MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY PROBLEMS UNDER INVESTIGATION

The Committee on Direction and Control of the Modern Foreign Language Study assumes provisionally as the four immediate objectives of instruction in the modern foreign languages a progressive development—

1. Of the power to read the foreign language.
2. Of the power to understand the language when spoken.
3. Of the power to speak the language.
4. Of the power to write the language.

The Committee posits further the following as ultimate objectives which may possibly be attained through the study of the modern foreign languages—

1. *Ability to read the foreign language with ease and enjoyment.
2. Ability to communicate orally with natives of the country whose language has been studied.
3. Ability to communicate in writing with natives of the country whose language has been studied.
4. Increased ability to pronounce and understand foreign words and phrases occurring in English.
5. Increased ability in the accurate and intelligent use of English.
6. Increased power to learn other languages.
7. A more effective realization of the importance of habits of correct articulation and clear enunciation.
8. Increased knowledge of the history and institutions of the foreign country and a better understanding of its contribution to modern civilization.
9. Increased ability to understand ideals, standards, and traditions of foreign peoples and Americans of foreign birth.

*In arranging the objectives, the question of relative importance has not been considered.
10. Development of literary and artistic appreciation.
11. Development of a more adequate realization of the relation of the individual to society.
12. A clearer understanding of the history and nature of language.
13. Increased ability to discern relationships and make comparisons between subjects allied in form and content.
15. The ability to make prompt and effective use of foreign discoveries and inventions.
16. Development of social adaptability through increased personal contacts with natives of other countries.

This statement of immediate and ultimate objectives constitutes a challenge to teachers of modern languages and to students of secondary education and educational psychology. The determination of the extent to which they are realized and realizable requires comprehensive experimentation and testing. In order to render the objectives more tangible and to focus attention upon specific studies which may be undertaken experimentally or statistically by teachers of the modern languages or by students of education, the Committee has formulated a list of problems for investigation and research. It is hoped that modern language departments in colleges and universities and departments of education will give consideration to these problems in the assignment of master’s and doctor’s theses. It is also hoped that teachers of the modern languages and members of departments of education will cooperate with the Study* in planning their own researches. The Study welcomes correspondence concerning any of the problems listed or others that may be undertaken.

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SUGGESTED PROBLEMS FOR MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY

A. FACTORS AND CONDITIONS IN ACHIEVEMENT

1. The effect on achievement of the age at which modern foreign language is begun.
2. The effect on achievement of the method used.
3. Variations in achievement due to general intelligence.
4. Variations in achievement due to the size of the school and to differences in teaching conditions.
5. Variations in achievement in classes taught by natives and by teachers trained in America.
6. The influence of previous foreign language study on achievement.
7. Comparative study of achievement by pupils beginning a modern foreign language in secondary school and in college.
8. The size of classes and resulting variations in achievement in foreign languages.
9. Variations in achievement in language classes meeting three, four, five, or more times weekly.
10. Comparative study of achievement in classes in which extensive reading is practised and in classes that read less and do more formal linguistic work.
11. Comparative achievement in modern language classes in the United States, in Canada, and in European countries.
12. Comparative study of achievement in modern language classes in experimental schools and in ordinary schools.
13. Comparative study of achievement in city school systems having supervisors of modern foreign languages and in those without special supervision.
15. The effect of a general language
course on progress in a modern foreign language.

16. The effect of varying periods of disuse on the abilities in modern foreign languages.

17. Increments of progress in modern language study by successive semesters.

18. Eye movements in reading foreign languages at different stages of progress.

19. The effect on ability to read modern foreign languages of oral practice vs. practice in translation.

20. The effect of varying distributions of class time between oral work, translation, free composition, and grammatical drill.

21. Comparative study of achievement in classes: (a) where much attention is paid to the acquisition of a good pronunciation; (b) where little attention is given to pronunciation.

22. Comparative study of achievement where two modern foreign languages are begun: (a) at the same time; (b) at an interval of a year; (c) at other intervals.

23. A study of the present practices and the validity of present methods of evaluating high school units by colleges and universities.

B. PROBLEMS IN TESTING ACHIEVEMENT

24. Comparative study as to validity and reliability of the true-false type, the Thorndike-McCall type, and the picture-supplement type of silent reading or comprehension tests in each of the foreign languages.

25. Comparative study of functional grammar test technique (correction of errors, completion, multiple choice with and without English translations, and true-false).

26. Comparative study as to validity and reliability of vocabulary test techniques: translation, selective type (English), selective type (foreign language), with and without context.

27. Standard tests of speed of reading each foreign language.

28. Correlations between functional grammar tests and formal grammar tests.

29. Interrelations between different abilities in modern foreign languages and their bearings on achievement tests.

30. The validity of measuring ability in pronunciation by the ability to detect errors in pronunciation.

31. Composition scales in each of the foreign languages for rating written work, and their reliability.

32. Composition scales for rating free compositions at the various levels in college entrance examinations.

33. Standardization of test material for measuring ability to understand the foreign language when spoken.

34. Standard tests of ability to speak each of the foreign languages.

35. Standard tests in the knowledge of the civilization of the foreign country: its history, its literature, and its institutions.

