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A Paradigm Shift in Foreign Language Teaching

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Connect. Only connect. (E. M. Forster)

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In memory of C. J. Dodson, an educator ahead of his time

Contents

Foreword

> Finally, the monolingual principle, the unique contribution of the twentieth century to classroom language teaching, remains the bedrock notion from which the others ultimately derive. If there is another 'language teaching revolution' round the corner, it will have to assemble a convincing set of arguments to support some alternative (bilingual?) principle of equal power. A.P.R. Howatt, 1984.

This book has been written to resolve the long-standing debate over the role of the mother tongue (MT) in the foreign language (FL) classroom. In an act of theoretical house-cleaning, the MT taboo, which has been, without justification of any substance, the perceived didactical correctness for so many years and in so many countries, will be swept away. At the same time, this book combines theory with practice, advice and guidance to teachers. Since the MT issue touches upon all the major domains of FL teaching – vocabulary, grammar, texts, communication, emotional aspects of learning, even pronunciation – a new synthesis of theory and practice has necessarily been developed in the process.

"Fracas over education" (Korean Herald 3 March 2001) – in many Asian countries pressures are rising on English teachers to teach through English only. In Europe, the issue is still being debated, with peaks in the early 1900s when a group of Parisian radicals officially enforced the direct method for more than a decade, and again in the 1970s, when foreign-language-only audiovisual coursebooks were made available. To this very day, in several countries including France, ministerial guidelines on foreign language teaching impress on teachers the importance of a monolingual L2 approach. Whether the FL should be the sole medium of instruction is thus more than an academic dispute. Millions of learners and their teachers, the ultimate consumers of our work are affected. We will show that official target-language-only policies, though inspired by the best of motives, are irresponsible because they result almost inevitably in the baby being thrown out with the bathwater.

However, this book goes far beyond the language of instruction debate. It develops the idea that, in a deep sense, we only learn language once. It is vitally important that we absorb the implications of this fact. Our first language lays the foundation for all other languages we might want to learn. Rather than a liability, it is the most valuable resource, indeed the critical one, that a talking child brings to the classroom. With this acknowledgement, a cardinal error which has crippled foreign language teaching (FLT) all too long, is rectified: the absence of effective bilingual techniques in the FL classroom, which had been banished from the classroom due to the general suspicion surrounding the use of the MT. From this point on "new avenues are opened for language teaching which involve the active, systematic use of the MT" (Cook 2001, 418). It is this systematic positive use of the MT within the framework of a modern communicative approach using the FL which is the basic thread running through all chapters.

This book, then, is not another plea for a flexible and less rigid attitude towards the use of the MT. Such a common sense approach would be just one more uneasy and muddled compromise. Being more relaxed about MT use in certain pedagogic situa-

tions, as is often recommended on pragmatic grounds, is not enough, and can even be counterproductive. It is vital that the fundamental powers of the MT, both explanatory and productive, be fully exposed and exploited.

For more than a century, the MT has often been admitted as a last resort only, a kind of fire extinguisher in case of emergency, to clarify tricky meanings and facilitate grammatical explanations. Against such a reduced view, we want to advance a quite rich understanding of the role of the MT. Foreign languages piggyback on L1. Primary school children have accumulated an immense charge and reservoir of pragmatic, semantic and grammatical meanings which must be transferred to the target language. If learners didn't do this mostly intuitively and, in the main, all by themselves, FLT would be a hopeless undertaking. Bilingual techniques which tease out these skills in order to support the FL are here considered to be central techniques that all teachers should learn to master. This means the prevailing orthodoxy which rides roughshod over learners' deeply felt needs has to be aggressively torn down and FLT put back on the most solid of foundations. The MT is the bedrock on which any subsequent language learning must be built, not only because it provides ready access to FL meanings, but because it is the magic key that unlocks the door to FL grammars – a fact that has been widely ignored.

Our bilingual, non-compartmental approach to FLT naturally extends to the teaching of a third or fourth language. In non-Anglophone countries, the learning of German, French etc – if it comes – will most certainly come after the learning of English as a FL. Chinese learners of German who already know English will not just place German in a new compartment but can use English as a bridge to German, just as we all use our MT to make sense of a FL. Here, our bilingual reform becomes trilingual or even multilingual.

