BLOCK 4.
The past meets the present: Language teaching methods in the 20ᵗʰ and 21ˢᵗ centuries

Sub-block 4.1.
Structurally based methods

Unit 4.1.3. The Audio-Visual Structuro-Global Method (AVSG) or Verbo-Tonal System (French version)

Outline

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

1. Objectives of this unit

1. Know the origin of the AVSG and its influence on language teaching in the 20th century.

2. Know the theoretical and practical principles together with the techniques of the AVSG.

3. Critically analyse the AVSG 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 AVSG, the ALM, and the SLT according to the three components of method.

5. Critically compare the AVSG with other past methods.

6. Critically analyse the pedagogical implementation of the AVSG using a representative EFL handbook: Dickinson, Gilbert, Leveque & Sagot (1975). *All's Well that Starts Well 1*. Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier.

2. Goal of the AVSG

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

3. Historical background of the AVSG

✓ Distinctive textbooks (chronologically ordered):

- CREDIF *(Centre de Recherche et d'Étude pour la Diffusion du Français). (1961). Voix et Images de France: cours audio-visuel de français, premier degré.* London : Harrap. Orig. Publ. St Cloud, 1958.

- CREDIF *(Centre de Recherche et d'Étude pour la Diffusion du Français). (1963). Bonjour Line.* Paris and London: Harrap-Didier.

- Capelle, J., Capelle, G. & Companys, G. (1971). *La France en Direct 1re. année version romane.* Paris: Librairie Hachette.

- Heinle, C.H., Coulombe, R. & Smith, F.S. (Project Development Staff). (1974). *Voix et Visages de la France.* Chicago: Rand McNally.

3. Historical background of the AVSG

✓ 1950s: Britain's gradual entrance in the Common Market → demands for learning French

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✓ French Education Minister creates the Fundamental French Commission.

Aim: study of the French language, specifically *français fondamentale*. Results would be applied to the teaching of French as a Foreign Language.

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CREDIF *(Centre de Recherche et d'Étude pour la diffusion du Français):* author of STRUCTURO-GLOBAL ACOUSTICO-VISUELLE (SGAV) or Verbo-Tonal system. English name: Audio-Visual Structuro-Global Method (AVSG).

• Corpus compilation of basic vocabulary from oral sources and written sources related to real-life and daily situations

• The written list measured how strongly people associated particular words with the situations in they presumably occurred.

• Final list used in the elaboration of French as a Foreign Language materials.

3. Historical background of the ASVG

✓ ASVG has been influenced by the work developed by **Petar Guberina**, former director of the Institute of Phonetics at the University of Zagreb.

*To us language is an **acoustic-visual ensemble**. We cannot separate the **situation** and its constituting elements from its linguistic expression. Accordingly, it is the **spoken language** that lies at the foundation of our method, together with **intonation** as an essential parameter that encompasses structures. **Dialogues** will be the permanent link between the context and the expression, while the **image** will be the vehicle of such a link between the context situation and its expression.*

*I have added the word "global" to the word "structure" so that it is clear that within the AVSG method every structure must be linked to a situation. The second reason was that it is necessary to **understand globally** and that there is **no need for translation**. The third reason was that the student must learn the **pronunciation, the sense of syntax and gestures within a large ensemble**…*

(Guberina & Rivenc, 1971: 10-11. Criado's translation from French and highlighting)

Which other methods use the pedagogical techniques stated in this quotation?

3. Historical background of the AVSG

✓ **For Guberina, language is a psycho-physiological system.**

- – Physiological side:

  When learning a new language or system, the student faces resistance from his/her native language. This especially applies to the acquisition of the foreign language phonetics. The ear must be trained to acquire the new sounds, which implies the retraining of the physical elements (ear, articulation).

- – Psychological side:

  The ear must be stimulated by our brain so that our aural system stops being "deaf" towards the sounds it is not used to yet.

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Importance of learning pronunciation, intonation and rhythm:

Pronunciation, with its fundamental elements (intonation and rhythm) is the most important factor for the total comprehension of sense. Intonation carries the unity of the sentence and enters all the structures of language. It is clear that pronunciation is the essential element in the learning of a foreign language.

(Guberina, 1965: 53. Criado's translation from French)
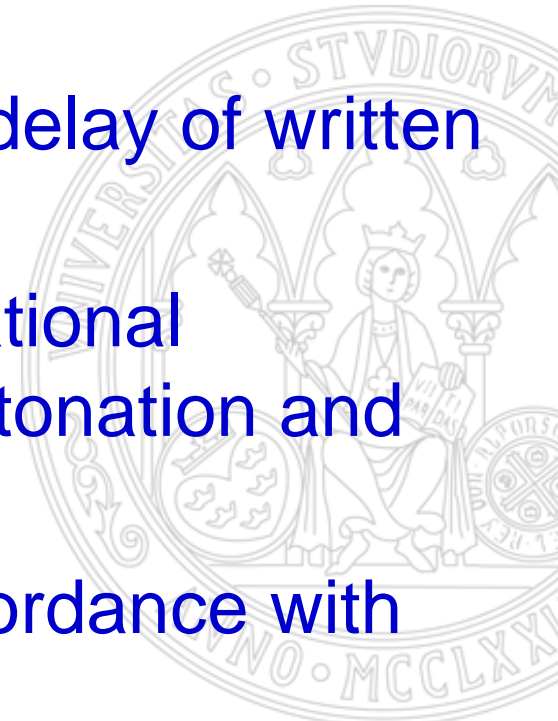
3. Historical background of the AVSG

✓ SUVAG-LINGUA (*Système universel verbo-tonal d'audition Guberina).*

The native language is an obstacle for learning. Teaching must train the source language ear to the sounds of the target language. Example: /r/ for Chinese-native speakers.

