



A Method of Teaching English to Foreigners

George Elmore Reaman

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An excerpt from:

CHAPTER I.

Practical Problems of Modern Language Study and Instruction.

The Problem:

To find a method by means of which adult foreigners may secure a working-knowledge of English with a minimum of time and effort. By "working knowledge" is meant enough English to make one's wants known and to be able to follow directions, whether spoken or written.

The Procedure:

- (1) A study of the origin of language in order to understand something of its underlying principles.
- (2) A study of the deaf and dumb language and of the sign language of Indians in order to learn the basis of their non-vocal means of communication.
- (3) A study of the methods that foreigners usually employ in making their wants known before they are able to speak our language.
- (4) A study of the two most popular methods in use at the present time—(a) the Roberts method and (b) the Goldberger method—in order to determine what principles they employ.
- (5) A study of current methods employed in teaching other foreign languages.
- (6) A comparison and critical study of the foregoing results in the elaboration of a method to solve our problem in a manner both psychologically and pedagogically sound.

In limiting the method to one that will give a "working-knowledge" only, we are justified by the fact that the type of foreigners with which we are dealing does not want training in linguistics; this, for two very evident reasons: first, many of them have had linguistic training in their own languages before coming to this country; and, secondly, to afford a linguistic training would require more time and application than these foreigners are able to give, even were it necessary. Hence the foreigner either learns English rather quickly and readily, or not at all. Yet it is highly desirable that the foreigner should become economically independent in the shortest possible time. So long as he is unable to make himself understood in English he is dependent upon unscrupulous interpreters and is at the mercy of political "bosses". Furthermore he can never become a satisfactory citizen until he knows the language of his adopted country....

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