The new role of the MT, as we see it, is arguably the best means of bringing methodology and local cultural context closer together. It is embedded in a view of language which has begun to emerge among cognitive-functional linguists and neuroscientists who regard form-meaning pairings, called "constructions", as the basic units of language (Meyer et al. 2008, 60ff.). In other words, meaning is central to language, and meaning-conveyance comprises both lexicon and grammar. These theorists also insist on the generative power of language as a structured system. In speaking, we easily combine communicatively significant elements to create new meanings which we might never have heard before. Pattern drills, which tried to exploit the productive potential of sentence structures, were too soon put into limbo, partly no doubt because of their unfortunate association with the meaningless parroting involved in some direct method and audio-visual programs. Along with the MT, this book puts the generative principle and the combinatorial power of language, its "quintessential property" (Pinker 1997, 118), at the very centre of language teaching. Pattern-finding, generalisation, restructuring, automatization and entrenchment – notions well-known in first language acquisition theory – describe important facts of language learning without raising the spectre of behaviourism. These facts, in turn, can be well integrated into a view of language as a cognitive skill, which is in line with our best teaching traditions and perfectly compatible with the findings of modern brain research.

In this forceful advocacy of MT and the generative principle, we are far from discrediting the crucial role of monolingual communicative activities and tasks, but given normal time constraints of the classroom, we propose that a new balance has to be

struck. Communicative competence remains an overriding goal, while at the same time "constructions" have to be restored to the core of FL competence.

This book shows how to tap the potential of the MT (and previously learned languages), how to harness the existing communicative competence, how to exploit the generative power of language, and how to teach foreign languages as a skill that all children can acquire. In illustrating these ideas with a rich repertoire of novel techniques for the FL teacher, we hope to set the theory and practice of FLT on a productive new course. Making the MT the corner stone in the architecture of FLT is a true paradigm shift.

Introduction: A red card for the mother tongue?

0.1 Method and Madness in Foreign Language Teaching

With regard to MT use, countless teachers have systematically been misteaching languages. They fall into two categories, but the error is the same: They don't master the sophisticated and powerful bilingual techniques necessary to harness the linguistic resources of the learners for effective foreign language learning (FLL). The first group does use the MT, but in an unregulated, indiscriminate, and destructive way – the bane of many FL classes. Texts are translated and used as quarries to dig up structures to be explained in the MT, which the teachers share with their pupils. They typically teach a FL mostly through the MT simply because of an insufficient oral command of the target language. The teachers' behaviour will rub off on the students, who, inescapably, will be given far too much leeway to use their MT at the expense of the FL. Here, MT use is indeed a cheap way out of the teachers' obligation to create a foreign language atmosphere in their classrooms. Comments like the following from retrospective self-reports by German tertiary students are not uncommon:

> My last English teacher was really nice but she taught most of the lesson through German, telling us she wanted us to really understand everything. I think we would have learned more if we had used German less. We had Spanish only for one year at this stage but lessons were conducted nearly completely in Spanish, while English was taught in German, after seven years of learning this language! Annika[1]

This is madness.

In many countries, this group may still be the majority as compared to the second group which tries to banish the MT from its classrooms. There are two sub-groups: (1) Expatriate native speakers of English, French, and German etc comfortably teach through their own language simply because they can't speak their students' language. For them, it's as if they make a virtue out of a necessity. (2) Still others try to impose a monolingual classroom, not through any fault of their own, but because of official policies and a crippling monolingual orthodoxy in teacher training colleges. These teachers feel they are betraying their students when resorting to the MT. Here are some more reflections from German students thinking back to their school days:

> Our teacher never consented to give a German equivalent, which I really detested because I always longed for clarity. Simone

> I really hated the fact that the teacher we had in grades 7–9 refused to explain English words we didn't know in German. She just wrote the word up on the board, but only a few pupils understood her English explanations. Even when we asked her nicely if she could give us the German equivalent she became angry. But I'd better stop talking about her, as it makes me angry. Sonja

1 For a great number of quotes, only first names are given as sources. The quotes are taken from autobiographical self-reports collected over many years from German university students of English who wrote about themselves as pupils and trainee teachers. Observed fact and personal anecdote may give an intriguing glimpse of classroom reality and supplement research findings. Butzkamm (2005) contains a collection of quotes from over 500 reports.

