

# 1

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

This chapter provides a brief history of the place and role of translation in second language education starting with the Grammar-Translation Method and concluding with the advent of Communicative Language Teaching. The ebb and flow of various forms of translation is examined in relation to the ways in which the purpose and process of learning are conceptualized in pedagogical approaches. As defined by Henry Widdowson, purpose refers to ‘what kind of language knowledge or ability constitutes the goals that learners are to achieve at the end of the course’ (Howatt 2004: 353).<sup>1</sup> Process, defined here from the point of view of the course provider, refers to ‘what kind of student activity is most effective as the means to that end’ (Howatt 2004: 353). Purpose determines the aspects of language that the method focuses on and is generally informed by linguistic theories. Process designs the most appropriate teaching techniques and is normally underpinned by Second Language Acquisition theories. The admission or exclusion of translation as a language learning exercise depends on how process is conceived; this in turn is influenced by how purpose is defined in a given methodology.

### 1.1 The Grammar-Translation Method

The Grammar-Translation Method began in Prussia at the end of the eighteenth century with the publication of a French coursebook and an English coursebook for secondary school pupils, authored by Johann Valentin Meidinger in 1783 and Johann Christian Fick in 1793 respectively (both cited in Howatt 2004: 152). The method was developed during the nineteenth century and became the dominant method of teaching foreign languages in European schools from the 1840s to the 1940s. The aim of Grammar Translation was to enable learners to read literary classics and ‘to benefit from the mental discipline and intellectual development that result from foreign language study’ (Richards and Rodgers 2001: 5). Grammar

rules were presented in the learner's first language one by one and in an intuitively graded sequence. Each grammar point was exemplified with a set of sentences created ad hoc in the L2 alongside their literal translation in the L1. Vocabulary was learnt by memorizing bilingual lists of lexical items and phrases.

For example, Franz Ahn's *New Practical and Easy Method of Learning the German Language* (1869) started with the declensions of German nouns, specimens of handwriting and the pronunciation of simple and double vowels, diphthongs, consonants and syllables. Then, in Part I, it introduced singular and plural subject personal pronouns with the present simple tense of the verb *sein* (to be) in the affirmative and interrogative forms (Ahn 1869: 1-12).

## PART I.

### 1.

<i>Singular.</i>	ich bin, I am; du bist, thou art; er ist, he is; sie ist, she is;
<i>Plural.</i>	wir sind, we are; ihr seid, you are; sie sind, they are.

Gut, good; groß, great, large, big; klein, little, small; reich, rich;  
arm, poor; jung, young; alt, old; müde, tired; krank, ill, sick.

Ich bin groß. Du bist klein. Er ist alt. Sie ist gut. Wir sind jung. Ihr seid reich. Sie sind arm. Bin ich groß? Bist du müde? Ist er krank? Ist sie jung? Sind wir reich? Seid ihr arm? Sind sie alt?

### 2.

I am little. Thou art young. We are tired. They are rich. Art thou sick?  
You are poor. Is she old? Are you sick? Are they good? He is tall (groß).  
Am I poor?

Knowledge of lexis and grammar was applied in exercises involving mainly the accurate translation of invented sentences and texts into and out of the mother tongue 'either *viva-voce* or in writing or in both – and this from the very beginning' (Sweet 1900: 203). Reading and writing were the major focus of language teaching. Speaking involved rehearsing a series of questions and answers to be translated from the L1 and then used in conversations between teacher and student, as in the so-called Ollendorff Method (Howatt 2004: 161–5). The medium of instruction was the student's native language, which was used to explain new items and make comparisons between the L1 and the L2.

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Two basic principles informed the process of learning expounded in Grammar-Translation textbooks. The first is that a language course can be based on a sequence of linguistic categories, most notably parts of speech. The second is that these categories can be exemplified in sample sentences and then practised by constructing new sentences on a word-for-word basis. It was also assumed that all that was required for translating into a foreign language was a knowledge of the grammar and the possession of a good dictionary. This belief was based on the ‘arithmetical fallacy’ that ‘sentences could be constructed *a priori* by combining words according to certain definite rules’ (Sweet 1900: 202). In more recent times, Grammar Translation was adopted in self-study guides like *The Penguin Russian Course* in 1961 (Fennel in Cook 2010: 11), which remained in print till 1996. Today the method continues to be used in situations where the primary focus of foreign language study is understanding literary texts (Richards and Rodgers 2001: 6–7). So, Grammar Translation has stood the test of time and proved to be remarkably resilient to the innovations that have been introduced in language teaching from 1830 till the present day, as will be shown in the following sections.

