill practice.

*Memory Chain*—Have the students sit in a circle. Ask one child a question. That student responds then asks the next student in the circle the same question. That child should respond, repeating the first student’s answer and adding another. The third child must respond by repeating the first two and adding a third and so on. Play continues around the circle to see how many items the children can remember. If a student makes a mistake, they are out for the rest of the round.
**Time Bomb**—Have the children sit in a circle on the floor. Ask one child a question. The student answers then asks the same question to the student to his or her right. That student answers and so on around the circle. When the question and answer gets about halfway around the circle, the student who answered first hands an object representing a time bomb to the child to his or her right. (Instructions for making a realistic looking bomb are included in the unit entitled Managing Materials.) The students will be able to pass the bomb faster than they can ask and answer. When the bomb catches up to a student who is in the process of speaking, it explodes, knocking that student out of the game. Play continues with the remaining players. Play until only a few students remain and reward them.

**Bingo**—Each student is given a unique bingo card with the cells showing target substitution vocabulary words or pictures. (A template for a bingo card is attached as Appendix B of this unit. A downloadable version is available at http://www.ITEFL.org/auraloral/bingo. Instructions for making vocabulary bingo cards are included in the unit on Managing Materials.) Each column on the card is identified at the top by one of the letters of the word bingo. The game is played by having students take turns calling out one of the letters, then inserting one of the substitution vocabulary words within the target structure. For example, if the class is playing a game of domestic animals bingo with the structure *I have a pet (animal)*, typical calls might be “N-I have a pet cat,” “B-I have a pet fish,” or “O-I have a pet pig.” It is also possible to intensify practice by having the entire class chorally chant the sentence the player has just called.

S1: O-I have a pet cat.
C: I have a pet cat.
S2: G-I have a pet pig.
C: I have a pet pig.
S3: I have a pet fish.
(and so on)

Any time a student finds the item inserted into the target structure in the column identified, they place a marker on it. The object of the game is to mark five squares in a row horizontally, vertically, or diagonally. (See several possible winning rows of squares in Figures 4–6.) Any time a student completes a winning row, they call out “bingo!” After the teacher verifies the winner’s marks, all the students clear their markers; and a new game begins.

The following few activities use playing cards that have been adapted to show substitution vocabulary words. With such vocabulary playing cards, it is easy to adapt almost any common card game for use in small group language-teaching chain drills. These small groups of just four or five students provide each child with numerous opportunities for turn-taking language practice and the objectives of the card games give children motivation to engage in such intensive chain drills. The teacher should move about the classroom and spend a few minutes listening to the structures being produced by each child in each group to ensure that the children are saying the target structures correctly. Because it is difficult for a teacher to monitor numerous groups at once, it is sometimes beneficial to add a rule to the game being played that provides for some sort of punishment (e.g., losing a card or drawing a penalty card, depending on the objectives of the game) if a student does not produce the target structure correctly. This will turn every player in every group into a “teacher” monitoring their competitors for accuracy in language production.

Telepathy—Have the students form small groups. Tell the children what vocabulary items are on the cards and list them on the whiteboard. Give each group a deck of cards. Each
group shuffles their deck and deals them out until they are gone. Students are not allowed to look at their own cards and should arrange them in a face-down pile in front of themselves. Then the first student to play puts a hand on the top card of his or her pile and announces what vocabulary word he or she thinks is written on the card by inserting it into the target sentence pattern. He or she then turns the card face up into the center of the playing area. Any time a student correctly guesses what his or her card will be, the child collects all the cards discarded since the last correct guess. After all of the students have exhausted their piles, the cards claimed by correct guesses are counted to determine a winner.

*I’ve Got It*—This is a very simple card game that can be played with even very young students as long as they can read the words on the cards. (Alternatively, picture cards can be used so no reading is required.) This game can also be played with larger groups of up to ten if desired. Give each group a deck of vocabulary cards. The cards are shuffled and dealt out until all are gone. The first player starts play by tossing in any card from his or her hand and using the shown vocabulary word in a target structure. Any other student who has a matching vocabulary card then pipes up, saying the word in the structure and tossing his or her card in as well. If a player has two or more of that card, he or she can toss them all in, repeating the structure and word an appropriate number of times. Then the next player in the circle starts another round. This continues until someone has gotten rid of all his or her cards. That student (or students, in the frequent case of ties) wins.

*Find Four*—This game is played similarly to the popular card game Go Fish. Separate the class into groups of four or five. Give each group a deck and have them deal out five cards to each player. The first player shows a card from his or her
hand, says the vocabulary word on it within a target pattern, then identifies another student he or she thinks may have a matching card. If that student has a match, he or she must surrender it, inserting the word into the target structure, and the playing student gets another turn. If, however, the called student does not have a match, the player is rejected and draws one of the cards left over from the deal. His or her turn then ends, and the next student plays. Players must try to remember what cards other students have, so when it is their turn, they know who to ask for what cards. Any time a student collects all four of a certain card, they are shown. Once all the leftover cards have been taken up, a player’s turn simply ends the first time they fail to make a match. The winner is the player that makes the most sets of four cards. In many cases, you can incorporate a question and answer structure into this game. For example, using a deck of domestic animals cards, the playing student shows a card that reads “cat” and says, “I have a pet cat. Billy, do you have a pet cat?” If Billy has a cat card, he must say, “Yes, I do,” and surrender it. If not, he says, “No, I don’t.”

