Evidence for the bilingual option

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The monolingual approach has persisted in the guise of the communicative approach – clearly a direct method derivative - until the present day. This paper calls for a revision of a methodology where the learners' mother tongue is only a stopgap device. It presents different groups of learners who testify to the effectiveness of a bilingual approach. The evidence is in: For beginners, L1 support is an immediate solution, not a last resort. Detailed proposals are made to improve courses for immigrants with native languages unrelated to conventional European school languages. At the same time, this paper calls for a bringing together of foreign languages teachers and teacher educators to conduct combined research on what works best for foreign language learners.

The theory in a nutshell

With regard to the role of the mother tongue in FLT – help or hindrance? – mainstream philosophy has settled for a weak-kneed compromise: use the foreign language as much as possible, and allow the MT (or another language already known to the students) for explanations of difficult words and grammatical constructions. This is a dismayingly uninformed position linguistically, since it does not specify the various aspects of mother tongue skills which could support foreign language acquisition:

As children grow into their mother tongue, (1) they have learnt to communicate combining body language with language; (2) communicating, they have learnt to articulate and develop their voice; (3) communicating, they have learnt to conceptualize their world and have grasped the symbolic function of language; (4) communicating, they have acquired an intuitive understanding of grammar; (5) they have acquired the secondary skills of reading and writing. In acquiring a first language, they have in fact constructed their selves. The MT is therefore the greatest asset any human being brings to the task of FL learning. It provides an indispensable Language Acquisition Support System. We all have to use established neural pathways in order to create new ones. If learners did not use this support and make the connections in their minds all by themselves, FL teachers would not get anywhere. Instead of ignoring it, teachers should help their pupils build upon existing competencies and make the right associations.

In the following sections, different groups of learners testify convincingly to the effectiveness of a bilingual approach.

Naturally developing bilinguals

Not only the founders of the monolingual approach at the turn of the 20th century, but also its modern proponents to this day refer to mother tongue acquisition, claiming the direct method is nature's method. The Internet course *Rosetta Stone* explains its monolingual approach like this: "It essentially means that you learn German in German, without translations, like you picked up your mother tongue." Would it not be much more to the point to look at naturally developing bilinguals as expert witnesses and role models for foreign language learners, such as children raised in linguistically mixed marriages?

Young developing bilinguals employ the following bilingual strategies to successfully extend their linguistic competence:

- Out of pure curiosity and for the joy of learning, bilinguals ask for the equivalent expression in the language which is not being used for communication at the time.
- Bilingual children order their linguistic world by contrasting equivalent expressions. They can thus create clarity of meaning and consciously practise both languages at the same time.
- In order to extricate themselves from a vocabulary difficulty, they switch to the other language and ask for an equivalent. This is no longer curiosity, but asking out of necessity.
- When they do not understand something, and the person they are talking to cannot give, or refuses to give, them an equivalent in their stronger language, they will try to find an equivalent expression themselves in order to confirm their understanding and clarify the situation.
- Bilingual children do not always make the effort to ask for an equivalent but simply insert a phrase from the other language into an utterance. Such mixed-language utterances are more likely to be produced in their non-dominant language, the one they feel less confident about.

Ample evidence is provided in the classical four-volume study by Leopold (1949) as well as in a host of later studies. Among them, Taeschner (1983) and Saunders (1988) stand out as particularly rich sources of the strategies used by a bilingual family. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the most vigorous and outspoken attack against methodological monolingualism came from C. J. Dodson, author of *Language Teaching and the bilingual method* ([2]1972), who was a natural bilingual, son of a German mother and an English father.

But what about immigrant children with no one to help with translations? Many develop over the years into highly proficient bilinguals. The situations are well-known where the children of immigrants interpret for their parents when the need arises. Is this counterevidence against a bilingual theory of second language acquisition? We think not. More so than adults, children are statistical learners. Their brains compute transition probabilities between syllables and between words. For this, children need big data which they get when they attend schools where the national language is spoken throughout. Part of this massive input is comprehensible because much of it occurs in recurring real life situations in and between lessons. Children pick up the same phrases they have heard over and over again, with slight variations. They will understand what the speakers want them to do without, at first, understanding the complete wording. Constant foreign language contacts will, however, make many phrases completely transparent over time and reveal the patterned nature of the new language.

