Nineteenth-century discourses on translation in language teaching

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Abstract: Renewed attention to the role of translation in language teaching raises questions about the historical origins of anti-translation discourse among contemporary educationalists. The mainstream narrative sees the nineteenth century as being dominated by "grammar translation", after which the twentieth century received progressive enlightenment from immersion and communicative methods. A survey of the main textbooks nevertheless suggests that most methods in the nineteenth century actually mixed spoken practice in L2 with various forms of translation practice between L1 and L2, to the extent that a monochromatic "grammar translation" is a simplification invented *après coup* by its opponents. The arguments against translation were initially based on a Romantic ideology of natural acquisition, somehow assuming that all learners were young children, but were then inspired by the experience of immigrants, particularly in the United States, who reflected on their adult mode of immersion. By the end of the nineteenth century, vigorous commercialization of the immigrant experience, notably by Berlitz, contrasted with the more balanced approach of the Reform Movement, which was building on a European tradition where spoken communication and translation both found places in foreign-language teaching.

The past decade or so has seen renewed interest in the use of translation activities in foreign-language learning (see Malmkjær 1998, 2004; Cook 2010; Pym, Malmkjær and Gutiérrez 2013), accompanied by various surveys of what language teachers think about translation as a classroom activity (e.g. Altan 2006; Carreres 2006; Liao 2006; Boakye 2007; Kelly and Bruen 2014). Although the majority of these studies report that translation is being used in class, the general thrust confronts a strongly established orthodoxy that sees translation as being a labor-intensive, non-communicative activity that restricts fluency in L2 (e.g. Gatenby 1948/1967; Mackey 1953-5/1967; Morris 1957/1967, Lado 1964). The resulting ideological conflict involves complex claims and counter-claims, many of which could be resolved by careful definitions of what kind of "translation" is being referred to.

Overarching the tussles is a macro-narrative according to which translation belongs to a benighted past – usually the "grammar translation" practices of the nineteenth century –, while "communicative" methods are the achievement of an enlightened present – variously starting from the end of the nineteenth century or the early decades of the twentieth. We thus typically read that "reactions against grammar-translation approaches in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were generally based on the role of communication and the development of oral skills" (Jin and Cortazzi 2011: 561). Siefert (2013: 3-28) consequently has little trouble stringing together a list of language educationalists who discuss translation *only* with respect to the "grammar translation" methods of the past, while he devotes some 15 fascinating pages to the ways the evils of grammar translation have been mythologized by a series of twentieth-century

experts who, building on each other, never cite any of the nineteenth-century texts they are strangely intent on maligning.

In an attempt to check this narrative, here I turn to a few language-teaching textbooks of a longish nineteenth century (spilling over a decade or so at both ends). The aim is to see what the educators of the day actually said about translation, and how they integrated it into their teaching methods. I am especially looking at two main aspects: 1) what kind of translation is being used, and 2) who is being taught, and for what purpose. Failure to attend to these aspects can only feed into futile and acrimonious debate about *all* translation in relation to *all* language learning, as if both those terms had pure and opposed essences. History, in principle, knows little of such extreme oppositions.

My presentation here will nevertheless be in two parts, forcing an initial separation that will then be bridged in various ways. I will look at the methods that incorporated translation in one way or another; I will then consider methods that sought to exclude it. My initial attention is to the textbooks that had the greatest impact, as indicated through numerous re-edition and adaptations. I will nevertheless also venture into a few special cases that, although not decisive in their day, stand out in hindsight as being particularly gutsy.

Teaching with translation

Although translation was commonly in use for the learning of classical languages prior to the nineteenth century, the focus was mainly on the translation of phrases, as in the elaborate translation exercises recommended in Ascham (1570/1870), and on lexical items, as in the picture-book approach dating from Comenius (1658). The late eighteenth century nevertheless saw translation being used as part of an approach to the teaching of grammar. This is where we should look for the methodological origins of what would later be called "grammar translation".

Meidinger and translation for the learning of rules

The prime exemplar of the change is Johann Valentin Meidinger's *Praktische französische Grammatik* of 1783, which ran to some 37 editions by 1857 (Bleyhl 1999: 47) and spawned many imitations. Marketed in its sub-title as an "entirely new and very easy way to learn the basics in a short time" (newness and ease have not changed much as selling points over the centuries), it starts from the proposition that "learning from rules is the shortest and safest way to learn French" (1783/1799: 2). The writing of grammatical rules for language learning was in itself by no means new (Nebrija made similar claims when introducing his Spanish grammar in 1492). What was new in Meidinger's method was the use of *comparative* grammar in pedagogically graded lessons, going from simple to complex relations, with each step being checked by having the learner translate short texts, which also go from simple to complex. So we find pedagogical progression, comparative grammar, and translation being used for checking the acquisition of the grammar.

Importantly, translation is by no means the only learning activity envisaged in this method. In his preface, Meidinger explains that the class activity on each text should start from an *oral* question-and-answer routine between student and teacher, in the L2, to

ensure that the text has been understood. Once the text has thereby been grasped orally, "I read them the story word-for-word in German [L1], and they translate it into French [L2]" (1783/1799: ix). There is thus a double translation movement at work: the teacher renders the L2 text into spoken L1 as an initial translation, and the student then translates the spoken text into the previously seen written L2, which would be a "checking translation". There follows a revision phase based on the checking translation: "Should the learner make a mistake [in the written translation], one does not correct them but underlines the error in red ink and reminds them of the rules, so that they can correct it themselves" (1783/1799: viii).

Meidinger's sample texts are letters, aphorisms, and then longer literary texts, with each fragment followed by bilingual glossaries of matching phrases. The textbook became so popular in German that any well-known aphorism was called "a Meidinger", something that everyone had learned in school.