> When someone dared to ask for an equivalent, he/she was reprimanded for not paying attention. He strictly rejected the use of the mother tongue, we were forbidden to use it; if we did anyway, we had to do some extra homework. Nicole
>
> I can remember one sentence I hated most in class, spoken by a teacher I had in grade eight. His idea was to banish our mother tongue from the classroom and use English exclusively. When I wanted to contribute something and when I was sure that I had a great idea, I tried to ask for an English word. During my contribution I said something like: "I am sorry, but what does X mean in English?" The answer was simple: "Ariane, I've told you to use the words you already know. There is no need to answer this question with the help of other words." This was all he had to say. I wasn't allowed to finish my contribution and he asked somebody else to make a contribution. Usually, my fellow students used sentences which could be found literally in the text. This was very boring, but our teacher liked it and even reinforced it by giving good marks to those who only used structures or words from the very text we were discussing. Instead of discussing new ideas (perhaps with some help from the teacher), we only recited the text and later, I never used my own words or expressed my own thoughts. But ridiculously, I got better marks for my oral contribution than before. I am convinced that some help from the teacher would have improved the whole classroom situation. I think it is one of the biggest mistakes which can be made, not to fulfill the needs of your pupils, especially, when they explicitly utter their needs. Ariane

This, again, is madness, yet there's method in't: the direct method. Kent (1996) interviewed post Standard Grade pupils in Scotland:

> Another area which constituted a demotivating factor was, ironically, the use of the foreign language as the medium of instruction. This was quite a controversial issue. One pupil said, "I had a teacher who never spoke a word of English and it nearly drove me nuts. You sat there going 'What?' … I think it's better to have a balance between the two (foreign language and mother tongue)." The unmitigated use of the target language in a classroom situation was considered demotivating and dangerous in that it could lead to erroneous understandings: "You might think that you have picked up some meanings but they might be the wrong meanings."

How the complaints resemble each other!

Neither the misuse nor the non-use of the MT have prevented good learners from being successful despite the methods used to teach them. But many learners have suffered and have fallen by the wayside.

0.2 Background

Since the Great Reform at the end of the 19th century, the role of the MT has been second only to grammar as the most discussed methodological problem. At that time, the "direct method" was developed (though it had its precursors), with its push towards the exclusion of the native language from the learning process. It was a good idea in its own day, in as much as it was a reaction against a rigid grammar-translation approach copied from classical language classes, in which texts were translated back and forth, grammar rules and bilingual word-lists were memorised and the lessons were conducted in the MT. At long last, French was actually to be spoken in French classes, and English in English classes. The foreign language should be accessed directly, without translation, with the mother tongue only to be used as a last resort. This approach was also hailed as the "natural method". After all, a small child grows into its native language without the help of another one, and without any grammatical instruction. Charles Berlitz launched his career on this approach, proclaiming himself the inventor of the direct method (which was not true) and opening his first language school in 1878. To this day, Berlitz instructors follow a target-language-only credo.

When we talk about the monolingual dogma today, we are not setting up a straw man that is nowhere to be found – although total prohibition of the MT is unlikely ever to have been practised by those who share a native language with their students. At present, the official guidelines in many countries recommend that lessons be planned to be as monolingual as possible, drawing on the MT only when difficulties arise. A consensus has been reached in favour of a kind of monolingualism with small concessions. It is not just what the experts believe, who are asked by governments to write official guidelines for schools – it is also what the majority of teachers believe, including those who have found personal, workable solutions to incorporate the MT in certain contexts. Contemporary versions of communicative approaches to FLT usually recommend that although the MT may occasionally be used as a useful linguistic resource, maximising the use of the target language in the classroom is beneficial in providing linguistic exposure for the learners. Concessions are made, particularly with regard to grammatical explanations, but remain concessions, whether minor or major. MT use is generally regarded as an evasive manœuvre only to be used in emergencies, as little as possible. Maximise the use of the FL, minimise the L1, and use your common sense, is the advice most frequently given. The L1 is more of a hindrance than a help, and sophisticated bilingual teaching techniques are as good as unknown in schools. It looks as though the methodological monolingualism, now operating under the new banner of the communicative approach, has triumphed. The metaphors used are an obvious giveaway. In Britain, teachers of French or German are "gardening in a gale of English"; they must build "dams against the flood" of English: The MT is conceived as a primary cause of errors, a constant threat rather than what it is first of all: the greatest pedagogic resource a child brings to the learning of FLs.

