

Monolingualism and its Heritage

Анотація. У статті розглянуто традиції монолінгвізму у викладанні англійської мови як іноземної. Визначено внесок попередників Реформаторського руху та його членів в успішне практичне застосування монолінгвізму (прямий метод), а також розкрито його сучасні прояви у викладанні англійської мови як іноземної.

Ключові слова: монолінгвізм, іноземна мова, прямий метод, Реформаторський рух, викладання англійської мови як іноземної.

Abstract. The paper looks at the tradition of monolingualism in the teaching of English as a foreign language, the contribution of the precursors of the Reform Movement and that of the members of the Reform Movement to the success and practical applications (the Direct/ Natural method), and tries to disclose its current manifestations in TEFL.

Keywords: monolingualism, foreign language, Direct/Natural method, Reform Movement, TEFL.

1. Introduction

The principle of monolingualism implies the exclusion of the native language (L1) or any other previously acquired language from the classroom, the target language (L2) becoming both the only medium of teaching and the object of learning. As such, monolingualism prevents the occurrence of L1 in conveying meaning or explaining grammatical rules. Actually, it emphasizes a general law of learning: people learn what they practise.

Unquestionably, in foreign language teaching, ample provision must be made for practice and communication without the intrusion of L1. This strategy seems to be as old as the teaching of languages. Although they used translation in the Latin classes, the medieval monastery schools banned the use of the vernacular languages, and classroom communication was carried out exclusively in Latin. Those who could afford private tuition could be exposed to even more practice in L2. For instance, Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), the French essayist, relates how his family entrusted him to a guardian who addressed him only in Latin in the first years of his childhood [9, p. 11].

2. The tradition of monolingualism

The first formulation of the principle of monolingualism in English appears in Claudius Holyband's dialogues (1573; 1576). Holyband was a Frenchman (called Claude de Sainliens) who anglicized his name after having fled France and moved to London to escape religious persecution in the sixteenth century. According to Howatt (1984), making use of dialogues, Holyband taught French and Latin in his schools, putting emphasis on reading and correct pronunciation. Written for different levels of student performance, different interests and experiences, lively and humorous, these dialogues present essential vocabulary and grammar, proverbs and sayings, alongside vocabulary lists arranged according to topic areas. The dialogues are sequences of scenes and events that follow one another, suggesting a context and building situations that connect them. From one of the scenes, we learn that speaking English during the French classes was discouraged. Holyband's monolingual instruction anticipated similar ideas by Jacotot and the Reform Movement.

The principle of monolingualism lies at the base of John Webbe's textbook *An Appeal to Truth* (1622). Webbe's approach to grammar – 'no grammar' – anticipates Henry Sweet's (late 19th century) intuitive view and the Direct Method philosophy of teaching grammar. The approach reflects his belief that foreign languages should not be taught by learning grammar rules but «by use and custom». He said that «Custom is the best approved school-mistress for languages», opposed language use to linguistic rule, and insisted that the proper way to learn languages was the practice of communication skills which would lead to knowledge of grammar through use [Webbe 1662: 38; 7, p. 35].

By exercise of reading, writing, and speaking after ancient Custom, we shall conceive three things which are of greatest moment in any languages: first, the true and certain declining and conjugation of words, and all things belonging to Grammar, will without labour, and whether we will or no, thrust themselves upon us.

Webbe's ideas of foreign language teaching show a striking resemblance to those of the Direct Method: no use of reference grammars, emphasis on spoken interaction, and aiming at developing an internalized knowledge of the language through communicative activities (reading, writing and speaking) conducted in L2. The fundamental difference lies in the use of translation to teach meaning (although he rejected word-by-word translation). Unfortunately, Webbe's ideas remained isolated from the mainstream of foreign language teaching.

3. Monolingualism and the precursors of the Reform

Both Jean Joseph Jacotot and Claude Marcel, two of the precursors of the Reform, wrote a 'method' and a background thesis to justify their methods. Neither followed a school of thought as at that time there was no coherent language teaching profession and no network of professional communication. Jacotot devised the earliest example of monolingual method for the language classroom. It was based on observing language similarities and differences, hypothesizing, and discovery.