C. PROGNOSIS TEST PROBLEMS

36. The validity and reliability of available prognostic tests.

37. A study of cases of genuine linguistic disability or incapacity not accompanied by low general intelligence.

38. A comparison of prediction on a basis of a general intelligence test, of school marks in other subjects, and of special aptitude tests.

39. A critical survey and analysis of the literature on the psychological processes involved in learning a foreign language.

40. The correlations and partial correlations between abilities in foreign languages and other school subjects, and their bearings on prognosis.
D. CURRICULUM PROBLEMS

I. VOCABULARY

41. Minimum vocabularies at various stages for each modern language.
42. Vocabulary tests on a basis of frequency for each modern language.
43. Critical examination of the size and character of vocabularies in widely used grammars and textbooks at the various stages.
44. The learning process in acquiring a vocabulary.
45. Critical study of the various ways of building vocabulary.
46. Effect on recognition vocabulary in the native and in the foreign language of systematic attention to etymology.
47. Effect on vocabulary building of extensive vs. intensive reading.
48. Comparison of active and of passive vocabularies.
49. Comparative study of the size and character of vocabularies in first-year books and grammars in French, German, Italian, Latin, and Spanish.
50. Frequency of occurrence in English of foreign words and phrases (especially French).
51. Comparative study of vocabularies in typical first-year courses with those in second-year courses.
52. An analysis of the vocabularies of the first 1,000 or the first 2,000 words in French, German, Italian, Spanish, English, and Latin to discover similarities and relationships.

II. GRAMMAR

53. Syntax frequency lists based on current grammars and on representative literary and popular prose.
54. Collection of data as to grammars most widely used and the grammatical topics stressed in the classroom.
55. Comparative effectiveness of learning grammar formally and functionally.
56. Increments in the knowledge of grammar at intervals of a semester or of a year.
58. A study of the frequency of grammatical errors in student exercises.
59. The variability in grammar and in composition texts in the high school and in the college.

III. READING

60. The nature and amount of modern foreign languages read at various stages in American and in European schools. Relative attention to (a) realia; (b) geography, history, and institutions of foreign countries; and (c) literary material.
61. Comparative study of texts and reading assignments in modern foreign languages where foreign language study is begun in the first year in high school, in the third year, and in college.
62. The selection and graduation of reading material for the various years of the foreign language course.
63. The variability of reading assignments and of texts in college courses in each of the modern foreign languages.
64. The variability of reading material used in high school courses in each of the modern foreign languages.
65. The methods used by institutions in defining “ability to read French and German” where such a requirement is in effect.
66. A comparative study of courses in modern foreign languages in 1890, 1900, 1910, and 1920; for example, in states or cities where records are available.
67. The reading of modern foreign languages after graduation from college by those not teaching the languages.
68. The knowledge of French, German, or Spanish history, literature, and institutions possessed by those who have studied the respective languages in comparison with those who have not.

69. Variability in the amount of reading in so-called extensive reading courses.

IV. TRANSLATION

70. Value of practice in translation for developing reading power.

71. Interrelations between the ability to translate from the native into the foreign tongue and from the foreign into the native tongue.

72. Translation as a testing device vs. translation as a means of teaching the foreign language.

V. PHONETICS

73. A study of present-day methods of phonetic drill.

74. Relative progress in learning to pronounce: (a) in classes conducted by the phonetic method (physiological explanations and the use of phonetic transcription); (b) in classes where pronunciation is learned by imitation.

75. A study of the actual amounts of practice in pronunciation that students get in typical classes in each foreign language.

76. Ability in pronunciation developed by native teachers as compared with teachers trained in America.

77. Experiment with the use of phonograph records in developing ability in pronunciation.

78. Variations in the time allotted to oral work.

79. The effectiveness of phonetic drill in correcting cases of particularly poor ability in pronunciation.

80. Methods of developing correct intonation in speaking and in reading the foreign languages.

81. Frequency of characteristic errors in pronunciation in each foreign language.

E. LEARNING PROBLEMS

82. The learning curve in acquiring ability to read a foreign language with daily or weekly record of growth in vocabulary and in ability to read.

83. The learning curve in acquiring ability to understand the spoken foreign language with weekly records of progress.

84. The learning curve in acquiring ability to read and speak a foreign language where the subject is living abroad.

85. The learning curve in acquiring ability to write a foreign language (e.g., five-minute compositions at weekly intervals with records of amount written and of decrease in errors).

86. The most effective distribution of time in learning a foreign language.

87. The effect of various incentives on progress in learning (e.g., travel abroad, preparation for foreign service, specific college requirements, etc.).