0.3 Spoilsports: stubborn teachers

If only it weren't for a small but constant flow of articles, in which stubborn teachers write in opposition to the prevailing ideology and advocate bilingual techniques: a wealth of telling practical experience, often without any theoretical pretence or in-depth understanding of the long history behind the topic. These articles are usually apologetic in tone – "it does not hurt to explain these things briefly in the MT", "there is no harm in …" etc. Their authors seem afraid of being branded as reactionaries or "heretical" (Schweers 1999, 6) – a clear signal to what degree received opinion has been internalized. Burling (1968), who uses a systematic mixture of native and foreign language, tellingly calls his proposals "outlandish". The topic 'mother tongue' is a well-kept family secret for many, a "skeleton in the cupboard … a taboo subject, a source of embarrassment", according to Prodromou (2002, 6). Time and again, using the mother tongue is accompanied by feelings of guilt. As a result, most of these contributions are more or less timid attempts at legitimisation, and hence more or less cautious formulations: "So let us stop feeling guilty about student and teacher use of L1 outside or even inside the classroom in very small amounts" (Katchen 1990, 105).

Those practitioners who experiment with bilingual techniques consistently report positive results, such as George (1984), who reports from India, and Kukulka (1982, 42), who teaches English in Poland:

> After experimenting with various methods and techniques for three years, I decided on a bilingual technique for teaching both grammar and vocabulary. After using the technique for two years, I can say that it is the most efficient of all the techniques I have tried.

Bertrand is a retired professor of German at a Paris university, who reports on the free private German lessons he gives to youths in the neighbourhood:

> 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. Victor, like Kemal, didn't get much from the pictures in the textbook and because of this his understanding of the text, despite additional explanation from the teacher, was worse than vague. 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 (Bertrand 1999, 303).

Alternatively, we can look at a case involving a language lecturer at York University, who inspires everybody with her 50 participant strong Italian course: "She's breaking every rule there is. She translates everything as she goes along, she mixes in a lot of grammar, she has students parroting phrases and answers" (*Times Educational Supplement* 3/10/1975).

Another example is that of Michel Thomas, proclaimed by Hollywood stars and celebrities for his rapid, effective teaching of languages. His painstaking structuring and hierarchical teaching of skills in a direct instruction approach represent a fascinating contribution to FL practice. His teaching precepts and techniques run strongly counter to prevailing FL orthodoxy, yet many align with those permeating this book: MT support through explanations, literal translation and idiomatic translation into L1 of new vocabulary and phrases, pattern practice and manipulation interleaving the new with old, focusing on vocabulary and structures that are generalisable, making L1-L2 links, similarities and differences explicit, generating sentences of increasing complexity, early focus on accuracy and fluency before application, emphasis on pattern recognition, practising previous skills in new contexts (Solity 2008). He seems to have little truck with fashionable strategies such as discovery learning and group work; the teacher remains the model, leader and guide.

0.4 Bilingual methods and language courses

More to the point, perhaps, is the fact that there are carefully crafted bilingual methods such as Suggestopaedia, which has enjoyed some popularity as an "alternative method" for teaching mature-age classes, as well as Curran's (1976) counselling approach or "Community Language Learning" and Blair's (1982) really innovative bilingual FL courses for adults.

How is this possible? Can both sides be right – the avoidance of, indeed, the ban on the MT and its very opposite, its regular, systematic use in meaning conveyance? Not really, and so the successes of bilingual approaches are either explained away or ignored. People surmise that it is not the bilingual teaching techniques that are of critical importance, but rather the energetic and good-humoured personality of the lecturer in

York, her meticulous planning; or it is Michel Thomas's personal magnetism, the reduction of psychological barriers in Curran's approach and the friendly, pleasant learning atmosphere created by the Suggestopaedia techniques, which are often accompanied by music and other aesthetic elements. Couldn't it be that the regular translations do play a significant role?