Technological techniques that try to free the signal from noise; by eliminating the frequencies that are characteristic of the student's mother tongue, it prevents him/her from making his/her own choice –biased toward his/her L1– when perceiving and producing the L2 sounds.
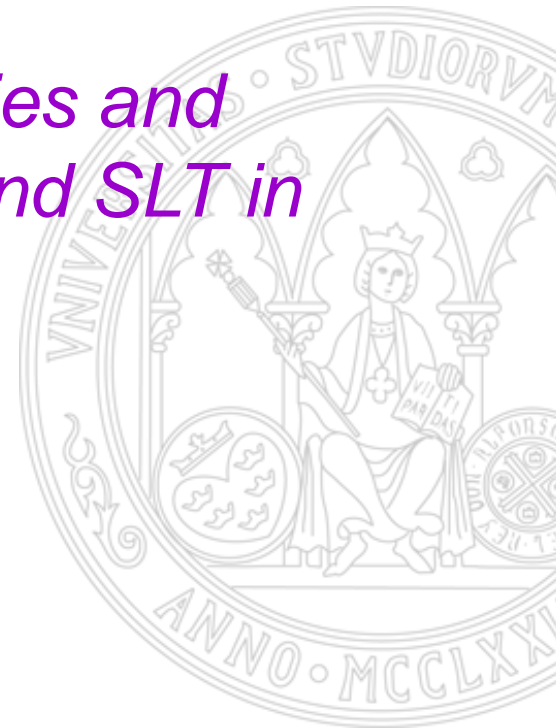
3. Historical background of the AVSG

✓ Pedagogical principles of the AVSG (Sánchez, 2009)

1. Visual elements become the essential resource in the classroom.

2. Strong control over the effective delay of written material by the teacher.

3. Global understanding of the situational dialogue before pronunciation, intonation and pattern drills.

4. Introduction of vocabulary in accordance with robust frequency criteria.

3. Historical background of the AVSG

Can you spot the main similarities and differences between the ALM and SLT in comparison with the AVSG?

4. Analysis of the components of the AVSG

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

- ❑ Theory of language (nature of language, including approach to culture)
  - ▪ French descriptive linguistics. *Français fondamental.*
  - ▪ Social nature and situational embeddedness emphasised (Stern, 1983: 467).
  - ▪ "Language is above all a means of communication between human beings or social groups".

    (CREDIF, 1961: viii. Criado's translation from French)
  - ▪ Culture consists of the everyday behaviour and lifestyle of the L2 speakers.
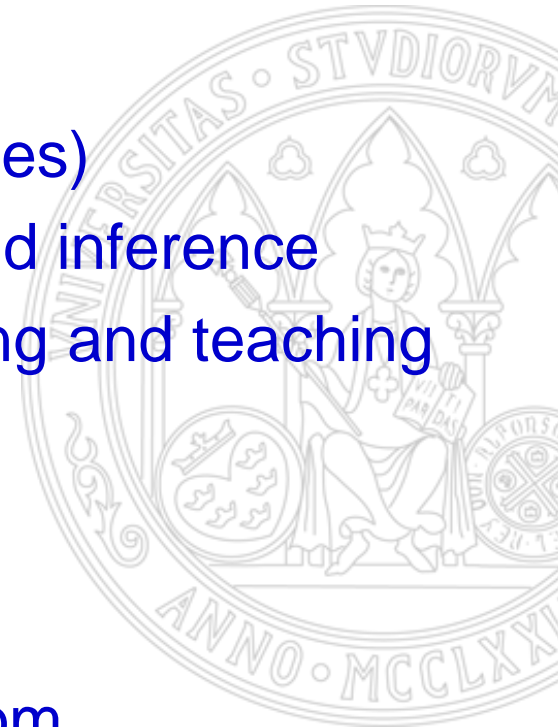
4. Analysis of the components of the AVSG

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

❑ Theory of learning (learning principles)

- L1 learning = L2 learning (inductive learning).

- Analogy and generalization

- Behaviourism

- Gestalt (Stern, 1983: 468): holistic approach to learning rather than analytical approach. From a total view and understanding of the situation to particular segments of the language –pronunciation and patterns.

- Guberina: Language as a psycho-physiological system.