Even when there is no native word heard, comprehension is, initially, for beginners, bilingual. Because understanding means making connections with established ideas and notions which, in turn, are strongly connected with mother tongue expressions. These mother tongue expressions are activated, however briefly, as word recognition experiments have shown (Weber & Cutler 2004). All languages seem to tap a common conceptual system (Illes et al. 1999), and foreign language acquisition is, initially, an extension of L1 acqusition. We can learn to talk about the weather in a new language because we access familiar weather notions which are already part of our mental make-up built up via the first language. However, as L2 proficiency increases and the links between L2 words and concepts are strengthened, mother-tongue associations can drop out of the recognition process and associated concepts can be directly accessed (“mental short-circuiting”, see Butzkamm & Caldwell 1009, 87).

Polyglots: Always connect.

Polyglots take languages to heart and make them a true mission. But, as a rule, they do not care much about teaching methodology discussed by teaching experts and linguists. Instead, they all seem to find their own extremely successful learning practices more or less by trial and error, and they generously share them with others. On the internet, they freely offer advice on how best to go about learning language. They organise conferences and document their techniques via videos. For them, learning languages – and creating links between them - has become an absorbing and enjoyable hobby, and they encourage others to take it up as well.

From what we have seen, there can be no doubt that polyglots prefer a bilingual approach which allows them to dive right into the foreign language. In fact, what has been a subject of considerable controversy among language teachers in many countries for more than a century, does not seem to be an issue at all. It is taken for granted – it almost appears self-evident - that beginners should start out with texts which they fully understand because translations (or glossaries) are provided in one way or another.

“Ideally, the books should be in bilingual text format” says Alexander Arguelles, a professor of linguistics, one-time editor of the RELC journal and, as a polyglot, significantly present on the internet. “It’s such an excellent format for studying foreign languages that it’s flabbergasting that it’s not more widespread and in common use.” He particularly recommends Assimil books which have been around for almost a century. Here the basic texts are presented as parallel versions, one side native language, one side foreign language, so one can quickly go from one to the other.

Arguelles also praises the German series “Kauderwelsch" for its bilingual format. Both *Assimil* and *Kauderwelsch* books not only give full idiomatic translations, but also literal translations. Thus, learners receive input where they understand both what is meant and how it is said. In other words, the learners’ mother tongue is used in two different ways for two different purposes: (1) ordinary meaning conveyance and (2) structural transparency. Take Chinese 你好 nǐ hao, which is the standard greeting, so it translates as hello / good morning / good afternoon. Good to know, of course, from a communicative point of view, but not good enough for learning the language. If, however, we are given an additional literal translation: nǐ

hao = *you good, the words are no longer buried in a frozen formula, but are available for innumerable other phrases. With this “double comprehension” learners can make – in Humboldt’s famous words – “infinite use of finite means” (“unendlichen Gebrauch von endlichen Mitteln”). For Butzkamm & Caldwell (2009, 51ff.), double comprehension is the basic condition, both necessary and sufficient, for language acquisition to take place.

Incidentally, in a more distant past, some authors recognised the learner's need for understanding both what is meant and how it is said. Sometimes they included two types of translations in their teaching arrangements. Robertson (1842), among others, provided an interlinear, i.e. literal translation as well as a fair English version of his French texts, called 'The same in good English'. Others used texts already familiar to their students in the mother tongue such as the Gospels and added literal translations where necessary. There is indeed an unbroken bilingual tradition from antiquity to this very day. However, what is a familiar format in some self-instructional courses is conspicuously absent in most schoolbooks – because of the monolingual orthodoxy.