A version of Meidinger's method was applied to the learning of English in Johann Christian Fick's *Praktische englische Sprachlehre* (1793/1800) – Fick is sometimes erroneously credited with having discovered the method. The work offers a systematic survey of English phonetics and grammar, then translation exercises both into L1 and into L2, which comprise some 40 pages of the 200-page course. The translations are of short texts, which increase in length and complexity. Beneath each text is a short word-to-word glossary, in the style of a bilingual dictionary. The German-to-English section begins from Aesop and includes fragments of world literature; the English-to-German starts with short dialogues, then aphorisms, letters, poetry, and formal forms of address. As in Meidinger, the translations clearly involve texts rather than isolated phrases or sentences.

Prussian New Humanism and inductive grammar

Meidinger's use of translation technically predates the reforms of the Prussian education system that were promulgated under Wilhelm von Humboldt. The precepts of New Humanism were based on the formation (*Bildung*) of the autonomous individual. In language teaching, this involved an inductive approach to the learning of grammar, where the activities carried out by the students would lead them to the rules. At the same time, the ideal of *Bildung* meant building up German-language culture by drawing on other cultures, privileging the classical past, especially Greek. Translation was one of main ways in which this was to be done. The same moment that made von Humboldt and Schleiermacher key thinkers in translation theory thus also made them innovators in education reform and hermeneutics respectively.

The general impulse of New Humanism might explain why the existing translation-based methods were modified in several successful textbooks in the course of the early nineteenth century. Seidenstücker's *Elementarbuch zur Erlernung der französischen Sprache* (1811/1833) begins with the Romantic claim that he is following nature: "imitating, as closely as possible, the natural way in which children come to gain knowledge and use their mother tongue" (1811/1833: iii). Although this precept is ideologically almost the inverse of Meidinger's insistence on grammatical rules as offering a quick and sure path, it does not involve a lesser use of translation, just a change in order. Seidenstücker presents the learner with a bilingual glossary, a text, and translation exercises, *prior* to working on any formal grammar. This inductive approach

to the teaching of rules effectively makes translation part of the discovery process. The change significantly alters the nature of the texts to be translated: instead of longish, continuous texts, Seidenstücker presents the learner with disconnected sentences, designed to give clues about the grammatical rule to be discovered. For example:

> *Vous*, ihr, *avez*, habt, *livre*, Buch, *acheté*, gekauft
> Vous avez un bon père et une bonne mère. Avez-vous un livre? Le livre est bon.
> Nous avons acheté un bon livre. Le livre que vous avez acheté, est bon. […]
> (1811/1833: 2)

The first lines give the French words with their German equivalents, then the series of French sentences are to be read aloud and perhaps translated, mentally or otherwise (the instruction "translate" is presumably so obvious that it is not actually given). The first sentence uses the grammar points previously required; the following sentences incorporate the new words so as to illustrate new grammatical structures. And this is on page 2, well prior to any grammatical explanation. A bending of natural syntax in the interests of translational parallelism has been observed (Siefert 2013: 54-55), and the sentences are clearly far from any naturalistic embedding.

 Seidenstücker's French textbook went through many editions until the 1830s, when it met competition from Franz Ahn's *Praktischer Lehrgang zur schnellen und leichten Erlernung der französischen Sprache* (1834) – the title advertises the book as a practical, quick, and easy way to learn French, indeed an improved continuation of Seidenstücker, and with similar bending of L1 in the interests of parallel translations (Siefert 2013: 75). This was also enormously successful, running to 31 editions by 1847. In Ahn's third edition we nevertheless find a warning against the excessive use of translation as a teaching method: teachers and learners are urged to not to "tie their spirit to the dead letters of words and dissolve their individuality into one" (Ahn 1834/1847: iv; cf. Siefert 2013: 76).

 Carl Ploetz first published his *Elementarbuch der französischen Sprache* in 1848, and in later editions he presents the work as a further development of Seidenstücker. Ploetz's approach is initially inductive, like Seidenstücker's, although he inserts more grammatical explanations into many lessons, in the deductive manner of Meidinger: parallel initial translations, then the grammatical explanation, then the mostly disconnected sentences to be studied and translated, first from L2 to L1, then the other way around. In effect, Ploetz plays within the repertoire inherited from his predecessors. He does introduce several innovations designed to help students with their translations. First, in the French sentences, the words pertinent to the grammar point are put in italics:

> *Nos* soldats ont combattu contre *vos* ennemis. [*Our* soldiers have fought against *your* enemies.] (1848/1877: 13, Lesson 13, on possessive pronouns)

Second, the syntactic differences between French and German are marked as clues in the German sentences:

> Heute habe ich (Frz. ich habe) zwei Briefe dem Briefträger gegeben.

[Today have I (Fr. I have) given two letters to the postman.] (1848/1877: 26, Lesson 30)

And third, different word orders are also marked by inserted numbers, indicating the order in French:

Hat man nicht eine ²herrliche ¹Aussicht…?
[Doesn't one have a ²wonderful ¹view…?] (40, Lesson 41)

This pedagogical presentation, effectively embedding the grammar lesson into the translation task, serves to reveal syntactic differences rather than forge any illusion of a common language.

Finally, Ploetz breaks away from the disconnected sentences of the earlier inductive approaches and starts to insert short connected Meidinger-type dialogues after lesson 40, although the juxtaposition of the connected and the disconnected tends to read like Surrealist poetry. Here, for example, is my translation of the first French sentences for Lesson 26 (note that the 1877 edition followed Prussia's defeat of France in 1870, so there was a certain logic flowing through the composer's mind):

1. Long wars are a great misfortune for the peoples. 2. The Romans and the Carthaginians fought for a long time. 3. General Scipio commanded the Romans in their last war against the Carthaginians. 4. The English have a very large navy. 5. Saarlouis is a small Prussian fortress [named after Louis XIV of France]. 6. Our general has shown great generosity to our enemies. 7. You have very bad taste, my friend. 8. These fighters are very-generous. 9. This table is very-long.

The disconnected phrases seem to enter as an all too convenient denial of any intention to mention the war.

