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METHOD FOR TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention relates to a method and apparatus for teaching a second language to a student skilled in a first language, which has particular application to improving conversational skills in a foreign language.

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BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

 A grasp of foreign languages is a valuable skill to possess. With world globalisation and travel on the increase, the modern individual is likely to encounter situations in which conversational foreign language skills would be of great value, whether it be for business or for pleasure.

20 A number of teaching aids are available for the purpose of teaching foreign languages to students. Some aids require the student to verbally mimic foreign words or phrases aloud when prompted to do so. Although effective for some, others find this type of learning technique quite intimidating, thereby reinforcing rather than removing the initial shyness and lack of confidence associated with enunciating foreign words.

 An alternative learning technique involves listening to foreign conversations between parties and following the corresponding native language translation in accompanying documents. Such passive learning techniques have the advantage of being less intimidating in nature, but often result in the student becoming lost or uninterested in the conversation, particularly if the student's foreign language skills are quite unaccomplished.

There is a need for an alternative language teaching technique.

5 SUMMARY OF INVENTION

According to one aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method for teaching a second language to a student skilled in a first language, the method
10 involving:

presenting to said student seeking to improve conversational skills in said second language, a conversation between at least one first party and at least one second party, wherein said at least one first party
15 speaks in said first language and seemingly comprehends said second language, and said at least one second party speaks in said second language and seemingly comprehends said first language.

20 According to a further aspect of the present invention, there is provided an apparatus for teaching a second language to a student skilled in a first language, having:

a storage medium for storing audiovisual data
25 comprising a conversation between at least one first party and at least one second party, wherein said at least one first party speaks in said first language and seemingly comprehends said second language, and said at least one second party speaks in said second language and seemingly
30 comprehends said first language;

a data processor for retrieving said audiovisual data from said storage medium and processing said audiovisual data into a format suitable to be displayed using an audiovisual display unit; and

35 an audiovisual display unit for presenting said processed audiovisual data to said student seeking to improve conversational skills in said second language.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

5 A preferred embodiment of the invention will now be described in relation to the accompanying drawing, Figure 1, which shows an apparatus for teaching a foreign language according to one aspect of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

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The present invention generally involves presenting a conversation to one or more students wherein two different languages are spoken concurrently throughout the course of the discussion. Each presentation would typically be a language lesson, for example, an instructional TV program, where a group of people interact and through that interaction, the use of a foreign language is taught to the student audience.

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The presentation would involve at least two parties conversing with one party speaking a first language (which is typically the native language of the students) and the other party speaking a second language (which is typically a foreign language in which the students are seeking to improve their conversational skills). The first and second parties give the appearance of understanding each other (typically because they are fluent in both languages). As part of the conversation is carried out in the students' native language, the students' comprehension of the conversation is increased, thus increasing the students' confidence in engaging in conversation in the second language.

35 According to one embodiment of the present invention, where the students' native language is Mandarin, a first party speaks in Mandarin whereas a second party speaks in English as indicated by example in

Table 1. Although each party speaks in a different language, the conversation flows as though each can comprehend what the other is saying and therefore a communication link is established between the parties.

- 5 Each party typically speaks in only one language throughout the duration of the conversation, however, it is possible that the parties speak in both languages or interchange their spoken languages.

10 Table 1

	Speaks	Comprehends
First Party	Mandarin	English
Second Party	English	Mandarin
Additional Party	English	English
Additional Party	Mandarin	-

- Additional parties may be introduced into the presentation, with different language speaking and/or
15 comprehension abilities from first and second parties. Parties which are neither first nor second parties are additional parties. For example, an additional party may speak in English and respond to instructions in English although never react to Mandarin. Additional parties may
20 also speak in a language without acting upon instructions or visa versa.

- Students should ideally identify with the party speaking their native language and acquire language skills
25 in the foreign language spoken by the other party. Students are thereby taught how to converse naturally in the foreign language, since the native language is also incorporated into the conversation which gives them a sense of familiarity. Increased benefit can be obtained if
30 the student learner already possesses some basic skills in the foreign language to be learnt. Through the use of two distinct languages in the conversation, students are encouraged to use the basic foreign vocabulary already possessed as they find themselves involved in similar

situations to those presented.

Typically, the conversation is presented to a group of students speaking the same native language and wishing to learn the same foreign language. It is however possible that the same presentation can be delivered to a single audience containing students of different native languages and desiring to learn the respective foreign language being presented. Native and foreign languages may include Mandarin and English although are by no means confined to these two examples.