A special trick favoured by some polyglots is to use the same basic texts for several foreign languages. Here the approach is clearly not monolingual but bilingual or better still, multilingual. Schliemann, the German archaeologist and discoverer of ancient Troy, used a French text by Fénelon for several languages. So did Trotsky (1929, 118), who used the Bible for different languages, in order not to “lose a single minute by being obliged to use a dictionary.” (The argument “translation saves time” reoccurs again and again in the didactic debate.). Similarly, when tackling Arabic after studying Indonesian and Javanese while at Harvard, Clifford Geertz, the ethnologist, reports: “The old Harvard sentences got translated once again, into bravura structures they had never dreamed of, and worked very well.” The translations were provided by Moroccan graduate students. This brings us to our next group.

Missionaries and ethnologists

Let us have a look at the pioneering missionaries who went overseas and started to learn unknown languages in a world which could not be more real. They were certainly learners with the highest possible motivation, energetic and eager to preach the gospel in the language of the people they would meet there for the first time. We are not concerned here with the many special problems of Bible translation, but with the simple facts of ordinary language

acquisition for everyday communication. The missionaries came to live among the natives, they had to enter the very lives of the people in order to survive among them. Was this not the ideal learning situation, being completely surrounded by the new language, total immersion? No grammar rules, no bilingual vocab lists so much frowned upon by Direct Methodists, but the real thing: Picking up the language as you go about the daily business of living together, preparing meals together, building huts, performing all kinds of daily chores, with all the things around you to be handled and named, and not just pictures or the few "realia" one could bring into the classroom? Being in the midst of so many native speakers, all of them potential informants, in almost all your waking hours? Is this not the archetypical language learning situation, success guaranteed? Somewhat like the Robinson Crusoe method, with the little difference that Robinson teaches Man Friday, not the other way round? "Friday began to talk very well..." Unfortunately, this is fiction, and the reality is quite different.

Eugene A. Nida (1952, 15), a pioneer in translation studies who worked for the American Bible society and is reputed to have revolutionised Bible translations, has this to say about many missionaries' journeys into the secret realms of unknown languages: "One must sit down with natives and begin to ask for words – sometimes without so much as being able to say, "What do you call this?" It may take weeks to stumble across this key phrase. At first, one may be forced to sit and stick out one's lower lip and in this way point to objects, for there are several places in the world where pointing with the finger is a very crude, vulgar gesture."

For him, who was probably the best authority on the difficult work of missionaries, there is not the least shred of doubt that a bilingual approach, if possible, would have made life much easier for the missionaries: "The task of mastering a language is not so difficult if there is someone in the tribe who speaks some foreign language which the missionary also knows; but if there is not so much as a single word in common, the initial stages may seem agonizingly difficult...." (Nida 1952, 30). Agonizingly difficult, yes indeed. It sometimes took several generations of missionaries to completely come to grips with an indigenous language.

The same applies to ethnologists who would not get anywhere near truly alien cultures without penetrating their languages. Nigel Barley, in his wonderfully comic and inspiring account of his life among the Dowayos of Cameroon, his first experience in the field, relates how much he depended on his native informant and often complains about the miserable

Pidgin English of his assistant. “I was never sure whether my difficulties with them were purely linguistic or whether much more was involved.” (Barley 1986, 92). Here we catch a glimpse of how much our views about language learning have a Eurocentric bias. The sense or logic behind our traditional European school languages and our ways of communicating are more or less familiar to us, despite obvious differences. The monolingual approach could hold sway for so long only because comprehension difficulties could be overcome comparatively easily. In the whole debate about the role of L1 in language teaching it was ignored how much of our understanding was “silently” contributed by our mother tongues embedded in a common European culture.

In her autobiographical novel about field work in Nigeria, another anthropologist relates the advice she had been given before setting out to Africa: “’Never use an interpreter”, my professors had intoned, “or you’ll never learn the language properly.” “You’ll learn the language more quickly,” Sackerton had confirmed cheerfully, “if no one around can speak anything else.” (Smith Bowen 1984, 2). Not a bit of it! The advice, not unfamiliar to young teachers going abroad, proved to be less than helpful. She manages with the meagre Pidgin English of her servants and with “a missionary’s really excellent word list (unfortunately only from the language into English) (p. 7).

