

# BLOCK 4.

## The past meets the present: Language teaching methods in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries

### Sub-block 4.1. Structurally based methods

#### Unit 4.1.2. The Situational Language Teaching Method (SLT) (British version)

# Outline

1. Objectives of this unit
2. Goal of the SLT
3. Historical background of the SLT
4. Analysis of the components of the SLT
5. Critical assessment of the SLT



# 1. Objectives of this unit

1. Know the origins of the SLT and its influence on language teaching in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.
2. Know the theoretical and practical principles together with the techniques of the SLT.
3. Critically analyse the SLT according to the three components of a method: underlying sets of principles and beliefs (why), content or objectives (what) and activities (how).
4. Recognise the differences and similarities between the ALM and SLT according to the three components of method.
5. Critically compare the SLT with past methods.
6. Critically analyse the pedagogical implementation of the SLT using a representative ELT textbook: *First Things First* (Alexander, 1967a)

## 2. Goal of the SLT

To enable students to communicate mainly orally in the foreign language.



*Why do you think this method is called “Situational”  
Language Teaching Method?*



# 3. Historical background of the SLT

## FOUR INTERVENING ELEMENTS IN THE CONFIGURATION OF THE SLT

- a) Harold Palmer (1877-1949): Founder of the **Oral Approach**. Vocabulary and grammar control; sentence patterns and substitution tables
- b) British structuralism (J. R. Firth, 1890-1960, M. A. K. Halliday, 1925-). Situational context
- c) A. S. Hornby (1898-1978): “The **Situational Approach in Language Teaching**” (1950). A series of three articles in ELT IV: Issues 4-6.
- d) Behaviourist psychology (B.F. Skinner. Skinner’s *Verbal Behaviour* (1957)).

# 3. Historical background of the SLT

## Situation: distinctive feature of

- British theoretical linguistics.

J. R. Firth and M. A. K. Halliday: close relationship between meaning, context and situation.

Predecessor: Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), anthropologist

- British applied linguistics (SLT)

*Our method will ... be situational. The situation will be controlled carefully to teach the new language material ... in such a way that there can be no doubt in the learner's mind of the meaning of what he hears.*

(Pitmann, 1963: 155-156. Quoted in Richards & Rodgers 2001: 42)

**Oral Approach** →

**Situational Approach** →

**Structural-Situational Approach** →

**Situational Language Teaching Method**

# 3. Historical background of the SLT

## ✓ Distinctive textbooks (chronologically ordered):

- Hornby, A. S. (1954-1956). *Oxford Progressive English Course for Adult Learners* . 3 vols. London: Longman.
- Alexander, L. G. (1967a). *First Things First. An Integrated Course for Beginners. New Concept English* (Vol. 1). London: Longmans.
- Alexander, L. G. (1967b). *Practice and Progress. An Integrated Course for Pre-Intermediate Students. New Concept English.* (Vol. 2). London: Longmans.
- Sánchez, A., Ríos, M., & Matilla, J. A. (1974). *Español en Directo*. Madrid: SGEL, S. A.
- Coles, M. & Lord, B (1975). *Access to English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Hartley, B. & Viney, P. (1978). *Streamline English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.





# 3. Historical background of the SLT

## ✓ Two key figures in the shaping of the SLT: Palmer and Hornby.

### 1) Harold Palmer

- Major works: *The Scientific Study and Teaching of Languages* (1917) and *The Oral Method of Teaching Languages* (1921).
- Partial rejection of the Direct Method



- *Harold Palmer [...] embarked himself into the task of merging a scientific-based approach to the strategies from the most famous of the natural methods with the rigorous principles from the Reform Movement. The outcome was a systematic study of tenets and procedures that could be implemented in the selection, arrangement and presentation of the content of a language course.*

(Criado, 2005: 127)



# 3. Historical background of the SLT

- ✓ Two key figures in the shaping of the SLT: Palmer and Hornby.