His contention in *Enseignement universel, langue étrangère* (1830) was that explanation was unnecessary, as each individual had a natural, innate, God-given ability to instruct himself. The role of the teacher was to respond to the learner's needs, rather than to direct or control him by explaining things in advance.

Marcel published *Language as a Means of Mental Culture and International Communication* (1853), a study of the role of education, which, according to Howatt (1984), attempted to define the part played by languages, native and foreign, modern and classical, in the context of education. He started by making a first distinction between 'impression' (reception) and 'expression' (production), related to a second one, that between spoken and written language. These distinctions gave rise to the 'four branches' of language teaching, the modern four skills.

Marcel also identified the three 'agents' of education (parents, teachers and method) and tried to define 'method'. He produced twenty axiomatic truths of methodology, among which the 'method of nature', which is «the archetype of all methods, and especially of the method of learning languages» [Marcel 1853: I: 335; 7, p. 153]. One of the crucial characteristics of 'the method of nature' was that «the mind should be impressed with the idea before it takes cognizance of the sign that represents it». In other words, comprehension precedes production. Another important idea was the distinction between the *analytical* and *synthetic* methods of instruction, which was revived later by D.A. Wilkins in *Notional Syllabuses* (1976). An analytic method ('a method of nature') starts from examples, practice and experience, and then moves on to general truths by a process of induction: «The analytical method brings the learner in immediate contact with the objects of study; it presents to him models for decomposition and imitation. The synthetical method disregards example and imitation; it turns the attention of the learner to principles and rules, in order to lead him, by an indirect course, to the objects of study» [7, p. 153].

In Marcel's view, as Howatt (1984) notes, the 'good method' should comprise both analysis and synthesis, but in different proportions, depending on the characteristics of the learner and the relationship between the immediate learning goal and the general aims of education. The analytical method determines the priority of spoken over written language, of the aural-oral skills over the reading and writing ones, an emphasis on text rather than sentences, and the inductive approach to teaching grammar. All these make Marcel a precursor of the Direct Method.

4. Monolingualism and the Direct/ Natural method

In the late 1860s, L. Sauveur opened a language school in Boston where he used intensive oral interaction in L2, employing questions to present and elicit language. He argued that an L2 could be taught without translation into L1 if meaning was conveyed through demonstration and action. His method came to be known as the 'Natural method', as it attempted to imitate L1 acquisition.

The method, called either 'the Natural method' or the 'Direct method' is «a method of teaching a foreign language with minimal use of the pupil's native

language and of formal grammar», according to *Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged 2012 Digital Edition*. It dates back to 1884, when the German scholar and psychologist F. Franke justified it by the direct association between forms and meaning in the target language and provided a theoretical framework for a monolingual approach to teaching. According to Franke [9, p. 198], a language could best be taught by direct and spontaneous use. Speaking, and pronunciation in particular, need systematic attention. Known words could be used to teach new vocabulary, and the use of mime, demonstration and pictures was recommended. Learners would then be able to induce the rules of grammar. These natural learning principles provided the foundation for the Direct/ Natural method.

Franke's proposal that language teaching should be undertaken within the target language was the first stimulus for the rise of the Direct/ Natural method. According to Howatt (*idem*), another influence was that of the work of François Gouin, who observed children learning language in natural settings. Gouin emphasized the direct associations that students make between objects and concepts and the corresponding words in the target language/.

Gouin's major work, *The Art of Teaching and Studying Languages*, published in Paris in 1880, on the eve of the Reform Movement, describes a simple method of teaching foreign languages: the 'series' technique, which suggests that L2 learning should be more like L1 learning, through abundant exposure to listening and speaking, with listening first, and reading and writing postponed to a later stage. Meaning was dealt with directly, without recourse to translation, and explicit grammar teaching was almost absent. L2 learning mimicked L1 learning, without taking into account the differences between L1 and L2 acquisition or the reduced exposure to L2 in the foreign language classes.

The Direct/ Natural method, and the characteristic principles and procedures include instruction conducted exclusively in L2, the teaching of everyday (mainly concrete) vocabulary and sentences using demonstration, realia and pictures as much as possible. Abstract ideas are taught by association of ideas. Oral communication skills are carefully built through question-and-answer exchanges. New teaching points are always introduced orally. Correct pronunciation is emphasized, and grammar is taught inductively. Teaching is done in small, intensive classes. The Direct/Natural method is typically monolingual and requires native speaker teachers who cannot use or refrain from using the learners' mother tongue.