Tong Wu (2010, 44) reports about early missionaries in China: “Neither polyglots nor ordinary missionaries learned the Chinese language without the participation of their MT. A lot of diaries and memoirs written at that time revealed that one of the most urgent things to do upon their arrival in China was to look for a ‘personal tutor’ or ‘linguistic informant’ with at least some sort of Pidgin English… This basic bilingual help was highly appreciated by the early groups of foreigners in China because they learned from experience that a monolingual approach could only make their linguistic survival more difficult.”

It bears repeating: Our views of language learning have been tainted by the fact that in our schools we usually deal with related languages with a common cultural background. Comparisons with remote languages clearly reveal the modern Eurocentric bias not only of the monolingual but also of the “no grammar” doctrine. By the same token, native languages are often devalued. Here is a diary entry of a missionary in 1892 quoted by Tong Wu (2010, 42): “This language is grandly indifferent to anything like a decent or consistent order of words. ‘Bring me that large book’ is nothing of the sort in Chinese. The noble Chinaman says,

‘Take hold that piece large book carry come.’ The word translated as ‘piece’ is what is called a numerary adjunct.“ Modern terms for these constructions are „serial verbs“ and „measure words“ and, it goes without saying, modern grammars of Chinese are no longer condescending or derogatory.

The deaf: speakers of sign language

For more than a century, deaf people in schools for the deaf have suffered unnecessarily because schools have often adopted a policy of pure oralism. Sign language was ignored, and the deaf were taught the national oral language without recourse to the signs they had acquired naturally, by living them, together with other deaf children. Teachers invented special rituals to shame their pupils out of signing. In those schools “a deaf child did well to learn 52 single words – one a week – by the end of the first year.” (Kisor 1990, 26) However, things are changing and a bilingual approach is gaining ground in the schools for the congenitally deaf. Teachers are beginning to use sign language, the natural L1 of the profoundly deaf, as a bridge to oral languages (Butzkamm & Butzkamm, 1999).

Since at first signs were considered to be grammarless gesticulations, teachers of the deaf did not learn them and could not have used bilingual techniques even if they had wanted to. This reminds us of the many expatriate teachers who teach their own tongue monolingually simply because they are ignorant of the mother tongues of their pupils. Unfortunately, the profession is slow to change and exploiting the first language is still officially frowned upon in many parts of the world, in teaching the deaf as well as in FLT.

A related aspect of the monolingual vs. bilingual controversy has to do with respect for indigenous languages: “As the students learn the rules of English grammar, they are also receiving a subtler message: that ASL has an equally complex and worthy grammar, a grammar they have already mastered.” (Hager Cohen 1995, 152) The same observation could be made for endangered languages of small minorities which are often devalued as mere “dialects”. A bilingual approach could strengthen them.

Role reversal: teachers as learners

We find it extremely illuminating when teachers themselves learn yet another language and discover they often wanted exactly what they had been told to discard in their own teaching, namely mother tongue support.

“Much of my frustration with direct methods comes from my own experience being taught Japanese in such a way. Countless times I would hear the teacher make a statement, feel I “understood” each individual word, but had no idea what the sentence as a whole meant. I realize there are those who say that certain things simply can’t be translated. Word-for-word, of course not. But idea-for-idea, that’s a different story. With all due consideration to the red herring of cultural differences, I would still argue that unless you can rephrase a statement in your own first language such that the essence of the meaning is maintained, you really don’t understand it.” (Weschler, 1997).