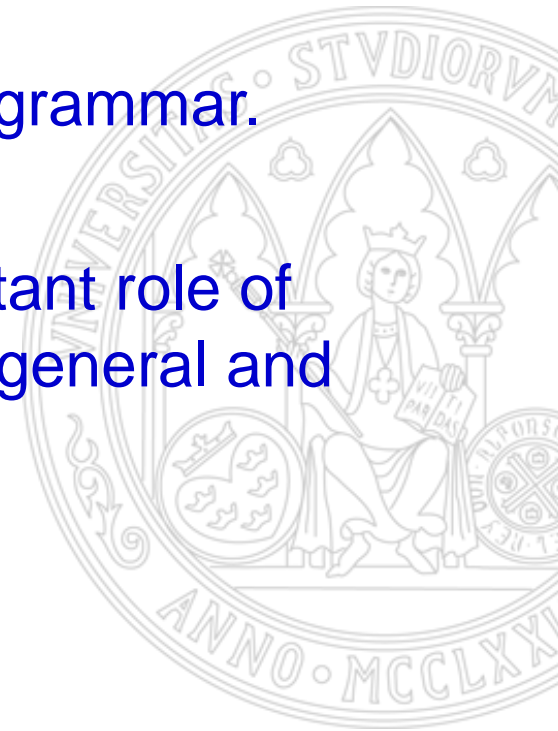
## 1) Harold Palmer

- Contents of a course: vocabulary and grammar.
- Vocabulary control:

General consensus on the very important role of vocabulary in language proficiency in general and reading proficiency in particular.



*Coleman Report (1929), Unit 4.1.1*



# 3. Historical background of the SLT

## ✓ Two key figures in the shaping of the SLT: Palmer and Hornby.

### 1) Harold Palmer

- Contents of a course: vocabulary and grammar.
- Vocabulary control:
  - Palmer, H. E., West, M. P. & Faucett, L. (1936). *Interim Report on Vocabulary Selection for the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language*. Report of the Carnegie Conference, New York 1934, and London 1935. London: P. S. King and Son.

Based on frequency and other criteria



- West, M. (Ed.). (1953). *A General Service List of English Words, with Semantic Frequencies and a Supplementary Word-list for the Writing of Popular Science and Technology*. London: Longmans, Green
- A standard reference in the elaboration of ELT materials.**
- Represented efforts to introduce a scientific and rational basis for choosing the vocabulary content of a language course and the first attempts to establish principles of syllabus design in language teaching.

# 3. Historical background of the SLT

✓ Two key figures in the shaping of the SLT: Palmer and Hornby.

## 1) Harold Palmer

- Contents of a course: vocabulary and grammar.
- Vocabulary control
- Grammar control: sentence patterns, substitution tables
  - Grammar seen as the underlying sentence patterns of the spoken language.
  - *Palmer and other linguists analysed English and classified its predominant grammatical structures into sentence patterns to be taught by means of substitution tables, whose origins can be seen in Renaissance authors such as Erasmus (with handdrawn brackets).*

(Kelly, 1969: 102)

<b>John</b>	<b>can</b>	<b>speak</b>	<b>German</b>
<b>Helen</b>	<b>can't</b>	<b>ride</b>	<b>a bicycle</b> <b>a horse</b>

# 3. Historical background of the SLT

- ✓ Two key figures in the shaping of the SLT: Palmer and Hornby.

## 1) Harold Palmer

The Oral Approach: a much more careful and orderly approach to the collection, gradation, presentation and practice techniques of lexis and structures than the DM.

*An oral approach should not be confused with the obsolete Direct Method, which meant only that the learner was bewildered by a flow of ungraded speech, suffering all the difficulties he would have encountered in picking up the language in its normal environment and losing most of the compensating benefits of better contextualization in those circumstances.*

(Pattison, 1964: 4)

# 3. Historical background of the SLT

## ✓ Two key figures in the shaping of the SLT: Palmer and Hornby.

### 2) A. S. Hornby

- Despite the work done on vocabulary and grammatical control on the part of Palmer and others, the Americans were considerably more advanced in the teaching of grammatical patterns (Howatt, 2004: 244)
- Hornby (1950): “The Situational Approach in Language Teaching”. Much more pedagogical approach than the ALM.
- Hornby, A. S. (1954-1956). *Oxford Progressive English Course for Adult Learners* . 3 vols. London: Longman.
- Main principles (Howatt, 2004: 244):
  - a) New grammatical structures should be presented in class in simple situations that made their meaning clear.
  - b) The structures should be carefully graded.

# 3. Historical background of the SLT

✓ Two key figures in the shaping of the SLT: Palmer and Hornby.

## 2) A. S. Hornby

Senses of “situation”:

a) Initial phases of the SLT (Hornby): classroom situation, with concrete objects, *realia* and picture sequences, aided by mime, actions and gestures.

