



METHODOLOGICAL BASIS OF USING THE AUDIO-LINGUAL METHOD IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Rustamova Nigina To'liqin qizi

*Kimyo International University in Toshkent
Samarkand Branch*

Abstract: This article examines the methodological foundations of the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) and its application in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). Rooted in structural linguistics and behavioral psychology, the ALM emerged in the mid-twentieth century as a systematic approach to language instruction that emphasized oral proficiency, habit formation, and pattern drilling. The article explores the theoretical underpinnings of the method, its key principles, pedagogical techniques, practical classroom applications, and a critical evaluation of its strengths and limitations. Drawing on foundational works by Fries, Lado, and Bloomfield, as well as modern reassessments by communicative language teaching scholars, this paper argues that while the ALM has been largely superseded by communicative approaches, its core insights remain relevant and informative for contemporary EFL instruction, particularly in contexts where structural accuracy and pronunciation are prioritized.

Keywords: Audio-Lingual Method, EFL, habit formation, structural linguistics, behaviorism.

Introduction

The history of foreign language teaching methodology is marked by the emergence and evolution of numerous approaches, each reflecting prevailing theories of language and learning at a given time. Among the most influential of these approaches is the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM), which dominated foreign language instruction in the United States and beyond during the 1950s and 1960s. The ALM represented a decisive break from the Grammar-Translation Method, which had long focused on the written word and the memorization of grammatical rules. Instead, the Audio-Lingual Method prioritized speech, listening, and the automatization of language patterns through systematic repetition and reinforcement.

The development of the ALM was closely tied to military needs during World War II, when the United States government commissioned linguists to develop intensive language training programs for soldiers. The resulting Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) placed emphasis on oral communication



and conversational fluency, laying the groundwork for what would become the Audio-Lingual Method. Following the war, this approach was further developed and refined by applied linguists at American universities, most notably Charles C. Fries at the University of Michigan and Robert Lado, who together provided much of the theoretical and practical basis for the method.

Today, although the ALM has largely been displaced by communicative language teaching (CLT) and other post-communicative approaches, its influence continues to be felt in EFL classrooms around the world. Many of the techniques associated with the ALM — including repetition drills, dialogue memorization, and focused pronunciation practice — remain common fixtures in language instruction. Understanding the methodological basis of the ALM is therefore essential not only as a matter of historical interest, but also as a means of critically evaluating and potentially integrating its most effective components into contemporary teaching practice.

Theoretical Foundations of the Audio-Lingual Method

The Audio-Lingual Method draws heavily on American structural linguistics, a school of linguistic thought associated with scholars such as Leonard Bloomfield, Edward Sapir, and Charles C. Fries. Structural linguists conceptualized language as a system of formally describable structures — phonological, morphological, and syntactic — that could be systematically analyzed and described without reference to meaning. This approach yielded detailed contrastive analyses of languages, which Fries and Lado applied to the problem of second language teaching.

Contrastive Analysis (CA) became one of the central methodological tools of ALM-based instruction. By systematically comparing the phonological, grammatical, and lexical structures of the learner's native language with those of the target language, CA aimed to predict areas of difficulty and design instructional materials that would address these challenges directly. The assumption was that linguistic interference — the transfer of patterns from the first language into the second — was the primary source of errors in foreign language learning. Consequently, instructional focus was placed on drilling the structures that differed most significantly between the two languages.

Alongside structural linguistics, the ALM was profoundly shaped by behavioral psychology, particularly the stimulus-response-reinforcement model associated with B.F. Skinner. In Skinner's framework, language learning was viewed as a form of verbal behavior — a set of habits acquired through repeated exposure to stimuli and the reinforcement of correct responses. Language acquisition, from this perspective, was not fundamentally different from other forms of learned behavior: it could be conditioned through repetition, reward, and the systematic elimination of errors.



This behaviorist conception of language learning had profound implications for pedagogical practice. If language was a system of habits, then the primary task of the language teacher was to help students form correct habits and prevent the formation of incorrect ones. Errors were not merely mistakes to be corrected after the fact; they were habits to be avoided through carefully controlled practice. The teacher's role, accordingly, was not to explain grammar rules but to provide models of correct language use, elicit responses from students, and reinforce correct responses through praise and repetition.

Key Principles and Pedagogical Techniques

The Audio-Lingual Method is organized around a set of core principles that distinguish it from other approaches to language teaching. First and foremost is the primacy of speech: the spoken language is considered more fundamental than its written form, and oral skills are developed before reading and writing. This reflects the belief, shared by structural linguists and behavioral psychologists alike, that speech is the natural and primary form of language, while writing is a secondary representation.

A second key principle is the avoidance of the native language in the classroom. The mother tongue is regarded as a source of interference and is therefore excluded from instruction as much as possible. The target language is used exclusively, and meaning is conveyed through visual aids, actions, and context rather than translation. This immersive approach is intended to help learners form direct associations between English structures and their meanings, rather than mediating meaning through the native language.