Ollendorff extends the translation method to France and the United States

The French did, however, adapt virtually the same method to the learning of German, albeit with modifications. H. G. Ollendorff's *Nouvelle méthode pour apprendre à lire, à écrire et à parler une langue en six mois, appliquée à l'allemand* (1836/1838) begins from a complaint that Meidinger's method promotes artificial phrases (the criticism does seem legitimate) and that it thereby restricts "natural" communication between the teacher and the student. Ollendorff says he is going to present sentences that learners might actually want to use, and he seeks to base his method on interaction around examples, once again invoking Romantic nativism: "I was not guided by arbitrary laws, but by the manner in which the child begins to learn his mother tongue" (1846: vii). So Ollendorff's method is new, quick, and natural, as they all claim in this age. But then, in the English-language version for learning French, these exemplary dialogues begin with: "Have you the bread? – Yes, Sir, I have the bread. – Have you your bread? – Yes, I have my bread", and so on (1846: 10), which would certainly be a strange way for any child to begin learning L1 – the nature of this "naturalness" is far from clear. The learner is also required to render the sentences into L2, which no doubt explains why the L1 English has

itself once again been denaturalized in order to fit French syntax (avoiding "Do you have the bread?" or "Have you got the bread?", for example). An American textbook for learning French, written by one H. G. Sanders to prepare younger students for the Ollendorff method, is rather clearer about what "naturalness" actually involves: "Young persons will more readily follow an example than a rule" (Sanders 1848: 4) – translation is once again being used inductively, in order to lead to grammar, and the syntax is thus denaturalized or at least controlled for that purpose. As in Ollendorff, Sanders' examples consistently use translation as an initial meaning-giving activity, presenting French words or sentences with their English counterparts sitting next to them, and the exercises are then to translate those same words and phrases first into French and then back into English. Thanks in part to Sanders' version of Ollendorff, the originally German-language method reached the United States, where it was then known (and later criticized) as the "Prussian method".

Marcel proclaims "natural" written translation

Partly like Ollendorff, the French language teacher Claude Marcel radically opposed the "grammar and dictionary" method, which he held to be "in direct opposition to nature" (1853: 93). Marcel nevertheless devised an ingenious argument to make translation akin to what he assumed was the natural acquisition process. Importantly, he argued that foreign languages should only be taught at the *advanced* stages of education, since the young mind first had to learn how to think in L1. Learning an L2 then works, for Marcel, from books, from the *written* language forms, the meaning of which is given not by situational context (as in L1 acquisition) but by translation:

> The native expressions addressed to [the child learning L1] are always accompanied by tones, looks, and gestures, which explain them at once. The translation attached to the text [by the advanced learner of L2] interprets the foreign words at once, just as the language of action interprets the native [language]. […] By means of these explanations, practice soon associates the foreign words with the native words in the mind of the learner, so that a recurrence of the former will readily recall the latter; and thus will the power of comprehending the written language be rapidly acquired. (1853: 93; cf. 1867/1869: 23)

Translation thus somehow parallels "natural" language acquisition, as a kind of second nature: "There is a complete analogy between these two modes of proceeding; translation interprets the foreign idiom, just as the language of action interprets the national idiom" (1869: 16). In fact, Marcel argues that translation is *superior* to L1 learning, since the meaning is given immediately – the L2 "ought, therefore, be understood by the learner in less time than the native language by the child" (1853: 93).

Although not influential in his day, Marcel has been read with attention more than a century after his works were published. He wrote with considerable clarity, in English, about the pedagogical order of the skills to be learned. Marcel assumes that L1 acquisition passes inductively through the following stages: understanding speech, speaking, understanding writing, then writing (1867/1869: 11, 14). In L2 acquisition, on the other hand, the assumed order is *reading*, hearing, speaking, and writing (1867/1869:

22) – the learner starts from the book. In this way, Marcel limits the advantages of his initial meaning-giving translations explicitly to reading (the first phase), then includes checking "double translation" exercises in his section on writing. The use of translation thus finds a well-demarcated place in a method that is free to do much else as well.

In this proposed "Rational Method" (1880: 14), Marcel is not above envisaging a crude commercial virtue in his use of matching pairs: "these reciprocal translations may thus serve both peoples to learn each other's language" (my translation) – the one text might serve two markets. Not surprisingly, the matching equivalents are explicitly contrived, once again, by starting from structures shared by the two languages and bending natural syntax where possible, thus openly "sacrificing idiomatic purity of style" (1880: 14). Yet Marcel at the same time is careful to caution against excessive reliance on parallel meaning-giving translations: the learner "should not be too hasty in applying [L2 structures] to the native words. If he makes use of an interlineal translation, he ought to keep it covered, look at it only after having endeavoured to translate independently of that assistance" (1853: 93). Marcel also sees a definite advantage in having L2 expressions translated in different ways in different situations: "If the same words are, in the explanation, translated differently according to their various acceptations, [the student] will, from the definite meaning they bear in each particular instance, form a clearer conception of their true and varied import, than if he had recourse to a dictionary" (1853: 93). Here it is clear that literal translation has become context-sensitive, and that its justification is found in the way it stimulates thought in the learner. Commercial benefits were clearly not the whole story.

As noted, when separating the four language skills, Marcel locates where and when certain types of translation are best used. Further, translation *into* L2 is not required of the beginner (1867/1869: vi), and all translation is to be phased out at advanced stages of reading:

> Indirect reading, that by which the idea is apprehended through the medium of the mother-tongue, that is, *translation*, is only an introduction to direct reading. At an advanced stage of the study, translation becomes an obstacle to the understanding of the language, for it is not always possible. (1867/1869: 47)

Translation thus operates as what we these days call "scaffolding", to be removed once competence has been constructed.

A translation-based tradition?

In summary, we find that translation takes on various distinct pedagogical roles in these methods: initial meaning-giving, checking on acquisition in L1 and L2, and underscoring grammatical differences, with little attention to translation as a full-blown activity in its own right. In these texts, translation *serves* the learning process; it is in itself a learning process that then somehow produces good translators.