(Not the current sense of situational syllabus! For instance, at the shop, at the museum, at the airport...)

*“There’s a NOUN + of + (noun) in the box”. The teacher takes out objects from a box and the class repeats:*

*There’s a tin of cigarettes in the box.*

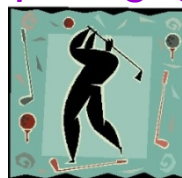
*There’s a packet of matches in the box.*

(Pitmann, 1963: 168. Quoted in Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 48)

b) Later incarnations of the SLT (Alexander’s textbooks): elaborate picture sequences to help the learner induce the meaning of patterns and vocabulary



*Which methods already used such pedagogical techniques?*





# 3. Historical background of the SLT

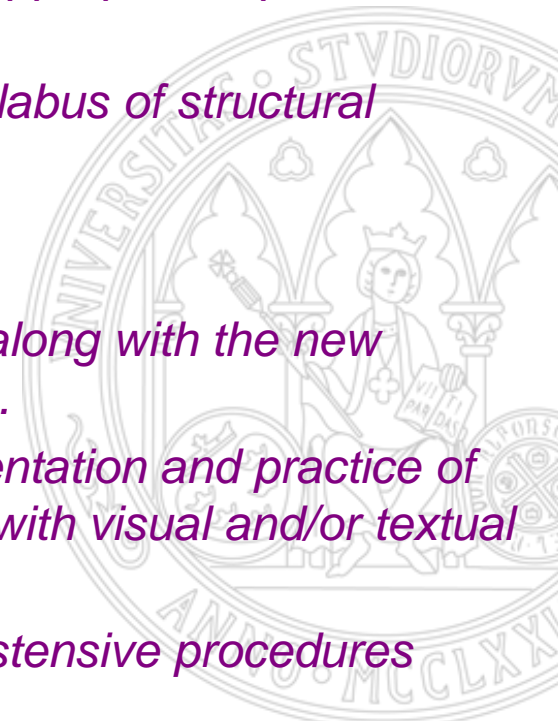
✓ **Two key figures in the shaping of the SLT: Palmer and Hornby.**

“Language in situations” → The seven principles of ELT (1950-1970) (Howatt, 2004: 299-300)

1. *All four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) should be taught but the spoken skills should be given priority.*
2. *Learning the spoken language meant acquiring a set of appropriate speech habits.*
3. *Courses of instruction should be built round a graded syllabus of structural patterns to ensure systematic step-by-step progress.*

*Do you remember the forerunner?*

4. *Vocabulary should be carefully selected and presented along with the new grammatical patterns in specially written connected texts.*
5. *Grammar should be taught inductively through the presentation and practice of new patterns in specially designed classroom situations with visual and/or textual support.*
6. *Wherever possible meaning should be taught through ostensive procedures and/or linguistic context.*
7. *Error should be avoided through adequate practice and rehearsal.*





# 3. Historical background of the SLT



*Can you spot the main similarities and differences between the ALM and the SLT?*



# 4. Analysis of the components of the SLT

## Axis 1. The Why. Underlying principles and beliefs (approach)

- ❑ Theory of language (nature of language, including approach to culture)

British structuralism (J. R. Firth, M. A. K. Halliday). Close relationship between language, context and situation. Language used for a purpose within a particular situation in the real world. Culture consists of the everyday behaviour and lifestyle of the L2 speakers.

“The language which a person originates ... is always expressed for a purpose” (Frisby, 1957: 16).

# 4. Analysis of the components of the SLT

**Axis 1. The Why.** Underlying principles and beliefs (approach)

□ Theory of learning (learning principles)

- L1 learning = L2 learning (inductive learning).
- Analogy and generalization

*The learner is expected to deduce the meaning of a particular structure or vocabulary item from the situation in which it is presented. Extending structures and vocabulary to new situations takes place by generalization. The learner is expected to apply the language learned in a classroom to situations outside the classroom. This is how child language learning is believed to take place, and the same processes thought to occur in second and foreign language learning, according to practitioners of Situational Language Teaching.*

(Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 41)

# 4. Analysis of the components of the SLT

## Axis 1. The Why. Underlying principles and beliefs (approach)

### □ Theory of learning (learning principles)

- L1 learning = L2 learning (inductive learning).
- Analogy and generalization
- Behaviourism

“If the student is to make the most of his abilities, he must be trained to adopt correct learning habits right from the start”. (Alexander 1967a: xii).