### 1.2 The pre-Reform approaches

In the mid-nineteenth century, the early reformers Jean Joseph Jacotot, Claude Marcel, Thomas Prendergast and François Gouin elaborated very detailed individual techniques that differed significantly from the traditional Grammar-Translation Method. Jacotot’s (1830) approach to teaching French to Flemish-speaking university students in Belgium was one of the earliest examples of monolingual instruction by a non-native speaker of the students’ mother tongue (Howatt 2004: 169–70). It consisted in studying a literary text in French alongside a Flemish translation. The teacher read the first sentence and repeated the opening phrase, asking students to look for other examples of those words in the remaining text. Then the teacher returned to the initial sentence adding the next phrase and so on till the whole text had been learnt by heart. These searches were complemented by comprehension questions and other exercises whose aim was to enable learners to discover how the foreign language works through hypothesis formation, observation and generalization. Explanations were considered not just unnecessary but wrong, since the instructor’s role was to respond to the learner, rather than directing and controlling him by explaining things in advance. Jacotot’s pedagogy was inspired by his egalitarian educational doctrine (*enseignement universel*) that believed in the individual’s ability to achieve all his or her aspirations if he or she could marshal sufficient strength and determination.

Claude Marcel’s Rational Method in 1853 (Howatt 2004: 170–4) was articulated in 20 ‘axiomatic truths’ elaborated from two principled distinctions. The first one is between ‘impression’ and ‘expression’. Impression refers to the process whereby the mind is impressed with the idea before it comprehends the sign that represents it. Expression is the process whereby we use language knowing the meaning as well as the form of the words we utter. It follows that

understanding meaning should precede knowledge of form; hence reading and listening should come before writing and speaking. The second distinction is between 'analytical' and 'synthetical' methods of instruction. The analytical method is inductive; it presents the learner with examples to decompose and imitate through practice. The synthetical method draws the learner's attention to principles and rules that enable him or her to understand deductively how the foreign language works. The way in which these techniques are implemented pedagogically depends on the characteristics of the learner and the relationship between the learning task and the goals of education. An emphasis on analysis was thought to be beneficial for young students up to the age of 12. For them the teacher's frequent repetition of the same foreign expressions that are explained through looks, tones, gestures and actions is preferable to translation, which would be confusing. For older students, on the other hand, meaning is to be derived from the translation into the mother tongue. This should be as literal as possible in order to associate the foreign word with the native one so that each new encounter of the former will promptly recall the latter, thus expediting reading comprehension, which takes priority over the other language skills, in keeping with the educational aims of the 1850s.

The Mastery System devised by Thomas Prendergast in 1864 (Howatt 2004: 175–8) derives from his observation of how children learn their mother tongue. He noticed that young children infer the meaning of language using clues derived from non-verbal communication such as the way people look at you, their gestures and facial expressions. Also, children memorize, through imitation, prefabricated chunks of language and they use them convincingly and fluently even without understanding either the meaning or the grammar. In contrast, self-generated utterances are tentative and ill-formed. These considerations led Prendergast to posit that an effective way of learning a foreign language would consist in memorizing model sentences rather than producing them anew. These so-called 'mastery sentences' would contain the most frequently used items of the language and as many of its basic syntactic rules as possible. So he first drew up a list of high-frequency English words, and then he created sentences that exemplified English syntax and provided the learner with a model for generating variations from the original structure. Prendergast's Mastery System is organized in seven steps. Step 1 consists in learning by heart five or six model sentences of about 20 words each, uttered by the teacher and repeated by the learner to achieve fluency and accurate pronunciation. Meaning is taught by translation into the native language, but grammar is not explained, since it is to be mastered unconsciously. In Step 2, the focus is on written language. Steps 3 and 4 involve the formation of variants of the model sentences and the acquisition of additional ones. The remaining steps concern the development of reading and oral skills. In these stages translation is used extensively, not to investigate the two language systems, but to help the learner to become accustomed to the foreign language through rapid renderings of L2 sentences.