As a consequence of this, translation is often circumscribed as just one of several activities to be used in class. Line up Meidinger, Fick, Seidenstücker, Ahn, Ploez, Ollendorff and Marcel (who is not normally placed in this kind of list), and you find a series of rather flexible ideas: 1) in most cases translation is to be used alongside other

methods, especially initial spoken interaction, 2) translation activities can be adapted to suit the criteria of pedagogical progression, ostensibly mapped out by grammatical points that go from simple to complex, 3) the relation between translation and grammar can be inductive, deductive, or a mixture of both, although the historical tendency was toward an inductive approach, and 4) L2 acquisition involves a "second nature", which is quite unlike L1 acquisition – this last point is clearest in Marcel, but all along the line the textbooks were concocting a very forced kind of naturalness, bending language to suit specifically pedagogical purposes.

All these writers were working in or for secondary schools (*lycées*, *Gymnasien*); they were concerned with training learners above the age of 12 or so, whereas the initial translations in something like Comenius's picture-book approach in the seventeenth century were generally intended for learners below that age. As such, all these methods lean heavily on writing, and on learning the written language, even when they ideologically claim to be following the way infants learn spoken language.

Remarkably, this century-spanning discourse makes no substantial reference to formal linguistics or any of its discoveries (notably in the historical linguistics of Indo-European and its sound shifts) – the extended historicity that Foucault (1966) attached to the nineteenth-century episteme somehow did not touch them. Instead, these writers follow the epistemic shift from the grammar rules of Enlightenment reason (Meidinger cites Voltaire) to Romantic development theory (notably Rousseau) and New Humanist *Bildung*, which maps well enough onto the shift from deductive to inductive presentations of grammar. The various uses of translation did not contradict their age.

Teaching without translation

Although the nineteenth century is not infrequently described as a period of translation-based teaching, there was prolonged reasoned dissent from the translation approach, dating from at least the 1820s. This opposition grew from some of the underlying contradictions between the spoken language privileged by Romantic development and the written language important to Humanist *Bildung*, although this was never a clear confrontation until overtly commercial criteria entered the fray.

Pestalozzi and Roth seek natural non-translation

When Marcel argued that an L2 should not be taught to children younger than about 12, his idea actually harked back to Rousseau, whose *Émile* (1762) affirms that clear ideas are naturally formed in L1 only, so there is no point in disturbing that formation with any L2: "you may give children as many synonyms as you please; you will change the words, not the language; they will never know any but one [language]" (Rousseau 1762/1979: 109).

Rousseau's ideology of the natural subject growing up in a national language fed into language education via other routes as well. One of them was in Rousseau's native Switzerland, where his influence on the educationalist Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi grew into a full-fledged Romantic approach to language teaching. Pestalozzi insisted on teaching language as an integral part of all other skills, thus involving the complete person who was learning with "head, hand, and heart". He gave special attention to what

he assumed to be natural progression: "by the gradual progress of lessons from sound to word, from word to speech, to attain to the formation of clear idea" (1801/1894: 71). His conversation-based method sought to "give the child the advantages of forming speech, in exactly the same gradual way in which Nature gave it to the human race" (1801/1894: 71). Pestalozzi's main application of this psychological progression was in teaching young children, especially the poor, to read – the major and most noble challenge facing democratic modernity. Later in his career, at his school in Yverdon, Switzerland, Pestalozzi sought to have this method applied to the teaching of classical languages to older children. It seems, however, that the teaching of a dead language could not be done by just talking about immediate objects: Pestalozzi's Latin teacher Stern began from simple spoken utterances and moved to more complex structures, but he also gave grammatical overviews and used back-translations (Roth 1984: 182). Thus, even within a radically naturalistic spoken-language approach, we find some of the methods being drawn from Prussian New Humanism, which similarly sought to engage the student in the inductive discovery of grammar.

From January 1819 to April 1820, Pestalozzi was joined in Yverdon by the Transylvanian preacher and Latinist Stephan Ludwig Roth. Roth later wrote *Der Sprachunterricht* (1820-21) based on this experience – the manuscript is reported as being translated into French in Yverdon in 1821 (Horlacher and Tröler 2015: 22; Roth 1984) but would not be published in German until 1927. Roth's book thus has all the chances of being the first major treatise on the use of a natural, communicative approach in the teaching of foreign languages, if and when he was applying Pestalozzi's original method. So was the communicative approach actually born in the 1820s?

In effect, Roth insists that spoken practice should precede grammar, since grammar perniciously separates meaning from form (1927/1970: 80, 153). In some parts of his treatise, though, the primacy of spoken language seems to become the primacy of spoken *L1* only, since language skills are presumed to be developed there and then transferred to L2 (1927/1970: 100, 106-107), as in Rousseau. Roth's discussion of this implies that both L1 and L2 are being used in the classroom. Further, says, Roth, since there is no Latin-speaking community in which learners can grow up, the teaching of Latin cannot rely on immersion and must thus have recourse to classical *written* texts (1927/1970: 135). Later in the treatise one finds explicit *criticisms* of Pestalozzi's excessive exclusion of grammar, of his attempt to teach classical languages as if they were modern languages, and of the tendency of Pestalozzi's teachers to make students recite phrases from classical authors and learn by them heart, rather than base grammar on induction from repeated practice (Roth 1927/1970: 153-157). On the specific issue of whether translation should be used as a teaching method, Roth is far from clear. In some sections he argues *against* constant reference to L1, since this prevents the learner from thinking in L2 (1927/1970: 157-160). But then, in his recommended sequence of tasks ("Kursus"), he proposes studying the lexis, the phrases, and then reading the L2 text long with frequent explanations, to be completed by a final quick reading of the whole text again (1927/1970: 143). It is not clear what language these "explanations" are in, but they might be in L1.

