

**Direct Method (DM) or Natural Method (NM) or Francois Gouin's
Series Method**

Francois Gouin's and his colleague Charles Berlitz

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1. A Brief History

Towards the end of the late 1800s, a revolution in language teaching philosophy took place that is seen by many as the dawn of modern foreign language teaching. Teachers, frustrated by the limits of the Grammar Translation Method in terms of its inability to create communicative competence in students, began to experiment with new ways of teaching language. Basically, teachers began attempting to teach foreign languages in a way that was more similar to first language acquisition. It incorporated techniques designed to address all the areas that the Grammar Translation did not – namely oral communication, more spontaneous use of the language, and developing the ability to think in the target language. Perhaps in an almost reflexive action, the method also moved as far away as possible from various techniques typical of the Grammar Translation Method – for instance using L1 as the language of instruction, memorizing grammatical rules and lots of translation between L1 and the target language.

Direct Method (DM), appearing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, developed from Natural Method (NM). Like the NM, it emphasized the learning of speech, acquiring meaning in environmental context, and learning grammar through induction. DM theorists believe that by applying scientific knowledge from psychology and linguistics, language learning can be made more efficient, with the result that students will learn faster than they would under the spontaneous and unplanned lessons of NM. Harold Palmer (1922) is perhaps its most articulate and eminent advocate.

The appearance of the “Direct Method” thus coincided with a new school of thinking that dictates that all foreign language teaching will occur in the target language only, with no translation and an emphasis on linking *meaning* to the language being learned. The method becomes very popular during the first quarter of the 20th century, especially in private language schools in Europe where highly motivated students can study new languages and not need to travel far in order to try them out and apply them communicatively. One of

the most famous advocates of the Direct Method is the German Charles Berlitz, whose schools and Berlitz Method are now world-renowned.

2. The Concept

These followings are the concepts of Direct Method:

1. Teachers who use the Direct Method intend that students learn how to communicate in the target language.
2. Students need to associate meaning and the target language directly.
3. The initiation of the interaction goes both ways, from teacher to students and from student to teacher, although the latter is often teacher-directed. Students converse with one another as well.
4. Language is primarily spoken, not written.
5. Vocabulary is emphasized over grammar.
6. The students' native language should not be used in the classroom.
7. In the Direct Method, students are asked to the language, not to demonstrate their knowledge about the language.
8. The teacher, employing various techniques, tries to get student self-correct.

Richards and Rodgers (1986:9-10) summarize the key features of the Direct Method thus:

1. Classroom instructions are conducted exclusively in the target language.
2. Only everyday vocabulary and sentences are taught during the initial phase; grammar, reading and writing are introduced in intermediate phase.
3. Oral communication skills are built up in a carefully graded progression organized around question-and-answer exchanges between teachers and students in small, intensive classes.
4. Grammar is taught inductively.
5. New teaching points are introduced orally.
6. Concrete vocabulary is taught through demonstration, objects, and pictures; abstract vocabulary is taught by association of ideas.
7. Both speech and listening comprehensions are taught.

8. Correct pronunciation and grammar are emphasized.
9. Student should be speaking at least 80% of the time during the lesson.
10. Students are taught from inception to ask questions as well as answer them.

The key *Aspects* of this method are:

I. Introduction of new word, number, alphabet character, sentence or concept (referred to as an *Element*) :

- **SHOW**...Point to Visual Aid or Gestures (for verbs), to ensure student clearly understands what is being taught.
- **SAY**...Teacher verbally introduces *Element*, with care and enunciation.
- **TRY**...Student makes various attempts to pronounce new *Element*.
- **MOLD**...Teacher corrects student if necessary, pointing to mouth to show proper shaping of lips, tongue and relationship to teeth.
- **REPEAT**...Student repeats each *Element* 5-20 times.

II. Syntax, the correct location of new *Element* in sentence:

- **SAY & REPEAT**...Teacher states a phrase or sentence to student; Student repeats such 5-20 times.

- **ASK & REPLY IN NEGATIVE**...Teacher uses *Element* in negative situations (e.g. “Are you the President of the United States?” or “Are you the teacher?”); Students says “No”. If more advanced, may use the negative with “Not”.

- **INTERROGATIVES** Teacher provides intuitive examples using 5 “w”s (Who, What, Where, Why, When) or How”. Use random variations to practice.