“Of course meaning is central. So why did my course book tell me not to worry if I didn’t understand everything? On the contrary, faced with a teacher’s or course book refusal to help me understand everything, I was outraged and frustrated.” (Gower 1999, 12)

Similar views are expressed in other retrospective self-reports as listed by Wu (2010, 45ff.), coming from teachers who once again had the chance of renewing their connection with language learning. Perhaps a witness such as Wilga M. Rivers should not be overlooked. As a professor of Romance languages at Harvard and an author of several pertinent books there can be no doubt that she was well familiar with both the theories and practices of foreign language teaching. These are relevant excerpts from her day-by-day diary of learning Spanish, her sixth language, showing a strong need for bilingual assistance:

“I am very frustrated by the lack of an English-Spanish glossary in my private textbook and other books.”
“I feel sure now that in an immersion situation, at least for adults on their own, it is important to have someone to whom one may have recourse in one’s own language.” (Rivers 1979, 72;74)

We wonder what she would have felt had she taken up a “remote” language such as Turkish or Arabic instead of yet another Romance language.

No need to multiply examples here. A well known teacher trainer has the courage to speak out clearly: “Thirty years ago I was so much part of the Direct Method orthodoxy of the day that I frowned on bilingual dictionaries and one day found myself miming the word ‘although’ in an elementary class [...] How had I managed to exclude my real experience as a language learner from my practice as a language teacher for so many years?“ (Deller and Rinvolucri 2002, 4)

Teaching immigrants with “remote” languages

Try teaching your own language to speakers of “remote” languages, embedded in alien cultures and unrelated to conventional European school languages. “Was ist Weihnachten (What is Christmas)?” I was once asked by a young immigrant, showing the cultural divide. Nothing could be plainer: A bilingual approach is faster and less frustrating for both teachers and learners.

Refugees seeking asylum in Germany get accommodation and financial aid, but only after being officially granted asylum are free intensive language courses made available to them. To our surprise we found that some had been waiting for a decision about their asylum status for almost a year, and in all those months they had acquired only about a dozen German words and phrases. That means, there had been very little contact with their German neighbours. The problem has now been recognised and in many areas voluntary workers arrange regular meetings where they try to talk to the refugees and teach them some German, often in a one-to-one situation.

When we started meeting regularly with migrants, the textbooks used in the official integration courses came from well-known publishers. They were expensive glossy books using a German-only approach.

What follows are some typical observations from participants in these courses with monolingual textbooks. They illustrate the two obvious ways of coping with comprehension difficulties: asking others for bilingual assistance or consulting a dictionary.

K, from Kazakhstan, “Often I didn’t understand a word of what was going on.”

But there was a woman next to her who had had some previous experience with German in her Russian family. So she asked her for translations but could not do it too often because her friend had once indicated to her: “Sorry, when I translate for you I’ll miss what the teacher is going to say next.”

A., from Syria: “Some of the participants have lived longer in Germany than I. It’s easier for them. Fortunately, I have a friend who sits next to me and is married to a German. So he helps me to understand. Sometimes I don’t understand a question and my answer is totally wrong.”

M., from Syria: “In our first course, the teacher only spoke German. It would have helped if the teacher had explained German grammar in English because all of us from Syria had some English.”

“We are four Syrians in the course, so we help each other. Someone asks a word, and those who know say the translation.”

A., from Syria: “I often write Arabic translations in my textbook and I also saw a Chinese woman scribbling Chinese characters in her textbook.”

Sh., from East Turkestan (China), also reports that their teacher only spoke German. “However, when we approached him during the break and asked him for English translations, he was willing to provide them.” It seems that there was an “official” German-only rule which the teacher, however, felt free to break outside the course.

In our privately organized course, with no “official” rules to follow, we do exactly like the missionaries did in remote areas of the world: If one of our clients is linguistically more advanced than another who comes from the same country, he quite naturally becomes our linguistic informant and translation helper. Misunderstandings can be clarified on the spot. With mother tongue support, the foreign language item can immediately become a usable piece of language, available on similar occasions.

But our digital age has new, wonderful possibilities for language many learners have already become aware of:

N. , from Syria, uses his smartphone during the course. “I speak the word softly, as noiselessly as possible, into the microphone and listen to the translation with one earphone only. So with my other ear I can still follow the teacher.”

M., from Eritrea, also has a smartphone but no translation program for Tigrinya, his native language. So he looks up an English translation, sometimes even Arabic and / or Amharic translations of which he has some understanding. Since the words looked up are stored by the programme, he learns them during bus-rides after class.