Why did the anthropologists and linguists who set up the Army Specialised Training Programme of the US Military during World War 2, with small classes rarely exceeding 10 students, two teachers (a linguist and a native speaker), and many contact hours per week, discard the direct principle and opt for bilingual meaning conveyance of new language material (Angiolillo 1947)? Did the programme fail to achieve its chief aim of developing the "ability to speak the language fluently"? Is it simply outmoded, worth consigning to the dustbin of history? What, then, about modern computer courses which use the MT in similar ways?

It is self-evident that phrasebooks for tourists are bilingual. They are not meant to teach the language. However, there is an odd contrast between self-study courses for adults with a world wide success such as the *Assimil*-books, which make systematic and clever use of the MT in various ways, and the teaching manuals and course books used for schools. The schoolbooks are usually authored by members of the teaching profession and seem to obey a tradition and an official policy from which they are unable to free themselves. Non-schoolbook publishers don't serve teachers and can only sell what works with the man in the street.

0.5 Spoilsports: teachers as learners

Why do so many novice teachers have trouble applying the principles they have learned in their teacher education course and "default" to the MT, often in a haphazard, detrimental way (Pennington & Richards 1997)? Could it be there's something wrong with the principles? It is even more revealing when accomplished teachers learn a new language and realize that, as learners, they want the very thing they are denying their own pupils. This, among other things, is what an English teacher noted down for herself when she was participating in a course on Modern Greek: "I'm not satisfied with getting the gist, I want to understand every word." "Translating the text was good, lots of dictionary work." "I'm going to learn the dialogue by heart, translate it into Greek and then back into English" (McDonough, 2002, 405). She sees the contradiction between what she feels comes naturally to her as a pupil and her own approach as a teacher, she sees it in her colleagues as well, but she does not offer any solution to resolve the dissonance.

Rivers, author of several influential books on FLT, notes in "Learning a sixth language: an adult learner's daily diary" (1979):

> I do make mental translations and these give me a feeling of security (p. 71).
> I am very frustrated by the lack of an English-Spanish glossary in my private textbook and other books. I will have to buy a small pocket English-Spanish, Spanish-English dictionary (p. 72).
> I check everything I want in the Sp/Eng, Eng/Sp dictionary which T. lent me (p. 73).
> I still feel not having an English-Spanish section in my textbook is a distinct disadvantage and hobbles me in trying to create new sentences (p. 74).

Here is another FL teacher going through the experience of learning a FL himself:

> 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's refusal to help me understand everything, I was outraged and frustrated (Gower 1999, 12).

> The teacher stares down at the wide eyes of his new students, 'Class. We are here to learn English. As of today, you are not to use any Japanese in this room. This is an "English-only" class.' And it is from that moment, I would argue, that the class is lost … 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,

reports Weschler (1997), who, as a teacher of Japanese, has changed to a "functional-translation method". Likewise, Rinvolucri was courageous enough openly to admit a 180º turnabout:

> 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 & Rinvolucri 2002, 4).

To these modern reports may be added past witnesses whose autobiographies bear testimony to the fact that they learned FLs successfully with bilingual texts (see chapter 2).

Don't we all know it in our bones: When we encounter a new piece of language, we want to know straight away and without further ado what it means precisely, so that we can put it to use immediately, work with it and make the most of it? Or are we content with inaccurate guessing and prepared to wait perhaps for weeks until the penny drops? Isn't it only the "experts" who tell us that the slow struggle for comprehension with a teacher miming and arm-waving and drawing little stick-figures on the board is preferable? – Let us do what comes naturally – it is all so blindingly obvious.

0.6 Classroom research and the doggedness of dogma

The imperative to abide by a doctrine of monolingualism cannot reconcile these opposing attitudes. 1967 saw the publication of C.J. Dodson's groundbreaking work, *Language teaching and the bilingual method.* In it, Dodson presented a new bilingual method, which was a frontal attack on the ban on the mother tongue, conceived on the basis of a series of controlled experiments on teaching.