Such suspicions could be supported by peripheral evidence. Roth's letters of this period indicate that translation did indeed remain part of his personal method. In a letter of April 1820 Roth tells his father that he himself is learning French with the help of an

L1 speaker of French: the two communicate through their common knowledge of Latin, *translating* Tacitus into French in the morning, then following grammar lessons in the afternoon (in Gräser 1852: 90). In a letter dated May 1820 Roth further opines that traditional language exercises bring discipline and can be combined with Pestalozzi's insistence on natural psychological progression: "Neither of these methods excludes the other" (in Gräser 1852: 91).

If Pestalozzi instigated a radically new approach to language teaching, it would seem to have remained without radical effect on the teaching of *foreign* languages. Greater impetus would come not from a Romanticism of natural acquisition, but from actual physical movements between countries.

Gouin goes to Germany

Apparently independently of Pestalozzi and Roth, in 1852 the French Latinist François Gouin began working on a teaching method that radically excluded translation. In his *Essai sur une réforme des méthodes d'enseignement* (1880), Gouin gives a colorful account of how, having travelled to Germany, he tried to learn German by using the available methods for classical languages, all of which failed miserably – apparently he sought no human teacher, trying instead to do everything from one book after another (which might account for his repeated failures). Among much else, he tried Ollendorff, Ploez, and "reading-translation by the aid of the dictionary" (1880/1894: 15), finding that a week of this constant translating led nowhere:

> I had hardly interpreted the meaning of eight pages, and the ninth did not promise to be less obscure or less laborious than the preceding. […] I dared to question the efficacy of the classical methods of the university. Translation might be suitable for learning Latin and Greek, but not for living languages. (1880/1894: 16; English translation by Howard Swan and Victor Bétis, modified)

No explanation is offered as to why there should be a difference between classical and modern languages, but the final evaluation is nevertheless resounding: "Translation is not merely a slow and painful process, but it leads to nothing and cannot lead to anything" (1880/1894: 17).

Then came communicative epiphany, destined to become a trope of the genre. Returning to France, Gouin by chance witnessed how his three-year-old nephew was learning French by repeating over and over the actions he had carried out, emphasizing the verb: "It was during the course of this operation, repeated again and again without ceasing, 'repeated aloud,' that a flash of light suddenly shot across my mind, and I softly exclaimed to myself, 'I have found it! Now I understand!'" (1880/1894: 38). From this moment of enlightenment, Gouin understands the importance of speech: "The organ of language – ask the little child – is not the eye; it is the ear (1880/1894: 32-33).

Gouin's method is then based on carefully concocted and ordered "series" of sentences, connecting a result with a logical set of actions. Here is an example:

> The maid chops a log of wood.
> The maid goes and seeks her hatchet.

the maid takes a log of wood.
the maid draws near to the chopping-block,
the maid kneels down near this block,
the maid places the log of wood upon this block. (1880/1894: 69)

From this series (close to students' authentic experience?) are separated the verbs and the various names for the objects involved. Students have to repeat and memorize the sentences, then use them in a dialogue with the teacher, who basically asks "And what do you [or did she] do next?" (1880/1894: 160). Then the student writes down the sentences, and finally writes them out again from memory. Gouin seems quite proud that, thanks to his method, the teacher can safely leave the classroom while the students are doing the writing activities, so that the one teacher can actually teach three classes at the same time (which implies that the writing takes up two-thirds of the students' time) – one imagines the teacher walking between three interconnected classrooms, as in a production line *avant la lettre*. Grammar is taught orally, then written down. Gouin claims that he can teach "universal grammar", common to all the (European) languages involved. But at the points where the grammars do not coincide, he has a logical problem: how can comparative grammar be taught without translation? Answer: "the translation of the act in the time takes place directly, without any intermediary – that is to say, by 'intuition'" (1880/1894: 228). What this means is anyone's guess, but it might suggest implicit recognition of students' mental translation, perhaps working from a common universal experience.

Although Gouin radically challenged the dominant use of grammars, of dictionaries, and of translation, he remained a strangely marginal figure. Commercial success was to come not from teachers working in three classes at once, but from quite another source of inspiration. While some Europeans were looking at children and strangely supposing that we all learn like children, others were considering linguistic immersion of a rather different kind.

Heness, Sauveur and the experience of the immigrant

The German Gottlieb Heness migrated to the United States in 1841 and started teaching German. In explaining his method in *Der Leitfaden für den Unterricht in der deutschen Sprache, ohne Sprachlehre und Wörterbuch* (Introduction to teaching in the German language, without a language class or dictionary) (1867) Heness interestingly starts from something *between* L1 and L2 acquisition, as normally understood. He explains that children in southern Germany are brought up speaking local dialects, then go to school to learn High German, thus learning an L1.5, or thereabouts. They do this through what Heness terms "object-teaching", explicitly adapted from Pestalozzi, which involves using a psychologically ordered sequence of activities involving all the senses. Heness argues that the same kind of learning can be brought about when teaching German to speakers of English: "English is nearly [sic] related to German, and […] this object-teaching could be made of service in teaching German, *or in fact any language*" (1867/1884: 4-5; italics mine). This might be a first moment of slippage in the argument: the method can clearly proceed from the many points that German and English have in common (German might

be an L1.8 or so here), but how can the same logic possibly be applied to non-cognate languages?

Having established himself in New Haven, Connecticut, Heness invited the sons of Yale professors to be his students and he opened a German-language school in 1866. Two years later he employed the Frenchman Lambert Sauveur to teach French by using the same method, and in 1871 the two were working in their new school in Boston. Sauveur then went on to produce his own version of the method, which similarly "teaches language without grammar or dictionary; it speaks French from the first hour, and does not pronounce one word of English" (Sauveur 1874: 6). In both Heness and Sauveur, the course starts by teaching names for the fingers of the hand (Heness 1867/1884: 23; Sauveur 1874: 11-13), which is perhaps the most immediate object in front of learners in the classroom, even if would not normally be the vocabulary everyone is most anxious to learn (the maid chopping wood might have been more stimulating). It then moves from objects or pictures to intensive question-and-answer routines, with much repetition, and later to the memorization of poems (cf. Heness 1867/1884: 16-17). Although Sauveur's textbook leans heavily on Heness in many respects (as can be seen in the shared lesson on the fingers), he presents his method as being "new and original" (1874: 6), even as he claims it was actually discovered by Montaigne some three centuries previously (ibid.) – the origins were suitably French, with no mention of Heness. Sauveur is sometimes cited as a discoverer of immersion methods, while Heness is more frequently forgotten.