88. The effect on progress in ability to read of having students at regular intervals record the amount read in a given time.

89. Plateaus in the learning curve for the acquisition of ability to read a foreign language.

90. A study of the strength of association from English to the foreign language and from the foreign language to English under different methods and conditions.

91. Study-habits of pupils in preparing reading lessons in modern languages.

F. METHODS

92. A study of the methods employed by successful teachers in building voca-
bularies (lists, drills, oral composition, etc.).

93. A study of methods used by exceptionally successful teachers in teaching pronunciation.

94. Methods employed to develop the ability to understand a spoken foreign language.

95. Free composition vs. translation into the foreign language as a means of developing the ability to write a foreign language.

96. A study of methods used where training for foreign correspondence is the specific aim.

97. A study of frequency of errors in vocabulary, reading, speaking, and writing, and writing the modern foreign languages.

98. A study of method as adapted to students at different ages (e.g., at the secondary school and at the college age).

99. A study of the relative gain in the various abilities (e.g., to read, to pronounce, to write, to understand, to speak) as a result of one or more types of method.

100. The teaching of syntax inductively vs. the teaching of rules systematically.

101. A study of prevailing modern language methods.

**G. TRANSFER VALUES**

102. The effect of the study of the modern foreign languages on English.

103. The effect of the study of Latin on progress in the modern foreign languages.

104. The effect of the study of modern languages on the knowledge of English grammar.

105. The effect on English vocabulary of training in the modern foreign languages.

106. The effect on speed of reading in English of habits of translation formed in acquiring a foreign language.

107. The effect of modern foreign language study on literary appreciation in English.

108. A study of the quality of English in translations for college entrance examinations, with due allowance made for differences in general intelligence either on the basis of an intelligence test or of an average of scholarship marks in high school in all subjects taken.

109. The effect of the study of modern languages on interest in and the attitude toward foreign countries and peoples.

110. A study of examination papers, to determine what objectives the examiners seemed to have in mind when choosing and formulating questions.

**H. ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION**

111. Modern language entrance requirements: (a) in liberal arts courses; (b) in other courses.

112. Modern language requirements for a bachelor's degree: (a) in liberal arts courses; (b) in other courses.

113. Mortality in foreign language classes in high school and in college, and the causes.

114. Foreign language courses in junior high school and their relation to language courses in senior high school and in college.

115. Practices in sectioning classes on a basis of preliminary tests, either of intelligence or of ability in the foreign language.

116. Number of students majoring in modern foreign languages as compared with other subjects and the number of such students preparing to teach.
117. Standards and practices in measuring reading knowledge of French and German for candidates for the doctor's degree.

118. The number of college students studying no foreign language, one, two, three, or more foreign languages in high school and in college.

119. Motives prompting high school and college students to elect foreign languages.

120. A study of the failures in modern foreign language courses and of the regulations governing these in different institutions.

121. Reactions of students to the kind and character of instruction given in modern languages.

122. The influence of the college entrance board examinations on modern language curricula and methods.

123. A study of examination papers written by candidates for teachers' licenses and certificates in modern languages.

ENGLISH NOTES

NEW OFFICERS

Officers of the English Section of the Virginia State Teachers Association elected at Norfolk on November 25 are:


An executive committee consisting of three members is to be named by the president.

A full report of the proceedings of the Norfolk meeting will appear in the next issue of The Virginia Teacher.

DISTRICT ORGANIZATIONS

During his incumbency as president of the English section, H. A. Miller of the Petersburg High School has given much time and energy to effecting district organizations of English teachers with the purpose of bringing the teachers of Virginia eventually into as close a contact as English teachers in some of the northern and middle western states now enjoy. It has been thought that only by such methods may Virginia's teachers be organized into a professionally-minded group. The organization at present stands as follows:

District A—Miss Lulu C. Daniel, State Teachers College, Fredericksburg, president.
District B—(Tidewater English Teachers Association) Miss Lucy Brickhouse, Maury High School, Norfolk, president.
District C—Miss Eva Branch, John Marshall High School, Richmond, organizer.
District D—Mrs. C. B. Bowry, Burkeville, president.
District E—Miss Mary L. Goode, Jefferson High School, Roanoke, organizer.
District F—Miss Evelina O. Wiggins, E. C. Glass High School, Lynchburg, organizer.
District G—Garland Quarles, Handley High School, Winchester, organizer.
District H—
District I—Professor J. R. L. Johnson, State Teachers College, Radford, organizer.
District J—
District K—

A DEPENDABLE LIST OF FILMS

Teachers of literature working through their local motion picture managers and those having the use of machines in their own schools will find much assistance in the recently published list entitled Selected Book Films, compiled by the National Committee for Better Films of the National Board of Review, 70 Fifth Avenue, New York City. The list contains names and addresses of film companies, suggests the audience suitability of each picture, and also indicates how long each picture has been in circulation.