A third principle is the systematic sequencing of language structures. Rather than presenting language in a holistic or communicatively authentic manner, the ALM introduces structures in a carefully ordered progression from simple to complex. Each new structure is thoroughly practiced before the next is introduced, and learners are not exposed to structures they have not yet been taught. This graded approach is designed to ensure that learners develop a solid foundation of automatized structures before moving on to more complex language use.

The primary pedagogical tool of the Audio-Lingual Method is the pattern drill, a structured exercise in which learners repeatedly practice a given grammatical or phonological pattern under the teacher's guidance. Several types of drills are commonly employed in ALM-based instruction. Repetition drills require learners to repeat a model utterance accurately after the teacher. Substitution drills present a model sentence and require learners to substitute one element — a word, phrase, or grammatical form — while keeping the rest of the sentence constant. Transformation drills require learners to convert a



sentence from one grammatical form to another, such as changing an affirmative sentence to a negative or a statement to a question.

Dialogue memorization is another central technique of the ALM. Learners are required to memorize and perform short dialogues that exemplify target structures in realistic conversational contexts. These dialogues serve as the primary vehicle for the introduction of new vocabulary and grammar, and they provide a memorable, contextualized framework for subsequent drilling activities. The goal of dialogue memorization is not merely recall but automatization — the ability to produce target structures rapidly and accurately without conscious effort.

In a typical ALM-based EFL lesson, the teacher begins by introducing a short dialogue, usually consisting of four to eight exchanges, which models the target structure for the day. The teacher reads the dialogue aloud while students listen with books closed, focusing entirely on the spoken form. The dialogue is then repeated several times until students have had sufficient exposure to begin repeating individual lines after the teacher. This choral repetition is followed by individual repetition, in which individual students or small groups practice selected lines.

Once the dialogue has been thoroughly practiced, the teacher moves on to drilling activities that isolate and intensify practice of the target structure. A typical sequence might begin with repetition drills, proceed through substitution and transformation drills, and culminate in a chain drill in which each student in turn produces an utterance that responds to and cues the next. The teacher monitors student performance closely, providing immediate corrective feedback for errors and positive reinforcement for correct responses.

The language laboratory, where available, plays an important role in ALM-based instruction. Students listen to model recordings, repeat utterances, and record their own responses for comparison and self-correction. This technology extends drilling practice beyond the classroom hour and allows for a degree of individualization that is difficult to achieve in large group instruction. In contemporary EFL contexts, digital audio and video resources have largely replaced the traditional language laboratory, but the underlying pedagogical function — providing models for imitation and opportunities for controlled practice — remains the same.

The role of the teacher in an ALM classroom is fundamentally directive. The teacher controls the pace and content of instruction, models correct language use, elicits responses, and provides feedback. Student talk is carefully structured and controlled; there is little opportunity for free or open-ended communication. While this may limit the development of communicative competence, it ensures that learners have extensive practice with target



structures before being asked to produce language independently. In large classes with limited instructional time — a common situation in EFL contexts in Central Asia and elsewhere — this structured approach can be an efficient means of developing basic oral accuracy.

Conclusion

The Audio-Lingual Method represents one of the most systematically developed and historically significant approaches to foreign language teaching. Grounded in the structural linguistics of Bloomfield, Fries, and Lado, and informed by the behavioral psychology of Skinner, the ALM provided a coherent theoretical rationale for a set of pedagogical techniques — principally pattern drilling and dialogue memorization — that have left a lasting mark on EFL instruction worldwide. While subsequent developments in linguistics, psychology, and applied linguistics have called many of the method's theoretical assumptions into question, its practical contributions remain significant.

A critical and informed understanding of the Audio-Lingual Method's methodological basis enables contemporary EFL educators to evaluate its strengths and limitations with nuance, and to selectively integrate its most effective techniques into eclectic or communicative instructional frameworks. In contexts where oral accuracy, pronunciation, and structural command are particular priorities — as they frequently are in Central Asian EFL classrooms — the foundational insights of the ALM continue to offer genuine pedagogical value. Future research might profitably explore how ALM techniques can be most effectively combined with communicative and task-based approaches to maximize both accuracy and fluency in EFL learners.

REFERENCES

1. Bloomfield, L. (1933). *Language*. New York: Henry Holt.
2. Brown, H. D. (2007). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching* (5th ed.). White Plains, NY: Pearson Longman.
3. Chomsky, N. (1959). A review of B.F. Skinner's 'Verbal Behavior.' *Language*, 35(1), 26–58.
4. Cook, V. (2008). *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching* (4th ed.). London: Hodder Education.
5. Fries, C. C. (1945). *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
6. Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics Across Cultures*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
7. Larsen-Freeman, D. (2000). *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