Like Prendergast's system, the Series Method elaborated by François Gouin in 1880 (Howatt 2004: 178–85) is based on personal observations of the way young

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children use their mother tongue. By listening to his nephew reliving a visit to a corn mill in Normandy, Gouin realized that language reflects the structure of the experience it describes, and experience is primarily understood and organized sequentially. From this insight, he formed the idea that all events can be described as series of smaller ones. Gouin's language teaching method consisted in presenting learners with a series of sentences, each expressing a component action of an event such as *The Maid Chops a Log of Wood*, which was described in 16 sentences. It was believed that the repetitive use of the same subjects and complements would facilitate memorization and accurate pronunciation as well as enabling the mind to focus on each different action and the verb expressing it, this being considered the most important element of the sentence and the most difficult to master. The system was taught in Geneva, where Gouin founded his own school, and enjoyed considerable fame for a time. In contrast with the prevailing paradigm, the methods adopted by the early reformers laid emphasis on monolingual versus bilingual instruction, meaning versus form, oral versus written skills and inductive versus deductive learning. They were the forerunners of the Reform Movement, a new orientation in language teaching that vigorously shook the very foundation of the Grammar-Translation Method.

### 1.3 The Reform Movement

In 1882 the publication of Wilhelm Viëtor's pamphlet *Der Sprachunterricht muss umkehren!* (Language teaching must start afresh!) marks the beginning of the Reform Movement, initiated by a group of phoneticians from different European countries: Wilhelm Viëtor in Germany, Paul Passy in France, Otto Jespersen in Denmark and Henry Sweet in England (Howatt 2004: 187–209). The movement soon began to influence secondary school language teaching and continued to expand till 1904, when Jespersen summarized its pedagogic implications in *How to Teach a Foreign Language*. The principles advocated by the reformers emphasized the primacy of oral communication skills; hence the importance of phonetics in teacher training, because knowing how sounds are produced is essential for achieving accurate pronunciation,<sup>2</sup> use of coherent, interesting, natural texts containing examples of the grammar points that need to be taught and the use of the foreign language in class.

There was agreement among reformers that exercises and translations into the foreign language should be replaced by 'free composition in the foreign language on subjects taken from the texts already studied' (Sweet 1900: 206). However, they also had divergent views. Translation into the mother tongue was excluded by associationist psychologists such as Felix Franke. He proposed teaching the vocabulary of a language by means of pictures to enable learners to establish a direct association between the word and the idea, so as to avoid the complicated psychological process of associating the foreign word first with the L1 equivalent (e.g. French *chapeau* = German *Hut*) and then with the concept (i.e. 'hat'). For his part, Henry Sweet argued that the psychological process involved is not necessarily

difficult because '[t]he fact is that to a German the word *Hut* and the idea "hat" are so intimately connected that the one suggests the other instantaneously and without effort' (Sweet 1900: 199). Besides, pictures may in some cases be 'either inadequate or useless, or absolutely impracticable, as in dealing with abstract ideas' (Sweet 1900: 200). Sweet also rejected the idea that translation was the cause of inaccurate associations across languages and proposed four stages in the use of translation:

In the first stage translation is used only as a way 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 1900: 202)

An example of the beneficial use of translation into L1 is demonstrated in Hermann Klinghardt's experiment, which he conducted in his *Realgymnasium* in Reichenbach in Silesia in the 1880s (Howatt 2004: 192–4). Klinghardt's elementary English course began with an introduction to English pronunciation, for which he used Sweet's phonetic notation and practical listening and speech exercises. After a few weeks he moved on to text, which was studied at a rate of one complex sentence a week. Each sentence was first transcribed phonetically on the blackboard, and then read aloud twice by the teacher and repeated by the students until it was spoken accurately and fluently. Students copied the transcribed sentence from the blackboard and the teacher glossed the meaning with an interlinear translation that was inserted between word boundaries. Once they were familiar with the whole sentence, the teacher selected one grammar point to be taught in detail, for example the difference between the definite and the indefinite article before vowels. He then continued to the next sentence until the entire text was fully understood. Grammar was therefore taught inductively, as Sweet had intended. This meant drawing grammar and vocabulary items that were appropriately graded by the teacher according to the student's linguistic ability out of closely studied natural sentences.

After the first month, students were taught a variety of oral communication skills such as asking questions about the text and topics concerning their life experiences, taking part in a discussion, or retelling a story. Writing activities followed in the second semester. They involved copying, writing answers to comprehension questions, and simple retelling exercises. Longer narrative texts

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were used such as *The Story of Robin Hood*, rather than descriptive ones as in the earlier stage. The course produced good results, as, at the end of the year, students showed not only a good knowledge of grammar but also confidence in the use of spoken language. Klinghardt's experiment aptly illustrated the relationship between approach and method in language teaching. 'Approach' here refers to a set of theoretical principles for teaching a language that are not prescriptive but open to a variety of interpretations as to how they can be applied. 'Method' refers to a body of classroom practices that derive from approach and are diversely applied in different educational contexts (Richard and Rodgers 2001). Klinghardt accurately interpreted the reformers' pedagogic principles on the basis of linguistics and psychology. He applied them with the knowledge and insight of an experienced schoolteacher who focuses his care and attention on the class and responds to its particular needs promptly and flexibly.