To improve the situation both for learners and teachers, the following changes are proposed:

- Textbook publishers offer bilingual word lists of words and phrases in many languages. The lists should be arranged in three columns and ordered according to lessons - this is standard practice in German coursebooks of English. These lists can be printed separately or downloaded freely from the internet. Bilingual classroom phrases for beginners should also be available.
- Teachers allow a “time-out” to help learners who speak the same language clarify comprehension problems among themselves. Learners use dictionaries and smartphones and share the information gained.
- Teachers select and present youtube videos on special German grammar topics to groups of students who share the same language. As they watch and learn, the teacher continues working with the rest of the class. German grammar videos are provided free of charge by bilingual native speakers and have often been clicked more than a million times (see, for instance, *Deiaa Abdullah* for Arabic and *Almani be Farsi*. For students who come equipped with a good knowledge of English *smarterGerman.com* is a great help.)
- Teachers ask former students who have become proficient bilinguals to provide them with parallel translations of selected texts which they will use time and again with new students.
- Contrary to what the BAMF (Federal Agency for Migration and Refugees) recommends, homogeneous classes where all students share a language will be formed wherever possible. For them special textbooks such as Hossein Tavakkoly’s “Deutsch für Perser” could be used alongside traditional German-only textbooks. These textbooks are written in the learners’ own language. That’s why they can, wherever necessary, provide word-for-word translations of unfamiliar and “bizarre”

German constructions. Here are four examples illustrating this technique, also called mother-tongue mirroring, for English speakers: In many languages the phrase “Do you have a passport?” is rendered literally “Is to-you passport?”. In Twi, comparisons such “Kofi is bigger than me” are expressed by means of a verb: “Kofi big exceed me”. In Mandarin, the plural of nouns is not marked by an ending, but by inserting a special measure word: “two books” is literally “two volume book”, “two knives” is “two grip knife”, somewhat similar to ”two pieces of soap” or ” two bars of chocolate”, etc. In the Ponca-language “I have a sister” is something like “I am sistered”. – In this way, languages can become transparent for one another.

- In the long run, teachers could make themselves familiar with salient grammatical peculiarities of their students‘ languages. They may record files of recurring errors from speakers of these languages and develop strategies to deal with them. Even a little knowledge of students’ languages will go a long way.
- Textbook lessons for advanced students usually deal with certain topics such as “trade unions”. Teachers should point out to their students that there could be Wikipedia articles on the same topic in their own languages. Reading them will certainly help them to understand the foreign language text better. Comprehension is the key to language.
- Since students come from varying school cultures, they should be taught effective learning techniques such as the read-and-look-up method.

Our digital age provides many opportunities to tailor the teaching and learning of foreign languages to the individual needs of the learners. (See also chapter 13:„Ideas for multilingual classes“ in Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009, pp.229ff.). With these possibilities, the traditional German or English-only approach in the international classes of the Goethe-Institute or the British Council, which may have made sense in former decades, should now be a thing of the past. - The situation is complex, and the bilingual approach is no cure-all against failures. Teaching migrants will remain a difficult job. Students differ significantly according to their origins, cultures, languages, ages, talents, motivation, and previous knowledge.

Teaching one-to-one.

“Bilingual techniques … allow us to release and transfer the immense charge and reservoir of

meaning embedded in the mother tongue to the target language" says Wilberg in his book on one-to-one teaching (1987, 147).