- **PRONOUNS WITH VERBS** Using visuals (such as photos or illustrations) or gestures, Teacher covers all pronouns. Use many random variations such as “Is Ana a woman?” or “Are they from France?” to practice.

- **USE AND QUESTIONS**...Student must choose and utilize the correct *Element*, as well as posing appropriate questions as Teacher did.

III. Progress, from new *Element* to new *Element* (within same lesson):

A. Random Sequencing:

1. After new *Element* (X) is taught and learned, go to next (Y).
2. After next *Element* is taught and learned, return to practice with first.
3. After these two are alternated (X-Y; Y-X; Y-Y, etc), go to 3rd *Element*.
4. Go back to 1 and 2, mix in 3, practice (X-Y-Z; Z-Y-X; Y-Y-Z, etc.) and continue building up to appropriate number of Elements (may be as many as 20 per lesson, depending on student, see B.1), practicing all possible combinations and repeating 5-20 times each combination.

B. Student-Led Limits:

1. Observe student carefully, to know when mental “saturation” point is reached, indicating student should not be taught more Elements until another time.

2. At this point, stop imparting new information, and simply do Review as follows:

C. Review: Keep random, arbitrary sequencing. If appropriate, use visuals, pointing quickly to each. Employ different examples of *Element* that are easy to understand, changing country/city names, people names, and words student already knows. *Keep a list of everything taught, so proper testing may be done.*

D. Observation and Notation: Teacher should maintain a student list of words/phrases that are most difficult for that student. List is called “Special Attention List”

IV. Progress, from Lesson to Lesson:

- **LESSON REVIEW** The first few minutes of each lesson are to review prior lesson(s).

- **GLOBAL REVIEW** Transition from Lesson Review to a comprehensive review, which should always include items from the Special Attention List.

V. Advanced Concepts:

- **Intermediate and Advanced Students** may skip some *Element* introduction as appropriate; become aware of student’s language abilities, so they are not frustrated by too much review. If Student immediately shows recognition and knowledge, move to next *Element*.

- **Non-Standard Alphabets:** Teaching Student to recognize letters/characters and reading words should employ same steps as in above Aspect I. and alphabet variations may be taught using Aspect III. Writing characters and words should initially be done manually, either on paper or whiteboard.

- **Country Accents:** Any student at intermediate stages or higher should be made aware of subtle variations in pronunciation, which depend on geography within a country or from country to country.

It should be noted that an integral aspect of the Direct Method is varying the **setting** of teaching; try different scenarios using the same *Element*. This makes the lessons more “real world,” as it will bring some confusing distractions to the student and employ organic variables common in the culture and locale of language use.

Diane Larsen-Freeman, in her book *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*(1986:26-27) provides expanded descriptions of some common/typical techniques closely associated with the Direct Method. The listing here is in summary form only.

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

- b. Question and Answer Exercise (*Asking questions in the target language and having students answer in full sentences*). This exercise is conducted only in the target language. Students are asked questions and answer in full sentence so that they practice new words and grammatical structures.

- c. Student Self-Correction (*Teacher facilitates opportunities for students to self correct using follow-up questions, tone, etc*). The teacher of this class has the students self-correct by asking them to make a choice between what they said an alternative answer he supplied. There are, however, other ways of

getting students to self-correct. Another possibility is for the teacher to repeat what the student said, stopping just before the errors.

d. Conversation Practice (*Teacher asks students and students ask students questions using the target language*). The teacher asks students a number of questions in the target language, which the students have to understand to be able to answer correctly. The questions contained a particular grammar structure.

e. Fill-in-the-blank Exercise (*Items use target language only and inductive rather than explicit grammar rules*). All the items are in the target language; furthermore, no explicit grammar rule would be applied.

f. Dictation (*Teacher reads passage aloud various amount of times at various tempos, students writing down what they hear*). The teacher reads the passage three times. The first time the teacher reads it at normal speed, the second time reads the passage phrase by phrase, the last time the teacher again reads at a normal speed.

g. Paragraph Writing (*Students write paragraphs in their own words using the target language and various models*). The teacher in this class asked the students to write a paragraph in their own words on the major geographical features of the United States.

h. Map drawing. The class included one example of a technique used to give students listening comprehensive practice.

3. Language Focus

Oral teaching comes before any other kind of reading and writing activities. Both speech & listening comprehension are taught. Correct pronunciation & grammar are emphasized

It emphasizes on listening and speaking, the use of the target language for all class instructions, and the use of visuals and realia to illustrate meaning.