### 1.4 The Direct Method

While reformers in Europe were developing an applied linguistic approach to language teaching, immigrant schoolteachers in America were developing 'natural language teaching methods', underpinned by the pedagogic ideas put forward by Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi in Switzerland (Howatt 2004: 210–28). His work was inspired by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's eighteenth-century educational philosophy. Rousseau believed that the child, endowed by nature with the capacity to apprehend the world, learns the deep meaning of the natural universe directly through the experience of the senses and through spoken communication with his tutor, who uses a restricted vocabulary because 'granted that the first law of speech is to make oneself understood, the greatest mistake one can make is to speak without being understood' (Rousseau 1762/1979: 72). Hence '[t]he child who wants to speak should hear only words he can understand and say only those he can articulate' (Rousseau 1762/1979: 73). The tutor observes the child's individual nature, becomes aware of the latter's readiness to learn so that he can teach what is useful for the child's age, stimulates his individuality by enabling him to learn to know and love himself, and works together with him in discovering and creating knowledge.

The tutor's responsibility is, in the first place, to let the senses develop in relation to their proper objects; and, secondly, to encourage the learning of the sciences as the almost natural outcome of the use of the senses.

*(Bloom 1979: 9)*

In the early nineteenth century Pestalozzi, inspired by Rousseau, maintained that the teacher must be capable of deeply understanding human nature in order to guide it properly. 'It is man', he affirmed, 'whom the educator must understand – man in his full scope and power – as a gardener wisely tends the rarest plants, from their first sprouting to the maturing of their fruit' (Pestalozzi 1951: 32). Pestalozzi's pedagogy was based on the principle 'Life educates', whereby 'the

natural development of the sensory activities in infancy' is stimulated so as 'to bring to the child's notice in a striking and commanding way the sensory objects of home life, and in this way to make them educative in the best sense of the word' (Pestalozzi 1826/1912: 291, 292). He believed, moreover, that this method of training sense-experience also stimulated the development of the powers of speech and that the faculty of speech had the capacity to link sensory experience to the faculty of thought. Hence the natural development of the mother tongue involved first experience, then language and then thought (Pestalozzi 1826/1912: 306–7). This constituted the prototype for all language teaching. Pestalozzi's procedure involved helping children to explore the properties of everyday objects such as their size, number and form. The aim was to let the child carefully observe the sense in which the words were used to name, describe and finally define the objects, so he would adopt them when he was sure of them, in line with Rousseau's belief that '[i]t is a very great disadvantage for him to have more words than ideas, for him to know how to say more things than he can think' (Rousseau 1762/1979: 74).

Gottlieb Heness successfully applied Pestalozzi's method to the teaching of standard German to his dialect-speaking schoolchildren in south Germany. Then, in 1865, he extended his techniques to German as a foreign language in America, where he opened a private language school (the Sauveur-Heness School of Modern Languages) together with Lambert Sauveur, who ran the French courses. Described in Sauveur's manual for teacher trainees,<sup>3</sup> their Natural Method consisted in intensive oral instruction based on *causeries* (conversations). During these dialogues, the teacher talked in the foreign language, describing, for example, the parts of the body. He used a well-connected text containing no more than 120–30 words and carefully structured sentences made up of statements which would be followed by questions and answers. The principles guiding these teacher-led interactions were 'earnest questions' and 'coherence', which facilitated comprehension and enabled students to predict the questions that would be put to them. The Natural Method was not adopted in secondary education in the US, but became popular in private language schools for adult learners, where in a few months beginner-level students were able to acquire basic oral skills.

Twelve years later, Maximilian D. Berlitz opened his first language school in Providence, Rhode Island, where he developed the 'Berlitz Method of Teaching Languages', also known as the 'Direct Method'. Initially designed for teaching German and French to English speakers, it aimed at providing beginners with everyday dialogue skills, like the Natural Method. The coursebooks written by Berlitz contained clear instructions for teachers (Berlitz in Howatt 2004: 224):

- no translation under any circumstances;
- a strong emphasis on oral work;
- avoidance of grammatical explanations until late in the course;
- maximum use of question-and-answer techniques.