According to another embodiment of the present invention, more than one first party and/or more than one second party may be involved in the conversation as indicated by example in Table 2. For example, three first parties speak in Mandarin and comprehend English whereas two second parties speak in English and comprehend Mandarin. Although each first party speaks in a different language to each second party, the conversation between any first party and any second party flows as though each can comprehend what the other is saying and therefore a communication link is established.

It is possible that a given first or second party speaks in and or comprehends both languages. The party will be classified as a first or second party according to the time spent speaking and/or comprehending a given language. In the present example, a party who speaks and comprehends both English and Mandarin, however, spends most of the time speaking English and comprehending Mandarin is classified as a second party.

Table 2

	Speaks	Comprehends
First Party A	Mandarin	English
First Party B	Mandarin\English	English
First Party B	Mandarin	English
Second Party A	English	Mandarin
Second Party B	English\Mandarin	Mandarin\English
Additional Party A	English	English
Additional Party B	-	Mandarin\English
Additional Party C	Mandarin	-

5 Additional parties may be introduced to the presentation that both speak in and/or comprehend the two languages spoken as previously stated. One additional party need not have the same speaking and/or comprehension characteristics as another additional party. For example, 10 one additional party may speak in English and respond to instructions in English although never react to Mandarin, and yet another additional party may speak in Mandarin without acting upon instructions in either Mandarin or English.

15 It is envisaged that conversational parties are typically persons, however, may also be cartoons, animals, voice overs or any objects capable of characterisation. Although each conversational party would typically be 20 skilled in both languages being spoken, it is conceivable that some may be able to enunciate in a given language, for example by reading cue cards, without a true appreciation of what is being said whilst at the same time giving the impression that they understand. The impression 25 of a communication link between conversational parties is required and naturally understanding is preferred.

In addition to speaking a first or a second language, it is envisaged that first, second or additional 30 parties may speak and/or comprehend a third language.

A preferred presentation system is illustrated in Figure 1. The conversation to be presented would typically be displayed on an audiovisual display unit 15 such as a television set, projector or computer monitor although
5 live performances involving people and/or puppets are also conceivable. Typically however, the presentation would be pre-recorded and stored in a suitable format on a storage medium 5 such as CD ROM, VHS, DVD or other like mediums suitable for storing audiovisual data. A purely audio
10 format may be adopted for the presentation however the inclusion of video would serve to better facilitate learning wherein the students visual and auditory senses are stimulated, comprehension is more readily communicated, and interest is more likely to be
15 maintained.

A data processor 10 which is typically a video recorder, DVD player or personal computer (PC) will retrieve the audiovisual data from the storage medium 5.
20 The data processor 10 will further perform any subsequent processing so such that the audiovisual data is in a suitable format to be output to the audiovisual display unit 15 where it will be presented to the student 20. It will be appreciated to a person skilled in the art that a
25 presentation stored in a remote location could be retrieved and presented over the Internet using the foregoing system.

THE CLAIMS DEFINING THE INVENTION ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- 5 1. A method for teaching a second language to a student skilled in a first language, the method involving:
presenting to said student seeking to improve
conversational skills in said second language, a
conversation between at least one first party and at least
10 one second party, wherein said at least one first party
speaks in said first language and seemingly comprehends
said second language, and said at least one second party
speaks in said second language and seemingly comprehends
said first language.
- 15 2. The method of claim 1 wherein said conversation
is presented in an audio format.
3. The method of claim 1 wherein said conversation
20 is presented in a audiovisual format.
4. The method of claim 3 wherein said conversation
is pre-recorded.
- 25 5. The method of claim 3 wherein said conversation
is performed live.
6. The method of claim 1 wherein at least one
additional party speaks in and/or seemingly comprehends at
30 least one said language, and thereby interacts with said
at least one first party and/or at said at least one
second party.
7. The method of claim 6 wherein there is more than
35 one additional party and each additional party may speak
in and/or comprehend a different language combination with
respect to other additional parties.

8. The method of claim 6 wherein said at least one additional party, speaks and/or comprehends a third language.

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9. The method of claim 1 wherein said at least one first party and/or at least one second party, speak and/or comprehend a third language.

10 10. An apparatus for teaching a second language to a student skilled in a first language, having:

a storage medium for storing audiovisual data comprising a conversation between at least one first party and at least one second party, wherein said at least one first party speaks in said first language and seemingly comprehends said second language, and said at least one second party speaks in said second language and seemingly comprehends said first language;

a data processor for retrieving said audiovisual data from said storage medium and processing said audiovisual data into a format suitable to be displayed using an audiovisual display unit; and

an audiovisual display unit for presenting said processed audiovisual data to said student seeking to improve conversational skills in said second language.

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