In contradistinction to the "Prussian" method, Heness and Sauveur designed their courses for students whose first aim was to *speak* the foreign language, not for those who only wanted to read. Heness claims that the student can *speak* fluently in 36 weeks, "a shorter time than any other method of study" (1867/1884: 7). But we should take careful note of how the method worked: this language learning was for *four hours a day, five days a week*; here we are talking about immersion in a German-speaking school; this is by no means an affair of after-hours crash courses for adults in a hurry. Tellingly, Heness explicitly uses his own immersion experience as an immigrant to claim that speaking is the basis of all else: "After learning to speak [English], the rest [the other language skills] came easily" (1867/1884: 9):

> All our immigrants, unable or unwilling to pay for instruction by grammar and dictionary, are learning English by Mother Eve's method; and all of them finish their course within a year or two with remarkable success, far outstripping those who choose a roundabout way. (1867/1884: 9)

This would be a second moment of slippage: learning L1 (from "Mother Eve") is surely not quite the same thing as the immigrant's or travelling student's immersion in L2 (or even L1.8), since the latter requires investment in a voyage. Heness and Sauveur, as immigrants (along with the critical Marcel, who had learned his English when in Ireland), were speaking from the experience of the displaced person. Their courses were imitating not the nature of the infant, but immersion abroad.

Heness actually recognizes this slippage when admitting that his method is fundamentally for *young* children, for whom the teacher should be like a parent. Why? Because "it is very difficult for the adult to understand and speak without translating"

(1867/1884: 10). And translation, including mental translation, is precisely the thing to be avoided, along with a dependence on rules.

Can grammar and translation really be ignored so easily? Hardly, if they help when needed. Heness allows that "grammar serves to correct mistakes, and the dictionary only assists in the recovery of words that cannot be recalled without it" (1867/1884: 11) – all of which is tautologically clear. Then, after the thirteenth week, comparative grammar is indeed taught in Heness's method, and it actually becomes dominant in the third term. Surely comparative grammar involves some kind of translation? It could be that this laudable grounding in speech, explicitly for young learners, might yet become something vaguely familiar to the Prussian method at the advanced secondary level.

One notes here the clear association of translation activities (either ordained or involuntary) with the use of writing. This should not be a necessary relation, since the kind of translation we are talking about can be as much spoken as written. The relation, I suspect, is something like guilt by association. Since learners above the age of 12 theoretically have their L1 firmly set in place and are thus more likely to refer to it in order to learn L2, they are more apt to use translation. It just so happens that since those are also the learners who have acquired writing skills, they are more given to using the written medium in their learning activities. One could also argue, of course, that writing actively and artificially separates the oral L1 and L2 skills. Be that as it may, the fact remains that the most ardent proponents of anti-translation were teaching young children and using spoken language (in the Rousseau model), while traces of translation enter when teaching older students who use writing (as in the *Bildung* model).

There is one further problem in Heness and Sauveur. In announcing a method that is so natural that everyone could theoretically use it for free, why should anyone then pay for language courses? Perhaps because it is safer than sending children abroad, or cheaper? And what is to be done with *adult* learners, who apparently cannot help but translate? These marketing aspects were never really worked out by Heness. They awaited a more entrepreneurial teacher, who also set up a school in New England.

Berlitz and the miracles of marketing

The American Maximilian Berlitz, an immigrant of German Jewish origins, opened his first language school in Rhode Island in 1878 and explained his method in a series of publications in the 1880s. As in Heness and Sauveur, use of L1 was excluded, and with it disappeared translation as well. Berlitz nevertheless claimed to have discovered the method all by himself, as the result of a happy accident. Apparently he initially employed a French teacher without knowing that the teacher did not know English; then he discovered that the students made particularly rapid progress with that teacher – the moment of epiphany was perhaps not as instantaneous as Gouin's, but it did enable Berlitz to claim originality, like almost everyone else.

Similarly like almost everyone else, Berlitz presents his method as "an imitation of the process followed by nature in teaching a child its mother tongue" (1888: 1). Later editions nevertheless add that this nature is *adapted* "to the different stages of mental maturity reached by a youth or an adult" (1888/1916: 3). So we are basically talking about secondary-level and adult education, at the level where Heness had noted that

learners cannot help but use translation. Berlitz, however, also makes an appeal to the "second nature" known by the immigrant:

> Instruction by the Berlitz method, is to the student what the sojourn in a foreign land is to a traveller. He hears and speaks on the language he wishes to learn, as if he were in a foreign country. He has however the advantage that the language has been methodologically and systematically arranged for him. (1888/1916: 4)

So the thing to be sold, in addition to the saved travel expenses, is the method itself as a highly structured process of immersion, excluding L1. The principles of Berlitz's method are: 1) "Teaching of the Concrete by Object Lessons" (as in Pestolazzi, Heness, Sauveur, perhaps Gouin), 2) "Teaching of the Abstract by the Association of Ideas" (as in Gouin), and 3) Teaching of Grammar by Examples and Ocular Demonstration (as in almost everyone since Seidenstücker). In practice, Berlitz's system is a clearly ordered sequence of object-based dialogues – as in Pestalozzi, Gouin, Heness and Sauveur – that starts from objects in the classroom, then colors, positions, numbers, and so on, with possible accompaniment by large wall pictures showing the objects mentioned – as in Comenius.