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Translation was uncompromisingly excluded, for three reasons (Berlitz in Howatt 2004: 224):

- Translation wastes valuable language learning time which should be devoted entirely to the foreign language.
- Translation encourages mother-tongue interference.
- All languages have their own peculiarities that cannot be rendered by translation.

By 1914, Berlitz had opened 200 schools in America and Europe. They employed native-speaking teachers and were able to offer most European languages as well as Japanese. The largest group attending Berlitz courses were adult learners. This is because, as the Coleman Report (authored by Algernon Coleman in 1929) stated, the Direct Method, though employed successfully by some teachers, was not suited to general use in secondary schools given that: (a) the supply of sufficiently trained teachers was too small, (b) the time devoted to foreign language teaching was limited, and (c) conversation skills were regarded as irrelevant for the average American college student (Coleman 1929: 238). Instead, the report emphasized the importance of reading.

The goal must be to read the foreign language directly with a degree of understanding comparable to that possessed in reading the vernacular. In order that students may attain this goal, reading experience must be adequate and the results of all other types of class exercise must converge toward the same end.  
*(Coleman 1929: 170)*

The texts read must be informing and illustrative of the foreign country, must suggest to students the kind of ideals, qualities and characteristics that best represent the people and are of interest to the student reader.  
*(Coleman 1929: 101)*

After the publication of the Coleman Report, reading became the aim of most foreign language teaching programmes in the United States till World War II (Richards and Rodgers 2001). In Europe the Direct Method was also regarded as unsuitable for public secondary school education since it required native-speaking teachers and banned the use of the students' mother tongue, which in Europe was considered useful as an aid to comprehension. Instead, it was the Oral Method that modernized secondary foreign language education in Britain, as we shall see in the next section.

### 1.5 The Oral Method

In the early 1920s, Harold E. Palmer combined the Direct Method with the applied linguistic approach of the Reform Movement and devised the Oral Method. Palmer's methodology was inspired by insights gained in teaching English abroad

and was addressed to secondary schoolteachers of foreign languages in Britain. It envisaged a four-year curriculum organized in three stages. The 'Introductory Stage' would last one school term and aimed to provide learners with a good grounding in pronunciation. The 'Intermediate' stage involved first the accurate memorization and assimilation of primary speech patterns through oral exercises, drills and question-and-answer interactions. Then, from these core sentence patterns, learners would derive further examples based on the same models. The 'Advanced' stage focused on reading, composition and conversation. Literature was introduced at this point and students were to progress from phonetic transcription to writing. The Oral Method excluded the teaching of grammar in the students' native language because grammatical rules were to be acquired through 'habit formation', which entailed 'accuracy', 'interest' and 'initial preparation'. As in Sweet's approach, the use of the foreign language as a medium of instruction did not exclude translation. 'Let us recognize frankly', Palmer affirmed, 'that the withholding of an "official" or authentic translation does not prevent the students from forming faulty associations, but that, on the contrary, such withholding may often engender them' (Palmer in Howatt 2004: 273).

Palmer created his own categories to describe the grammatical structure of the sentence in terms of form and function. The new word classes were: 'miologs' (corresponding to morphemes), 'monologs' (word forms) and 'polylogs' (collocations or phrases). They formed functional relationships with each other called 'ergons'. In Palmer's system the 'ergonic' relationship between linguistic units gave rise to all types of sentences. In later years, Palmer's focus on sentence patterns and spoken language shifted to a text-based approach, whereby a coherent text provided the material for acquiring oral skills through activities such as pronunciation practice, comprehension questions and retelling. This change renewed Palmer's research interests in the selection and control of vocabulary for pedagogic purposes (Howatt 2004: 268). His work on high-frequency words, which produced a 3,000-word list that accounted for 95 per cent of running text, led, in 1932, to the publication, with Albert S. Hornby, of *The IRET Standard 600-word Vocabulary*. It was used two years later for the preparation of the *Interim Report on Vocabulary Selection for English as a Foreign Language* published in 1936 and co-authored with Michael P. West and Lawrence W. Faucett with the consultancy of the behaviourist psychologist Edward L. Thorndike. The aim of the report was to draw up word lists for the creation of reading materials in English as a foreign language, in an attempt to establish scientifically based criteria for syllabus design (Richards and Rodgers 2001: 37; Howatt 2004: 289–90). Palmer's distinguished research and applied work laid the foundations of the British approach to the teaching of English as a Foreign Language, to which I now turn.