As is very rarely the case in the field of FLT, Dodson's work inspired researchers from various countries who tried either to replicate his experiments directly or to carry out similarly structured comparisons of methods. Bilingual techniques were found to be superior to their monolingual counterparts in studies by Sastri (1970) and Walatara (1973). Similar results were reported in a laboratory experiment closely modelled on Dodson by a group of Japanese researchers (Ishii et al., 1979). The most important study was a year long comparison of two classes by Meijer (1974), one bilingual, the other monolingual and audiovisual. Admittedly, this research is limited (when is there ever enough?), but certainly it is research too weighty to be disregarded. Butzkamm's doctoral dissertation *Aufgeklärte Einsprachigkeit. Zur Entdogmatisierung der Methode im Fremdsprachenunterricht* (Enlightened monolingualism. Taking the dogma out of FL methodology) came out in 1973. In the second edition (1978, 184) he argued that moving the

supportive role of the MT from a marginal position to a central position amounted to a true paradigm shift. In 1978 Alexander published "An introduction to the bilingual method of teaching foreign languages". Butzkamm (1980) reported on a successful two-year implementation of the bilingal approach in a German grammar school. Alexander & Butzkamm (1983) presented their current organization of bilingual method techniques, using protocols of typical classroom interactions. Dodson's work was again validated by Kaczmarski (1988) in Poland and Caldwell (1990) in Australia. Kasjan's (1995, 1996) feasibility studies on German for Japanese university students were also explicitly based on Dodson's seminal work.

The reactions have been, all in all, defiantly incurious. Ironically enough, Krashen (1981, 134f.), an influential writer in the eighties, reinforced the monolingual paradigm, although, for him, 'comprehensible input' was in fact the most important single factor in language acquisition. Too few have been willing to take a good look at alternative bilingual techniques and accept the challenge to rethink the old doctrines, which continue to trickle down from training colleges to practising teachers.The Anglo-American mainstream simply moves on undaunted. Many young native speakers from Anglophone countries have spilled out into the world and made a living teaching English. A great number of them teach their own language – at least, at first – without any relation to the culture and language of their pupils. Famous exceptions include the "greats" in our field: Harold Palmer in Japan, Michael West in India or, notably, the novelist and composer Anthony Burgess in Malaya and Brunei. "One cannot but suspect that this theory of rigid avoidance of the mother tongue may be in part motivated by the fact that the teacher of English does perhaps not know the learner's mother tongue", argues West (1962, 48). This "English-only" policy has, of late, been classified as "oppressive" (Canagarajah 1999) and "neocolonialistic" (Auerbach 1993, 13). In East Asia, direct method techniques "favoured by the British Council … have led to frustration, failure and financial waste. They have made rural masses shy away from English and reserved English as a preserve for the few" (Walatara 1973, 100). The international dominance of English native speakers, who find absolution in the dogma of monolingualism when they cannot understand the language of their pupils, together with the cheaper mass production of strictly English textbooks in the Anglo-American mother countries, constitutes one of the reasons behind the sanctification of, and the demand for, monolingualism in the classroom. It goes without saying that non-Anglophone speakers who teach their native languages abroad equally find the monolingual doctrine quite comfortable.

It would, therefore, be wrong to attribute the whole blame to English colonial policies. Another major colonial power of the time, France, was also involved, perhaps even more so, given its customary attention to education and pedagogy with its very centralised system. Faced with the task of developing within its colonies citizens imbued with French humanism, which could best be attained though the eventual study of French literature, its expatriate largely monolingual teachers, of necessity, resorted to a direct method approach. In this, they were aided by pedagogical research and practice and the government-sponsored production of visual materials designed to allow direct method approaches with diverse language groups in Africa, Indochina, and elsewhere. The perceived success of this enforced approach, which responded to the particular colonial circumstances, was, in the end, not confined to these colonies. A small group of

influential Parisian "activistes" embraced the direct method and made it mandatory in France, in what was called at the time a "coup d'état pédagogique" (Puren 1993, 49), for a brief period from 1908 until 1925, when new directives defused this quite false pedagogy, which had by then become ludicrous ("We all cheat on this direct method all the time except when the inspector comes", a teacher quoted in Puren 1993, 78).

The "méthode directe" was replaced by a "méthode active", providing at least something of a positive outcome, the importance of active FL use, to a thoroughly nonsensical episode in L2 pedagogy. Nevertheless, the idea survived, and the direct approach was revitalized in the era of audiolingual and audiovisual textbooks of the sixties and seventies (e.g. *Voix et images de France; La France en direct; Ecouter et parler*, all of them with tapes, picture strips and -slides later to be replaced by videos), promoted and supported pedagogically by government institutions.