Berlitz's position with respect to translation was nothing if not clear: "In the Berlitz Method, translation as a means of acquiring a foreign language is entirely abandoned" (1888/1916: 3). Berlitz gives three reasons for disliking translation:

1. In all translation methods, most of the time is taken up by explanations in the student's mother tongue […]
2. He who studies a foreign language by means of translation, neither gets hold of its spirit nor becomes accustomed to think in it; on the contrary, he has a tendency to base all he says upon what he would say in his mother tongue, and he cannot prevent his vernacular from invading the foreign idiom, thereby rendering the latter unintelligible or, at least, incorrect.
3. A knowledge of a foreign tongue, acquired by means of translation, is necessarily defective and incomplete; for there is by no means for every word of one language, the exact equivalent in the other. Furthermore, the ideas conveyed by an expression in one language, are frequently not the same as those conveyed by the same words in the other. (1888/1916: 3-4)

The translation concept here is clearly restricted to exact word-for-word matching, of the kind offered in initial prompts in previous methods. Of course, if that were the only kind of translation involved, there would be nothing further to explain – so what could be the time-consuming explanations of Berlitz's first complaint?

The nineteenth-century commercial argument against translation

Whatever his inherent contradictions and limited conceptualization, the first of Berlitz's three reasons was certainly the most important for commercial success, and probably still is. Berlitz claimed that his students learn "with little trouble and in a comparatively short time to speak the foreign language fluently, whilst the student at school, in spite of his *wearisome work with grammar and translation exercises*, vainly strives for years to

obtain the same result" (1888/1916: 4, italics mine). Such claims could have been an invitation to empirical comparisons of methods, had there been a research culture interested in such matters. Instead, the main calculation of efficiency could equally be financial: since Berlitz was running forty-five schools by 1916, teaching many different languages in many different countries, there was an obvious economic advantage to a method that required only one pedagogy for all, and just one textbook per L2 (rather than a separate textbook for each L1/L2 combination). The exclusion of translation simplified things considerably, providing an economic argument that again still retains its force.

These nineteenth-century arguments for and against translation, with the "against" team clearly emerging victorious in the commercial field in the last decades of the nineteenth century in the United States, did not fundamentally alter in the twentieth century. Through a further series of miraculous epiphanies, the various immersion and communicative theories have shunned the use of L1, and translation with it. In doing so, they have endlessly repeated the strategy of *reductio ad unam* that worked so well for Berlitz, on at least three levels: 1) all L2 language learning should imitate that of the L1 (as if the use of writing changed nothing); 2) the first aim of all learners is to *speak* L2 (as if the other skills were never aims as well); and 3) all translation is word-for-word initial translation (as if translation never illustrated *differences* between languages, as if it did not involve transformations, and as if it were never a desirable skill in itself). Underlying these is the precarious assumption that L1 and L2 are always *separate* systems, between which there should be no interference (as if there were no cognate languages, diglossic teaching situations, multilingual communities, or dynamic language change).

Such complex issues might require some linguistics. Commercial success did not.

Enter some reforming phoneticians

What the Americans called the "Prussian" method came to be known as "grammar translation", although that term seems never to have been used by the writers themselves. It was very probably coined by later critics, starting from Wilhelm Viëtor's 1882 treatise *Der Sprachunterricht muß umkehren! Ein Beitrag zur Überburdungsfrage* (Language teaching must be turned around! A contribution to the question of overburdening). Viëtor's third edition refers to an established "grammaticizing-translating" ("grammatisierend-übersetzenden") practice or method (1882/1905: 47, 49; cf. Siefert 2013: 141), which he sees as preventing the learner from thinking in L2. In the early twentieth century, the term "grammar translation" was then used loosely to refer to any method that taught grammar and translation, often with the erroneous assumption that this is all that the method set out to do (Siefert 2013: 1-30).

Viëtor, however, was not against translation as such. Its limited use into L1 was actually part of his own recommended method (1882/1905: 32, 49). His main complaint, as his title suggests, was that learners were being overburdened with attempts to teach them *all* language skills, *entire* grammars, and a pedagogical use of translation into L2 that is not only too difficult (1882/1905: 49, 50) but also, he implies, ignores the "art" ("Kunst") of translating texts into the foreign language, which he thought did not belong in the classroom anyway (1882/1905: 33, 48). To be sure, Viëtor's critique was not on behalf of translators: he was speaking as a university professor, a linguist, more especially a phonetician whose professional passion was to get learners to speak. He did

nevertheless find a specific place for translation in the process of learning and using a foreign language.

The debate stirred by Viëtor's arguments in Europe ran independently of the new language schools in the United States. His position was broadly supported by Felix Francke's pamphlet on the psychology of language learning (1884/1890: 24-27), where the perceived aim is for the learner to associate the L2 utterance directly with the concept or action, rather than go from L2 to L1 and then to the concept or action (Francke's diagrams would become the basis for what was later called the Direct Method). Viëtor's arguments were picked up by the English phonetician Henry Sweet in 1884, notably in his Presidential address to the Philological Society, and they then became part of a concerted intervention by university phoneticians into the field of language acquisition: Sweet in England, Otto Jespersen in Denmark, and Paul Passy in France, whose group founded the International Phonetic Association in Paris in 1886. Together with Viëtor, these heavyweights became what is known as the Reform Movement (Howatt and Smith 2002).

Even though their insistence on giving speech pride of place chimed in with the L2-only methods of the American language schools, the Reform phoneticians were not entirely against translation. Like Viëtor, they found translation suitable in the right place and time. Passy actually argued *against* Berlitz's banishment of L1, allowing that translations into L1 and L2 could be useful exercises where advanced students can use them to explore the differences between language systems, and that, at beginner levels, translations could be useful checks on acquisition if and when they saved time:

> Much as I advise reading and explaining in the foreign language […] I cannot renounce all translation. Of course, the teacher comes across passages for which one can say, without hesitation, that translation is useless; but for other passages, for many others, it is necessary to translate, since there are details, nuances, that the learners honestly believe they understand but they do not. These translations should be spoken and should come after the explanations, as an accessory; they operate as checks. […] It goes without saying, I hope, that I absolutely reject word-for-word translation. (1899/1903: 42-43)

Passy thus implicitly recognizes several kinds of translation: initial word-for-word (which he rejects), explanatory *spoken* checking into both L1 and L2 (which he accepts), and full (transformational) translation for advanced students, presumably written. This recognition that translation can be used as an active part of a spoken method, and that it need not be word for word, effectively overcame at least one of the ideological impasses of the late nineteenth century.