Snap—Put the students in small groups. Give each group a set of vocabulary cards, which are dealt out until they are gone. Students are not allowed to look at their own cards; they just place them in a neat stack on the table in front of themselves, creating draw stacks. The first player turns over the top card from his or her draw stack and uses the vocabulary item shown within the target structure. Then the next student does the same and so on. On subsequent rounds, players turn over another card and lay it directly on top of the other discards. Any time two discard piles end up showing the same vocabulary word (see Figure 7), all the players, except the one who just turned the card creating the match, race to shout out “snap!” The first to say it collects all the cards in those two piles and places them back under his or her draw
The Aural-Oral Approaches

The object of the game is to collect as many cards as possible.

Figure 4: Snap!

Conclusions

Although the Aural-Oral Approaches, the Audio-LINGual Method (ALM), and the Situational Approach have been largely rejected by some second language acquisition researchers, many of their disadvantages can be avoided leaving us able to use their advantageous features for effective teaching that is compatible with more contemporary methods. In this unit, we explored the theoretical and historical background of the Aural-Oral Approaches, described the characteristics of each, discussed the advantages and disadvantages of each, and discovered how many of their disadvantages can be avoided. We then covered a variety of applications, or teaching techniques, that facilitate the types of drills that are characteristic of the Aural-Oral Approaches.

Both ALM and the Situational Approach were reactions to the ineffectiveness of the Grammar Translation Approach and the Reading Approach in enabling students to orally
communicate in their second language. While ALM was heavily influenced by the science of Behaviorism and assumed students must develop “speaking habits” through repetitive oral practice, the Situational Approach arose from the new field of pragmatics, which emphasized the fact that certain language structures can have quite different meanings depending upon the context, or situation, in which they are used. Both Aural–Oral approaches emphasize the teaching of listening and speaking and delay the teaching of reading and writing. In both approaches, the input students receive is carefully controlled and grammatical structures are sequenced from simple to more complex. In both, the rules of grammar are learned inductively, not through overt explanation (deductively). While both approaches may use single-slot substitution and double-slot substitution in choral drills or chain drills, traditional ALM allows the language to be manipulated without regard to context for the mere sake of practice, while the Situational Approach only allows practice of language that would actually be used in certain communicative situations. While ALM discourages the use of the mother tongue in the classroom, the formal Situational Approach strictly forbids it.

Both Situational Approaches have certain advantages. Neither requires teachers to have native-like fluency. Both are fairly easy to use, even in large classes, but the Situational Approach places a slightly greater demand on teachers to establish suitable situations for the language being practiced while ALM does not. Because the Aural–Oral Approaches delay the teaching of literacy skills, teachers and students are allowed to focus on just two of the four primary language skills. Some argue, however, that this is actually detrimental, even to aural and oral development.

The approaches also have other disadvantages. For example, many ALM or Situational Approach students
struggle to fluently use certain structures when they are appropriate in situations other than those that were used for practice of the structure in the classroom. Also, some classroom management issues may occur when students only pretend to respond orally during choral drills or lose interest after their turn in long chain drills that progress through the class in a predictable pattern. Also, some teachers fall into the trap of always asking the target questions while students respond, robbing students of the chance to practice producing the questions as well as the responses. Finally, because these approaches discourage any use of the mother tongue, teachers may have difficulty explaining more abstract vocabulary, and beginning students may have no way to ask for clarification because they lack the necessary proficiency in the target language to do so.

Most of these disadvantages can be overcome. For example, even modern **four-skills approaches** allow for certain lesson phases to focus on particular skills, so the methods of the Aural-Oral Approaches can still be utilized in lesson phases that focus on listening and speaking practice to lesson phases that focus on listening and speaking practice. To help students be able to use target structures in a variety of situations, teachers should consciously demonstrate a variety of situations in which each target structure could be used as well as teach variations of target questions and responses that may be useful in differing situations. To overcome the difficulties of not being able to use the mother tongue, a small amount of time could be set aside before and after each lesson in which teachers can explain target structures and vocabulary and students can ask for clarification in their native language. The bulk of the class, then, would be conducted only in the target language. Classroom management concerns can be addressed by breaking students into smaller practice groups, making the
turn-taking of chain drills random rather than predictable, and calling on students who have already responded in a chain drill to report what response was given by one or more of their classmates.

Despite being pedagogically traditional, variations on the Aural–Oral Approaches still have an effective role to play in modern second language teaching practice, especially in regions where there is a shortage of fully bilingual language teachers.

Notes

1) Aural–Oral Approaches (听说法):
外语或第二语言教学方法，听说领先、大量操练、反对课堂使用母语，以结构主义语言学和行为主义心理学为基础，不要求教师有本族语般的流利程度。

2) Behaviorism (行为主义):
心理学理论认为，人和动物的行为只能且必须从生理过程来研究，由此产生的学习理论解释了人怎么样受外部事件的刺激产生行为变化（反应），而不需要任何“意向”或其他心理活动。

3) operant conditioning (操作性条件反射):
学习理论，由美国心理学家斯金纳提出，是行为主义心理学的重要方面。生物发出动作称为操作。结果称心会重复一次，称为操作受到强化。无结果（不强化）或结果不称心，操作重复的机会就会减少。是对古典性条件反射的补充。

4) Situational Approach (情景法):
起源于新领域语用学，强调一种语言结构可能因情景/语境不同而产生不同含义，严格禁止使用母语。

5) pragmatics (语用学):
研究语言在交际中的运用，特别是句子及其语境之间的关系，包括：话语的理解与运用对现实世界的认识间的关系，说话者如何使用和理解言语行为，句子结构如何
受说话者和听话者间的关系的影响。

References