0.7 A professional neurosis

There is yet another major reason why the monolingual idea has become the prevailing "didactical correctness" to date, and it has nothing to do with expatriate teachers. A great many teachers in Europe towards the end of nineteenth century used the grammar-translation method because they could not teach otherwise. They had not had enough living contacts with the language themselves and lacked the oral flexibility to conduct lessons through the FL. The time was indeed ripe for the Great Reform brought about by those who did have the necessary language skills. Ever since those days there has been a deep concern, and quite rightly so, about teachers' language proficiency. Even in modern Europe, student observations like the following are not infrequent:

> The teacher did not structure the course at all. She exclusively used her mother tongue, German, throughout the lessons. I even suspected that she knew no French at all. She panicked nearly every time she had to explain a grammatical problem, saying that it would be too difficult for us. Nicola

> I actually had two terrible teachers whom we did not respect at all, because they themselves did not really know the language they tried to teach us. In the lower grades it might still be possible for the teacher to hide behind a textbook most of the time, but later when some pupils took part in exchange programs, the situation became unbearable. In the case of my English class almost half of the students spoke better English than the teacher. The result was that the teacher, who was not a strong personality anyway and always had authority problems, was boycotted by most of us, which led to a terrible tension in the class. Jessica

> Unfortunately, my Spanish teacher was unable to speak Spanish himself so I gave up Spanish after only one year. Yasmin

This, of course, is irresponsible teacher behaviour, and governments in various places have in fact reacted to such perceived inadequacies, through changes in the examination structure, to encourage attention to the oral capabilities of teacher-trainees and hence improvement in teachers' proficiency. In ministerial guidelines teachers were instructed to conduct lessons in the FL, and the use of the MT was given a bad name. Pressures to constrain teachers to a monolingual approach were motivated by a well-intentioned desire to have teachers improve their personal language proficiency and indeed their interactivity through the target language. In Hong Kong, the Government went as far as to force less well-trained teachers to undergo proficiency tests, with their jobs on the

line. This was the stick to coerce them into making the necessary effort, whether to go abroad for the appropriate language immersion, or to stay at home and apply themselves with the required diligence, discipline and jolly hard work through continuing education. "English-only" became a badge of honour among EFL teachers, and MT free lessons almost a religious principle for those who were capable of teaching in this way.

Add to this that the best teachers tend to get the best teaching conditions: selective schools, the best classes in the form, senior classes where monolingual teaching is easiest. These teachers, of course, are largely those with superior outcomes in their own language study, better application to their continuing L2 education, significant, beneficial experiences of immersion and so on. In such circumstances, where they habitually lead their pupils to superior L2 achievement, they are unlikely to see the need for any radical change, in line with the old adage, if it ain't broke, don't fix it. With students of superior ability, high motivation to succeed and the mental agility to handle the challenges of monolingualism, these teachers have little incentive further to analyze and reflect on their teaching or experiment with other approaches. When confronted with other levels of ability and lower attainment in their students, they may attribute the difficulties simply to the quality of the students themselves.

We are often so walled in by our past experiences that we are unable to emerge to the challenge of the new.

These superior practitioners also are naturally the ones who end up as the profession's leaders: teacher educators, inspectors, applied linguists, members and chairs of examination boards and curriculum and syllabus committees, leaders of language teachers' professional organisations, leaders of workshops, speakers at conferences, writers of journal articles and authors. The monolingual approach has become a matter of faith with them, deep faith. It is little wonder that for a long time the main voices heard and heeded have been those that advocate monolingual teaching – with or without the usual concessions. Whenever the MT is mentioned there is a neurotic fear that incompetent teachers, so embarrassing to the profession, are involved, that the dams will break and the MT will pour into the FL classrooms. Since a profession needs to see itself as well-trained and competent, we believe that the profession has fallen victim to a huge historical neurosis.

Why else should a self-crippling mistake have held sway for such a long time? What teachers need is a near-native proficiency in the FL, but definitely not a mother tongue phobia. It bears repeating: The baby has been thrown out with the bathwater.