Sweet, in his *Practical Study* (1899), was even more open to translation, perhaps because of his experience as a university teacher of Old English. He saw translation as enabling a "full understanding" of the L2, in a process that could be divided into several stages:

> In the first stage translation is used only as a means of conveying information to the learner: we translate the foreign words and phrases into our language simply because this is the most convenient and at the same time the most efficient guide to

their meaning. In the second stage translation is reduced to a minimum, the meaning being gathered mainly from the context with, perhaps, occasional explanations in the foreign language itself. In the third stage the divergences between the two languages will be brought face to face by means of free idiomatic translation. To these we may perhaps add a fourth stage, in which the student has so complete and methodical a knowledge of the relations between his own and the foreign language that he can translate from the one to the other with ease and accuracy. (Sweet 1899: 202)

The first stage here would be what I have previously called "initial" or "meaning-giving" translation, justifiable if and when it proves efficient – useful at the beginning, but later, Sweet suggests, occupying second place to the L2 texts, so that the learner will not be tempted to rely on translations (1899: 134). The second stage is part of what Sweet sees as contextual "explanation" in L1 and L2. The third stage is then the use of translation to highlight *differences* between the languages, and here the reference to "free idiomatic translation" is key: we are approaching a fuller concept of what translation can do, perhaps involving a range of possible solutions, although its function here is ultimately to check on acquisition, with exercises going into both L1 and L2 (1899: 207). And in the fourth stage, as recognized in Passy, translation in an *application* of the skills acquired.

Jespersen's *How to Teach a Foreign Language* (1901/1904), on the other hand, accords a far greater role to inductive work on grammar. It thereby severely limits the role of translation, especially as a way of evaluating language skills. Jespersen is particularly irked by the use of translation in final exams, since the ability to translate is not generally the aim of L2 learning: "while there is […] a constantly increasing number of people who need to express their thoughts in a foreign language, there are really very few who will ever have any occasion to exercise skill in translation" (1901/1904: 53). This implicitly recognizes that translation can at least be an aim for a minority, but we are told little about that separate path. Jespersen nevertheless begrudgingly admits that "there are many words where an English translation gives the information required more quickly and more clearly than it could be given in a long explanation in the foreign language" (1901/1904: 70-71), and so translation can be allowed in the interests of simple efficiency. Even then, explanations in L2 are to be preferred when possible, since they "amuse the pupils because they get more intellectual work out of them than out of translations, which are always given to them gratis" (1901/1904: 71). Not surprisingly, Jespersen adopts a particularly myopic sense of translation, seen as one-to-one pairing that hides the specificity of L2 and embraces no explanatory elements. Taking the example of the many ways of rendering the English pronoun "it" in German (according to gender and case), he regrets that the learner who relies on any one translation will apparently fail to see those differences (1901/1904: 135). This seems to be arguing against a benighted pedagogy that offers the learner nothing but the bluntest of initial translations, as if there had never been any grammar taught in the nineteenth century, and as if there had been no more creative uses of translation. In sum, Jespersen falls more on the side of the growing pedagogical bias against the use of translation.

Although the Reform Movement is sometimes presumed to have put an end to the nineteenth-century reliance on translation, what we find in Viëtor, Passy, and Sweet is actually a set of astute correctives to previous methodologies. Viëtor was no doubt

justified when opposing pedagogies that tried to do too much; Passy was insightful in praising the virtues of creative spoken translation activities; and Sweet gave what is possibly the most complete nineteenth-century typologies of the ways translation can be used in the language class. Despite Jespersen's reservations, this was hardly the rock on which some twentieth-century ideologies of immersion and communicative methods could base their exclusion of all translation.

There, too, the traditional narrative falters.

In summary

If at this point we look back at the various nineteenth-century discourses, it seems clear that only in a few cases was translation held up as the *only* teaching method: translation was mostly to be used alongside spoken activities, visual or situational supports, carefully graded exercises and, from Prussian New Humanism, inductive grammar. On the other hand, the radical *exclusion* of translation would seem to date from the immigrant experience in the United States, beginning from Heness's immersion teaching and finding its international market through Berlitz.

The various pedagogical uses of translation were more or less identified in the textbooks, with the clearest typology being produced by Sweet (1899). There seems to have been no particular theory of translation at work (just as there was no particular linguistics): no translation theorists are cited by the language teachers, although some non-stated ideological connections could be made between Prussian New Humanism and the theoretical attention that von Humboldt and Schleiermacher paid to translation. If there was a typology of translation activities, it grew and evolved from practice.

At the risk of imposing a simplification on that practice, I might summarize the uses of translation as follows:

1. Initial meaning-giving translation, usually at word or phrase level, often in situations where it is assumed the student is engaging in mental translation anyway.
2. Literalist translation, in which an L2 structure is presented as an extension of L1, often involving forced or restricted uses of L1 syntax. This is sometimes based on the Romantic supposition that language skills are first acquired in L1.
3. Contrastive translation, where L1 and L2 are compared in order to illustrate their differences, using translations that are either rigorously non-literal or so literal as to be markedly non-standard. Here translation is a tool in the service of comparative grammar.
4. Checking translation, in either direction, where translation is used as a check on prior acquisition.
5. Creative, communicative translation, where translation is an *application* of the skills acquired, rather than a means of acquisition, and is placed beyond the grammar-acquisition stage.

Criticisms of nineteenth-century translation activities usually focus, with reason, on the pedagogical traps of "literalist translation" (although the "natural" dialogues of the period were probably just as contrived) and the excesses of "checking translation" (especially

when translation is the basis of exams and thus effectively becomes the measure of all language acquisition). Yet the other uses were also present. They deserve to be recognized and further explored.

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