Michael Schmitz from Berlin, once a Berlitz school teacher, turned away from the Berlitz method, created his own teaching system including German grammar videos etc. and became a highly successful independent German coach: "Expelling one's mother tongue from the classroom is a big mistake as it is one of the greatest resources we have when learning a new language. Also, when learning fast, motivation tends to be high because you can see your progress and how you improve day by day." (https://smartergerman.com/about/) He also says: "The bilingual approach had and still has a huge impact on my work and liberated my teaching from its tight monolingual corset that I had to wear way too long. With your approach I managed to speed up the time that learners need to learn German by as much as 80% and have found my calling. "
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOSoVfg7p90&list=PLVG-4bDL112cnpPVUKChjteL-S874ZsX9&index=5

Yves Bertrand, a retired linguist at a Paris university, gives free German lessons to underachieving youths in the neighbourhood. He reports (1999, p. 303):

"Prevailing methodology is not suited to certain students. In my mind my task is to correct the errors of the textbook or of its approach. By error, I mean not so much a point of detail as the systematic refusal to use French apart from grammatical explanations… . So I regularly asked him to translate the passages he was studying, and I quickly realized where he was not understanding and where he was misinterpreting. In the same way, I asked my three charges to give me back the new vocabulary working from German to French and from French to German … For me the interests of the child were far more important than the precepts and taboos of the accepted methodology. My results proved me right." (our translation).

A detailed study of the techniques preferred and materials used by independent professional language trainers working in one-on-one situations is highly desirable.

The common sense of ordinary people

Last, but not least, ordinary people. What do those do who are unaware of professional language didactics and simply use their common sense? Again, we need only glimpse at what in fact is only too obvious.

When Sister Elisabeth Holfert, who had no linguistic background, was called to work as a deacon in the Arab quarter of Strasbourg, she at once went to see the chief of the Berber clans: “Immediately I undertook to learn Berber. Every day I came and sat beside the chief and asked him: “How do you say ‘give me your arm’ or ‘I won’t hurt you’, in short, the everyday expressions that I needed to know in my role as a nurse. I jotted down phonetically everything he told me and learnt it by heart in the evening, and the next day I returned to see the chief who corrected as much as needed. In this way I ended up speaking Berber with a good accent which earned me the nickname, the Arab sister (Goure 1981, 119; our translation).

David, now a teacher of English, remembers a holiday in an English summer camp. “To get food you had to wait in a queue. As I was very young and didn’t like some of the dishes, I didn’t want too much food on my plate and asked my [German] parents to teach me suitable phrases. The very next day I used the phrase ‘not too much’ or ‘just a little bit, please’ “. Examples could easily be multiplied.

Here is another type of bilingual approach, a “remote” approach as it were, which we have also frequently encountered: Mohammad from Syria, for instance, reports that in order to improve his German, he watches episodes from the detective Conan series in German, which he had once enjoyed as a child in Arabic. Others re-read the original Asterix comics which they first read in their mother tongue.

Is the direct method really nature’s method, as has so often been claimed? Is it more “direct” than the bilingual approach Sister Elisabeth, Mohammad and David used? We believe that these simple observations alone are the final blow for adherents of the monolingual principle. For beginners, at least, nature’s method is bilingual.

The theory-practice divide

It is self-evident that one cannot learn a language by constantly using another one. So the foreign language must become the working language of the classroom. On the other hand, a naturally acquired language, usually the mother tongue, is the bedrock on which any subsequent language learning must be built. So how can the cognitive potential of the mother tongue be tapped and existing competencies be exploited? Is that why teachers of foreign languages feel so caught in the middle of a methodological dilemma?

These seemingly conflicting demands could be the underlying reasons of the dislocation between what Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes advocate in terms of target language use and the practice seen in schools (Nisbett and Ross 1980; Johnson 1996; Borg 2003).

Lynch's (2015) study followed a group of Modern Languages teachers in training from their ITE year to the end of their first year of teaching as Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) in Scottish secondary schools. His findings revealed that the NQTs used considerably less target language during their NQT year and had changed their views on the target language substantially since their teacher training year.

If there is a 'judicious' amount of L1 that can be used in class, as is often advocated, then teachers need advice on this issue to stop L1 becoming the lingua franca of the classroom. Here, the controlled use of proven, well-defined bilingual techniques, old and new, as provided by Butzkamm & Caldwell (2009), could prevent the inconsiderate, haphazard and time-consuming use of the mother tongue which is the bane of so much language teaching.