4. Analysis of the components of the AVSG

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

❑ Theory of teaching (pedagogical principles)
- Inductive learning: through practice and inference
- Inductive approach to grammar learning and teaching
- No grammatical explanations
- 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 AVSG

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

- ❑ Model of language: everyday speech
- ❑ Emphasised language areas: sound system –above all– 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)

4. Analysis of the components of the AVSG

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

❑ Procedure: LISTEN – REPEAT – UNDERSTAND – PERFECT PRONUNCIATION

Phases of lesson (from Stern, 1983: 467):

1) *Presentation*:
   – watching a story in a series of rigid sequence of pictures shown to the learners as a filmstrip and listening to tape recording.
   – Stylized dialogue and narrative commentary.
   – A joint semantic unit between the visual image and the spoken utterance or filmstrip frame.

2) *Explication* by the teacher of the meaning of the sense groups (subgroups of filmstrips) by pointing, demonstrating, selective listening, question and answer.

   Global understanding of the situational dialogue before Practice (next stage)

4. Analysis of the components of the AVSG

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

- ❑ Procedure: LISTEN – REPEAT – UNDERSTAND – PERFECT PRONUNCIATION

  Phases of lesson (from Stern, 1983: 467):

  1) *Presentation*
  2) *Explication*
  3) *Practice:*
     - Dialogue is repeated several times so as to memorise it;
     - language laboratory practice for pronunciation and structures;
     - imitation of native-like pronunciation.
  4) *Exploitation* or *transposition*:
     - The students detach from the tape-and-film presentation and gradually apply the linguistic contents learned to role play the same dialogue and are asked to transfer the dialogue to their own real-life situations.
     - Further grammatical drills to practise patterns inserted in the tape and filmstrip dialogue presentation.

4. **Analysis of the components of the AVSG**

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

❑ Activities: dialogues and pronunciation and pattern drills

Is the sequence of pictures in the comic-strip related to a previous method?

"Dictation and contact with the written language are withheld for 60 contact hours of completely aural-oral work. Simple readings are introduced after 100 hours of contact, and written compositions begin after 250 hours" (Lado, 1988: 23).

Why do you think that the AVSG adopted this procedure?

4. Analysis of the components of the AVSG

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.
  - ▪ 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 AVSG

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.
- ▪ Written materials delayed from the beginning of classroom instruction.
- ▪ Audiovisual materials. Extremely important.
- ▪ Laboratories. Tape recorders.

5. Critical assessment of the AVSG

Can you think of any advantages and disadvantages of the AVSG?

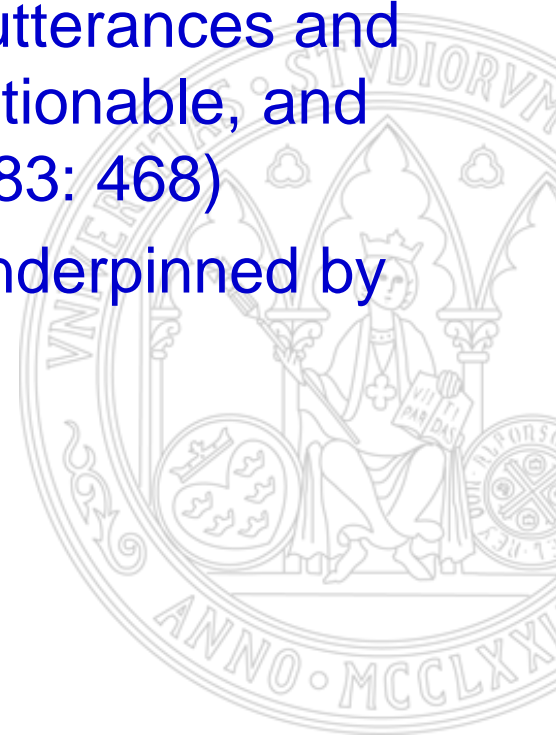# 5. Critical assessment of the AVSG

❑ **Positive aspects**

1. In general, very similar to ALM and SLT

2. Attempted to place language learning into a simplified social context (Stern, 1983: 468)

3. Emphasis on the phonological system of the language

4. Pedagogical procedure of scenario a) visually presented by sequenced filmstrip and b) aurally presented by corresponding tape recordings →

    responsible for exploiting technology for the benefit of language learning (Stern, 1983: 468); a remarkable improvement in the use of drawing, films and slides for language teaching purposes.

5. Critical assessment of the AVSG

❑ **Negative aspects**

1. The same as in the ALM and SLT

2. Like the DM, the equivalence between utterances and visual images is often theoretically questionable, and presents practical difficulties. (Stern, 1983: 468)

3. The rigid teaching sequences are not underpinned by empirical support. (Stern, 1983: 468)

5. Critical assessment of the AVSG

❑ **Influence of the AVSG on FLT**

- ▪ Not very successful due to the dogmatic character of the application of the method and the exaggerating demands for the teachers who put it into practice (Sánchez, 1992: 36)

- ▪ *In comparison, the simplification carried out by Alexander in his work definitely contributed to its long-lasting success, above all because of its little requirements for the teacher.*

  (Criado, 2005: 148)