The teacher will provide the student with *“a stimulus to elicit the new pattern in a series of oral drills until the student is able to respond accurately and automatically. Each new pattern is not presented as the exemplification of some abstract grammar-rule, but as a way of saying something and no further explanation or elucidation is necessary. The student is trained to use correct forms automatically, rather than by applying ‘grammar logic’ ”*

(Alexander, 1967a: xiv)

# 4. Analysis of the components of the SLT

## Axis 1. The Why. Underlying principles and beliefs (approach)

### □ Theory of teaching (pedagogical principles)

- Inductive approach to grammar learning and teaching (practice and inference)
- Language learning results from understanding the situation depicted in the picture sequences and from the following verbal interaction between the teacher and the students

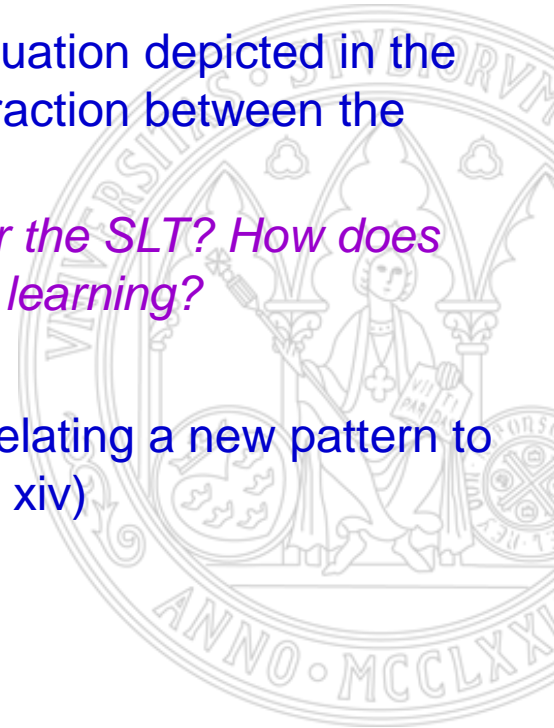


*Why do you think that visual aids are so important for the SLT? How does this pedagogical resource relate to the SLT theory of learning?*

- No grammatical explanations

“Where explanation is necessary, it can be done by relating a new pattern to one that has already been learnt” (Alexander, 1967a: xiv)

- Formal accuracy is emphasised
- No use of L1 in the classroom
- Teacher is the authority in the classroom



# 4. Analysis of the components of the SLT

## Axis 2. The What. Objectives of teaching. Syllabus specifications

- ❑ Model of language: everyday speech
- ❑ Emphasised language areas: sound system and grammatical patterns.
- ❑ Emphasised skills: oral (listening and speaking). Order of presentation of skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing
- ❑ The distribution of structures in each lesson will be based on the principle of progression from simplicity to complexity (grammar control)
- ❑ Vocabulary is introduced following frequency lists (vocabulary control)
- ❑ “Structures are always taught within sentences, and vocabulary is chosen according to how well it enables sentence patterns to be taught” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 42).



# 4. Analysis of the components of the SLT

## Axis 2. The What. Objectives of teaching. Syllabus specifications

TYPICAL STRUCTURAL SYLLABUS WITHIN SLT: a list of structures and vocabulary:

	Sentence pattern	Vocabulary
1 <sup>st</sup> lesson	This is...	book, pencil, ruler, desk
2 <sup>nd</sup> lesson	These are... These are...	chair, picture, door, window
3 <sup>rd</sup> lesson	Is this...? Yes it is. Is that...? Yes it is.	watch, box, pen, blackboard

(Frisby, 1957: 134)



# 4. Analysis of the components of the SLT

**Axis 3. The How.** Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

□ Activities:

*Our principal classroom activity in the teaching of English structure will be the **oral practice of structures**. This oral practice of controlled sentence patterns should be given in **situations** designed to give the greatest amount of practice in English speech to the pupil.*

(Pitmann, 1963: 179. Our highlighting)

*Our method will ... be situational. The situation will be controlled carefully to teach the new language material ... in such a way that there can be no doubt in the learner's mind of the meaning of what he hears.*

(Pitmann, 1963: 155-156)

# 4. Analysis of the components of the SLT

**Axis 3. The How.** Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

□ Activities: dialogues and drills

- Structures and vocabulary presented with dialogues listened to with the aid of picture sequences (storyline), mime and *realia*.