0.8 The alternative: the mother tongue as a base for reference

We here present a theory that restores the MT to its rightful place as the most important ally a foreign language can have, one which would, at the same time, redeem some 2000 years of documented foreign-language teaching where MT support was taken for granted. The MT is for all school subjects, including foreign languages, a child's strongest ally and can be systematically used to great effect. In contrast, methodology throughout the twentieth century has been dominated by a negative metaphor: Foreign language teachers build islands that are in constant danger of being flooded by the sea of the mother tongue. They have to hold back this sea, build dams against it, stem its tide.

This much is true: Every new language is confronted by an already-existing MT. All languages are competitors in the sense that if they are not used, they may be lost, and there is only a limited amount of time that can be shared between them. Precisely because the mother tongue is always available, it is so easy to avoid using the foreign language – a constant temptation for pupils and teachers. Any use of the MT needs justifying, simply because we do not learn any language by mostly using another one. This is trite, but sometimes the trite has to be stated. It is a truth that has nonetheless led to false beliefs. Fortunately, good teaching does not always depend on good theory.

In contrast to these false beliefs and the negative view of the MT in the classroom, a coherent theory of positive MT support will be developed. It will be shown that monolingual orthodoxy, with or without concessions, is untenable in every respect. However, by this, we do not mean to throw out a single monolingual technique, simple or sophisticated. The bilingual techniques described here are clearly intended to enrich existing methodologies, and not to impoverish them. "Bringing the L1 back from exile may lead not only to the improvement of existing teaching methods but also to innovations in methodology" (Cook 2001, 419). The most important means of acquiring an FL is certainly the FL itself, because in many respects, a language teaches itself. But the second most important means is the learners' MT. It should be employed regularly and systematically, and in its fullest form *where that is appropriate*. Future teachers should have a large variety of complementary well-tried techniques, both monolingual and bilingual, at their disposal, and they will have to decide which of them will serve their purpose best in a particular classroom and its cultural context. Also, teachers who are to produce bilinguals should themselves be bilingual, i.e. be reasonably fluent speakers of both target language and the native language of their pupils.

This book not only seeks to redress an imbalance, which in itself would certainly be a step towards resolving the current guilt-embedded methodological muddle, but argues, with Dodson (1967, 16), that drastic re-thinking of FL methodology is called for. This is the essence of our theory: The knowledge and skills acquired through and with the MT provide the foundation for FL learning and teaching. It is at bottom a simple idea, of the kind that evokes the response: "Why haven't we thought of it before?"

Chapter 1: Teaching English through English – with the help of the mother tongue[1]

1.1 Message-orientation and mother tongue

> Language is activity, purposeful activity, and we should never lose sight of the speaking individuals and of their purpose in acting in this particular way. Otto Jespersen
>
> Language learning is learning how to mean. M.A.K. Halliday

With regard to the MT controversy, the number one question asked is: Should we conduct lessons through the FL? Our answer is an unequivocal yes. This answer invites the second question: Does this mean the exclusion of the MT from the classroom? The answer is an equally unequivocal no.

This chapter reaffirms the pre-eminent role of FL input and oral interaction in the classroom. However, the mediating role of the MT is the most significant complementary factor in attaining message-oriented discourse and creating a FL atmosphere in the classroom. Rightly used, the MT is the natural ally teachers and students have in moving from a focus on form to a focus on message and establishing the FL as the medium of instruction.

1.2 Immersion, the natural way

The MT taboo derives much of its force and appeal from the desire to imitate first language acquisition. Children have no other language to refer to when they start to understand. And when they start talking, they don't think of the language. They want to communicate, to understand and be understood. Just as their parents want to. Language is a means to an end, never an end in itself. Live the language and love it, because with it and through it, we understand the loved ones around us and become part of their exciting world. Later, as adults, we, too, feel that we have not really mastered a new language until we have lived and worked in it and can get along without falling back on our MT. Total immersion seems the best way, the natural way of acquiring a FL. It is here that we are most likely to encounter the real practicalities of human interaction and to learn our lessons from them, as did Corinna.

She remembers the following conversation with her host family on a school exchange in year 9:

Couple: "We're going out tonight."
I: "Okay."
Couple: "We're going to play cards with friends."
I: "Okay."

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1 Throughout this book, we refer generally to the teaching of English as a FL, since it is undoubtedly the most wide-spread FL taught globally. It should, however, be seen as the prototypical instance of FL teaching.