5. Monolingualism and the Reform Movement

The Reform Movement was promoted by a group of international scholars and teachers (German, French, Danish and British) committed to the idea of monolingual classes, without adopting an extremist view. Three of the figures of the Movement – Wilhelm Viëtor in Germany, Paul Passy in France, and Otto Jespersen in Denmark – were phoneticians who had started as school teachers. The only British member of the group was Henry Sweet, who had a different background. Under their

influence, in the 1880s, translation and explanation in L1 started to be pushed aside in favour of monolingual teaching.

The Reform Movement started in 1882 with the publication of Viëtor's pamphlet *Der Sprachunterricht muss umkehren!* («Language teaching must start afresh!») and with the setting up in the same year of the Phonetic Teachers' Association (later to become the International Phonetic Association). Viëtor's pamphlet soon became one of the most influential documents in language teaching history. According to Howatt (1984), Viëtor insisted that a language teaching reform must begin with accurate descriptions of speech based on the science of phonetics, and there must be a properly trained language teaching profession. Due to the Reform Movement, modern language teaching became synonymous with the use of the phonetic transcription, despite voices from the classroom which claimed that it imposed an extra learning burden.

The Reform Movement recommended not only the avoidance of L1, but also the primacy of spoken language, the inclusion of phonetics both in language teaching and the training of language teachers, the use of dialogues to introduce conversational phrases and idioms, stressed the importance of context in disambiguating the meaning of sentences, and an inductive approach to the teaching of grammar.

Henry Sweet is considered the originator of an applied linguistic approach to the teaching of languages. His aim in *The Practical Study of Languages* (1899) was to devise «a rationally progressive method» [Sweet 1899/1964: 47; 7, p. 183] of practical language study. His book deals with the importance and the practical implications of the teaching of phonetics and the use of transcription, and culminates with one of his basic principles of language teaching methodology: the primacy of spoken language. It also explores the methodological principles and practices of teaching grammar and vocabulary, the study of texts, translation, and conversation. The book deals with the intellectual foundations of practical methodology and places linguistics and psychology at the heart of his theory. Sweet upheld that the learner's task is to form and maintain correct associations between the target language and the world, avoiding 'cross-associations' by using translation. Disconnected words and sentences were rejected as they prevented the learner to form associations. The teacher was advised to draw on a text's grammar and vocabulary only after it had been thoroughly studied and assimilated by the student. As the sentences isolated from the text could be considered a bridge between text and grammar, grammar could be taught 'inductively'. Sweet insisted that texts should be direct, clear, simple, and familiar, and new vocabulary should be firmly controlled, both in terms of number and of practicality. The *Practical Study of Languages* finishes with a chapter on the *judicious* use of translation.

6. The Reform principles

The Reform Movement was founded on three principles: primacy of speech, centrality of connected text and priority of oral methodology. The primacy of the

communication competence over the knowledge of grammar had been a constant preoccupation for various authorities of the 17th centuries, from John A. Comenius to John Locke.

The principle of connected text may have been inspired by the absurd sentences of the Grammar-translation method. On the other hand, psychology itself, as a science, had begun to emerge as ‘associanism’. As a consequence, the use of disconnected words and isolated sentences in teaching came under serious criticism. For the same reason, the use of translation was banned, as it could lead to the formation of ‘cross associations’ and hinder the development of the foreign language. The text-based approach implied ‘induction’ in the teaching of grammar, relying on the use of the data provided by the language of the text for the teaching of grammatical rules.

The third principle was the primacy of an oral methodology, especially in the early years of learning. Viëtor explained that a text provides the starting point for various activities such as question-and-answer work, retells and summaries, which require learners to use the target language. Therefore, the teacher was expected to speak the foreign language as the normal means of classroom communication, using the learners’ mother tongue only for lexical and grammatical explanations. (However, L1 was completely absent from the classroom in the Berlitz schools where the teachers were native speakers.)

7. The heritage of the Direct/Natural method

The Direct/Natural method was established in Germany and France around 1900 and became widely known in Europe and the United States due to L. Sauveur and especially Maximilian Berlitz. Although the latter referred to the method as ‘the Berlitz method’, the teaching principles are those of the Direct/Natural method.