Factors influencing teachers' approach

The main reasons the NQTs gave for the changes, were discipline, difficulty in teaching grammar and time pressure. Many teachers identified level of difficulty of what they are trying to introduce, explain or get across as being the main problem. When questioned on their approach in the final interviews, or why they did things in certain ways, the NQTs' responses indicated that they considered the most important thing is to make sure pupils

understand and that they could best do that in L1. One student mentioned that she did not have time to 'mess around' explaining in the target language.

A hard thing for ML teacher educators to admit is that maybe the teachers are right. After all, comprehension is the key to language acquisition. There may be simply times when a short explanation in L1 may help the lesson along. Teacher educators may need to revisit their thoughts on target language use and think more in terms of optimising use of the target language rather than maximising it.

Working together

Teacher educators may need to come together more than is currently happening with classroom teachers to share ideas and contributions, as advocated by McIntyre (1991) and Furlong et al, (2000) . Instead of remaining with the conflict of what teacher educators advocate in terms of L1/L2 use in the classroom and what teachers actually do in the classroom (and the associated guilt often expressed for doing something differently), both parties should come together to discuss, examine and research what works and come to an agreed understanding, which may be different from what is currently advocated. In this way, perhaps, a new approach could be co-constructed, which would inform future teacher education programmes, so that what is advocated in teacher education programmes is replicated in schools, or what is seen in schools is what is advocated in teacher education programmes. Teachers and teacher trainers alike must be aware of bilingual techniques such as the sandwich technique and mother tongue mirroring, or be shown other strategies that may help comprehension (pupil as interpreter, functional posters on classroom walls, helpsheets). Certainly, university teacher education programmes seem to have emphasised extensive L2 use in class over many years, although there have been arguments by a number of researchers for a systematic, well-aimed- use of L1 (Butzkamm 2003; Hammerly 1989; Cook 2001), From the research examining L2 use in schools (Franklin 1990; Meiring & Norman 2002), it is known that experienced classroom teachers find extensive use of L2 difficult.

Cook (2001, p. 414) lists a number of ways he considers L1 can be used positively in the classroom, including for classroom management. Like Butzkamm, Cook's stance is to use L1 in the L2 classroom in a planned way, as he sees positive benefits for the language learner

with this approach. Others whose studies lead them to similar views are Hammerly (1989) and Pachler and Field (2001), to name but a few who all support the inclusion of MT in the L2 learning process. Moreover, empirical studies on vocabulary learning such as Tian and Macaro (212), Lee & Macaro (2013) and Zhao & Macaro (2016) – again to name but a few - found a positive effect for a bilingual approach as compared to English-only explanations.

Conclusion

It goes without saying that the mother tongue (MT) mustn't become the lingua franca of the classroom. This is arguably the single biggest danger in foreign language teaching. But in a laudable effort to make teachers conduct classrooms in the foreign language, mainstream philosophy has thrown out the baby with the bathwater. The monolingual dogma became so entrenched that native English speakers went out in to the world and thought it quite all right to teach beginners without having the faintest knowledge of the MT of their pupils, with books not containing a word other than English. But as we have seen, L1 support is an immediate solution for various groups of learners, not a last resort. Admittedly, the evidence presented here is anecdotal, but its cumulative effect seems to us convincing. For many decades large parts of the teaching profession have refused to see the obvious. The best window into the logic of a foreign language is a naturally acquired language, usually the mother tongue. Bilingual techniques can de-foreignize the foreign, can make grammatical functions plain and thus make all the difference. The mother tongue – or another language previously acquired – can be made our most powerful ally. Advocacy for the use of L1 in the foreign languages classroom should not be seen as to replace L2, rather that a skilled use of L1 can be the very thing, the conversational lubricant that allows teachers to maximize their pupils' exposure to the foreign language and help them develop best the skills needed to communicate in the foreign language. "A pedagogy that is able to incorporate translation in this way need not sacrifice any of the things that are done in communicative approaches" (Pym 2018). In their state-of-the-art article „Own language use in language teaching and learning", authors G. Hall & G. Cook come to the conclusion: „The way is open for a major paradigm shift in language teaching and learning" (2012, p. 299).

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