Difficulty of conveying all meaning only through pictures: recourse to gesture, mime and translation; translation of lexis but not patterns (Alexander, 1967a)

- Structures and vocabulary practised by means of guided repetition and substitution activities, including chorus repetition, dictation, drills; controlled oral-based reading and writing tasks. (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 53).
- Occasionally pair practice and group work were also comprised (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 53).

# 4. Analysis of the components of the SLT

**Axis 3. The How.** Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

- ❑ Roles of teacher (including feedback issues).
  - Traditional.
  - The teacher is the authority in the classroom and the provider of linguistic and cultural contents.
  - Teacher models language.
  - Teacher controls the direction and pace of learning.
  - Error correction is compulsory and immediate so as to prevent the formation of bad habits.

- ❑ Roles of students.

Passive (no room for creativity or control over the content and pedagogy) but reactive: constantly responding to the teacher's stimuli.  
Can be trained to produce correct responses.

# 4. Analysis of the components of the SLT

**Axis 3. The How.** Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

- ❑ Roles of instructional materials: Teacher-oriented.
  - Extremely important.
  - Written materials delayed from the beginning of classroom instruction.
  - Audiovisual materials.
  - Laboratories. Tape recorders.



# 5. Critical assessment of the SLT



*Can you think of any advantages and disadvantages of the SLT?*



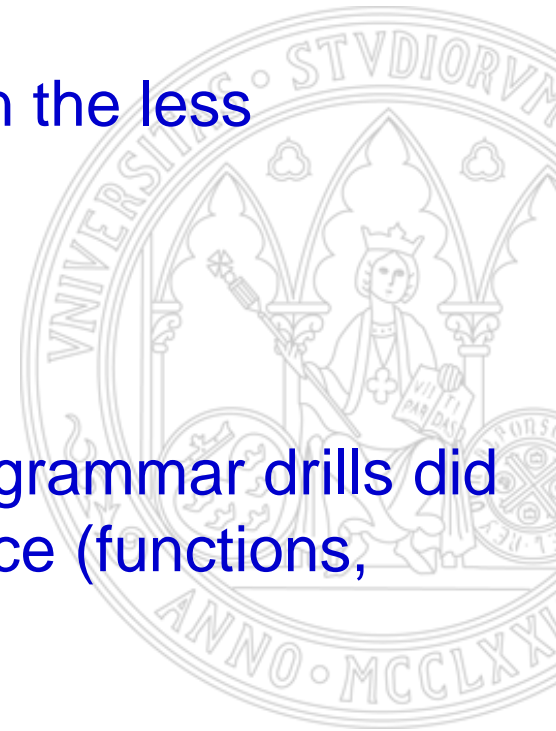
# 5. Critical assessment of the SLT

## □ Positive aspects

1. In general, very similar to ALM
2. Systematic exploitation of pictures as a pedagogical device for inductive teaching purposes
3. Much more pedagogical approach than the less contextualised ALM structures

## □ Negative aspects

1. The same as in the ALM
2. Even situations and its contextualised grammar drills did not cater for communicative competence (functions, roles, social contexts)
3. Behaviourism not suitable either





# 5. Critical assessment of the SLT

## □ Influence of the SLT on FLT

1. Immense in ELT and other language methodologies. For example, Sánchez, A., Ríos, M., & Matilla, J. A. (1974). *Español en Directo*. Madrid: SGEL, S. A. First SLT-based course for Spanish as a Foreign Language
2. The didactic sequencing model proposed by the SLT, the PPP, was transferred to teacher training courses such as the RSA/Cambridge Certificate in TEFL during the 1980s and early 1990s (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 47):
  - “Presentation (introduction of the new item in context through dialogues); Practice (controlled practice of the item) and Production (a freer phase which includes transference to parallel situations)” (Criado, 2005: 149).
  - Also found in the ALM, but the SLT offered a situationally contextualised PPP thanks to the use of dialogues and pictures as the mode of presentation.
  - The PPP is the chief characteristic of the “mainstream EFL style of teaching”, which “represents, perhaps, the bulk of EFL teaching over the past 50 years, if not longer” (Cook, 2008: 265)..



Section 6.4  
(Block 6)



2, 3