The Direct Method emphasizes the use of the target language, avoiding use of the mother tongue and therefore 'translation'. In context, a child would not rely on a first language to learn it's mother tongue. Adopting the direct method, students learn to correctly pronounce the language, in a natural and responsive way. They also absorb the whole, entire 'meaning' of their target language. Fundamental to each 'contemporary' method today, is the psychological aspect of learning a second language. That is, cultural absorption, which in turn, leads to the true 'understanding' of any foreign language.

4. Merits and Drawbacks

4.1. Merits

1. Students are motivated to be able to say and understand English especially teacher use realia and demonstration they are interested to learn.
2. Students can easily understand things, for example pen, pencil, table etc
3. Students get experiences directly and practically

4. Students are accustomed to pronounce English word correctly.
5. It is a natural method which teaches language the same way the mother tongue is acquired. Only the target language is used and the learning is contextualized.
6. Its emphasis on speech made it more attractive for those who have needs of real communication in the target language.
7. It was one of the first methods to introduce the teaching of vocabulary through realia
8. Students acquire fluency in speech. They are quick at understanding spoken English. They can converse in English with felicity and ease.

4.2. Drawbacks

1. Students can feel bored if teacher can not motivate students.
2. In some level this method is difficult to apply because students do not understand L2 at all.
3. Teacher sometimes translate words because it is difficult to explain students if they still do not understand.
4. The Direct Method concentrates on listening and speaking but not reading and writing. That is why many of those who have learned English through the Direct Method feel that they do not get adequate command over written language.
5. it is still confused how to apply this method beyond elementary stage and safe guard misunderstanding without translation.
6. Successful teacher of the Direct Method needed competence in his language / stamina/ energy/ imagination/ ability and time to create own materials and course. Yet it is difficult to find a sufficient number of such teachers.
7. Also Direct Methodists failed to grade and structure their materials adequately – no selection, grading or controlled presentation of vocabulary and structures.
9. As Brown (1994:56) points out, “(It) did not take well in public education where the constraints of budget, classroom size, time, and teacher background made such a method difficult to use.”

5. Teacher roles

The teacher directs the class activities. The teacher and the students are more like partners in the teaching/learning process. The teacher explains new vocabulary using realia, visual aids or demonstrations.

1. **Q & A:** The teacher asks questions of any nature and the students answer. In preparation for this activity the teacher models, extensively, the use of complete answers to questions. Once doing this activity the teacher expects full sentences as answers to each question. Students can also be given the

opportunity to ask the questions. **Objective: Experiment with words and sentence patterns to create interest and variety.**

2. Dictation: The teacher chooses a grade appropriate passage from a book and reads the text aloud three times. The first time the passage is read the students only listen. The second time the passage is read it is read phrase by phrase, with the teacher pausing long enough for students to write down what they have heard. The third time the text is read, it is read at normal speed and the students check their work. **Objective: Listen attentively, courteously, and purposefully to a range of texts from a variety of cultural traditions for pleasure and information.**

3. Reading Aloud: Students take turns reading sections of a passage, play, or dialog out loud. At the end of each student's turn the teacher uses gestures, pictures, examples, or role play to help the students make meaning of the text. **Objective: Orally and silently read a range of contemporary and classical grade appropriate texts for enjoyment and information.**

4. Getting Students to Self-Correct. For example if the student says, "I have cree apples," the teacher should say, "Do you have cree apples or three apples?" **Objective: Reflect on speaking behaviors and strategies.**

5. Map Drawing: Students are provided with a blank map of Canada. The teacher gives specific instructions to the students. Once they are finished, their map will be completely labeled. The teacher takes the same map on an overhead and the students give the teacher instructions on how to label the map. **Objectives: Listen purposefully to determine the main ideas and important details; use language appropriate to audience, purpose, and situation.**

6. Student Roles

The student role is less passive than in The Grammar-Translation Method. The teacher and the students are more like partners in the teaching/learning process.

Conclusion

Direct Method is a radical change from Grammar Translation Method by the use of the target language as a means of instruction and communication in the language classroom, and by the avoidance of the use of first language and translation. It is a shift from literary language to the spoken every language as the object of early instruction. It emphasizes on speaking and listening. It uses realia, picture, demonstration of pictures and objects. Direct Method has merits and drawbacks. It requires native teachers or fluent teacher in foreign language they teach, but it is difficult to meet these requirements.