The Direct/Natural method was successful in small private language schools, such as those of Sauveur and Berlitz. In general, the Direct/Natural method banned translation and the use of the students’ mother tongue, but in these schools, to make sure this happened, only native-speaker teachers were employed. The method overemphasized the similarities between naturalistic L1 learning and classroom L2 learning and distorted them, failing to consider the practical realities of the classroom. In the absence of a textbook, the method was largely dependent on the teacher’s skills and intuition. However, not all teachers were proficient or knowledgeable enough to adhere completely to the principles of the method. Moreover, strict adherence to the method’s principles was often counterproductive.

These commercial schools were a forceful impetus which imposed the Direct/Natural method for more than two decades. In non-commercial schools, the method was adopted in the 1920s but soon fell into disfavour.

In the United States, the Coleman report (1923) showed that conversation skills were irrelevant for the average American college student and that reading was a priority for language learning. This emphasis on reading continued until World War II. In France and Germany the Direct/Natural method techniques started to be

combined with more controlled grammar-based activities. In Great Britain, Henry Sweet had already pointed out the limitations of the methods. Subsequent developments led to Audiolingualism in the United States and the Oral Approach or Situational Language Teaching in Britain (Richards and Rodgers, 1986).

8. The heritage of monolingualism

In spite of the warnings that a distinction should be made between the initial grasp of meaning and the subsequent fluent use of the new language items, in the 1960s, the Audio-lingual approach banned L1 from the foreign language classroom again. Even today, in many countries, the teaching guidelines issued by the education authorities still advise against the use of L1, which echoes one of the principles of the Reform movement.

In the 1970s, the Direct/Natural method was adopted by the Inlingua schools and in 2012 by many of the language departments of the Foreign Service Institute of the U.S. State Department. To this day, the Berlitz schools follow their model of language teaching, proving that monolingualism can still thrive. The following description of the Berlitz method dates from 2011: «The Berlitz Method excludes any use at of the student’s native language in either the classroom or in the student’s review materials. By totally immersing the student in the new language, we can most closely simulate the real-life situations in which he or she will be using the language, and eliminate the cumbersome process of introducing a concept first in the student’s language and then in the target language (Berlitz London, 2011)».

9. Conclusion

More than the moderate academic ideas of the Reform Movement, those of the Direct/Natural method have made a real impact and served the commercial and political interests of the English-speaking countries. On the back of the Direct/Natural method, these have been able to export materials, experts, and teachers. The monolingual learner’s dictionaries, which have become a huge industry in Great Britain and the United States, are means to the same ends. Theoretical linguistics itself offered some help when, under Chomsky’s influence, the native speaker started to count as not the only reliable source of language in language teaching, but also as someone who had the privilege of providing linguistic data and processing them introspectively. Before Chomsky, the members of the Reform Movement had looked at the native speaker as the only reliable source of language data. In the shadow of Chomsky’s ideas and following a long tradition, monolingualism flourished again.

In 1997 Kanavillil Rajagopalan was speaking of «the apotheosis of the native spaker», referring to one of the effects of Chomsky’s theories on language teaching: the native-speaker command of a language started to be considered enough for someone to be able to teach that language. It took years before it was realized that there was a lot more to language teaching than a good grasp of one’s mother tongue, and before the native speaker ‘was deposed’ from language education. As

Rajagopalan puts it, «[...] the idea that ‘knowledge of what’ is sufficient to guarantee ‘knowledge of how’ has been one of the most enduring dogmas of rationalist thought and is largely responsible for the widespread belief that applied sciences are eternally dependent on knowledge produced by their ‘pure’ counterparts» (Rajagopalan, 1997, 227).

One of the consequences of the ‘deposing’ of the native speaker from language teaching was summed up by A. Davies: «If it is accepted that the native speaker is no longer at the center of communicative competence, then that liberates language teaching because it means that worthwhile goals are suddenly accessible – intermediate goals perhaps, but at least not unlike the knowledge/ability of many native speakers» (Davies, 1989, 169).

In other words, although the native-speaker teacher may not be at the centre anymore, the principle of monolingualism is still influential in foreign language teaching, even after ‘the deposing’ of the native speaker from language education.

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