## 1.6 Situational Language Teaching

In the early 1950s Albert S. Hornby systematized the techniques of Palmer's Oral Method and put forward a methodology that gave equal emphasis to the meaning

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and the form of the grammatical patterns of the English language. He named it the ‘Situational Approach in Language Teaching’ (Howatt 2004: 297). According to Hornby, the most effective way of teaching the meaning of sentence patterns was to demonstrate it in simple situations that could either be acted out by the teacher and the learners or illustrated through visual aids such as pictures, realia, wallcharts, flash cards and stick figures. This principle guided the way in which patterns were taught in class and the way they were graded in the design of coursebooks, which adopted the same replicable framework for the presentation of grammar. So, for instance, the present progressive and the present perfect simple were taught before the present and the past simple tenses because the former could be easily acted out, while the latter could be grasped at a later stage through reading exercises.

Drawing on François Gouin’s Series Method, discussed above in section 1.2, Hornby proposed that at beginner level patterns be taught one by one and be organized in sequences that created simple storylines. For example, the sequence ‘I am going to open the window’, an intention announced to the whole class before acting out the storyline, is made up of three patterns (Howatt 2004: 298):

- I am walking to the window (uttered while moving towards the window).
- I am opening the window (spoken while the action was in progress).
- I have opened the window (pronounced before moving away, maybe with one hand on the open window).

The idea of teaching grammar inductively by introducing and practising new structures situationally became a key concept of the British tradition in English language teaching for the following two decades. It influenced the French Audio-Visual Method adopted in two courses, *Voix et images de France* (1961) for adults and *Bonjour Line* (1963) for children, which prompted the British Council to commission a course designed along the same lines, *The Turners* (1969) (Howatt 2004: 316–17). Other complementary principles informing situational language pedagogy were:

- 1 All four language skills should be taught but speaking should be given priority.
- 2 Courses of instruction should be built round a graded syllabus of structural patterns.
- 3 Vocabulary should be carefully selected and presented along with new grammatical patterns in specially written connected texts.
- 4 Wherever possible, meaning should be taught through ostensive procedures and/or linguistic context.
- 5 Error should be avoided through adequate practice and rehearsal (Howatt 2004: 299–300).

Point 4 in the above list leaves open the question of the use of the students’ mother tongue to facilitate comprehension. In an article addressed to teacher trainees, Hornby clarified his position as follows:

The British teacher who goes to India, Egypt or China, or any area where the language of his pupils is unknown to him, will teach English, often successfully, without using the language of his pupils. The Indian, Egyptian or Chinese teacher working with him will almost certainly make a considerable use of the vernacular. But he may well be following the Direct Method. If he is competent and if he uses the method wisely, he will almost certainly obtain better and quicker results than his British colleague who is unable to use the vernacular.

(Hornby in Howatt 2004: 313)

In line with the view expressed by most scholars from Sweet onwards, Hornby recognized the advantages of a sensible bilingual methodology and distanced himself from the total exclusion of translation advocated by some proponents of the Direct Method, most notably Berlitz. The principles underpinning Situational Language Teaching and the techniques applied in the Audio-Visual Method were adopted, at least in its early stages, by a large-scale project set up in the UK in 1963, the Nuffield Foreign Languages Teaching Materials Project, which produced a French course for primary schools called *En Avant* (Howatt 2004: 324).

## 1.7 Structural Language Teaching

Hornby's Situational Approach represented the British version of Structural Language Teaching, a methodology that began in the US during World War II and gained considerable institutional support there throughout the 1940s and 1950s. The theoretical foundations were provided by the descriptivist linguist Leonard Bloomfield and the applied linguist Charles C. Fries. They belonged to the American tradition of structural linguistics, which sought to identify and describe the formal patterns of language through empirical observations. Bloomfield's *Outline Guide for the Practical Study of Foreign Languages*, published in 1942 (Howatt 2004: 303–4), described in detail the techniques used by fieldworkers to elicit, record and transcribe indigenous Amerindian languages with the assistance of native informants. It also gave some general advice on language learning and became one of the main manuals<sup>4</sup> used in the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) set up in December 1942 to teach over 30 languages to selected US army officers. The programme ran from April 1943 to February 1944. The method used in the ASTP, which became known as the Army Method, was subsequently adopted in a large number of intensive courses run in American universities. Its goal was to develop 'a command of the colloquial *spoken* form of the language' (Agard *et al.*, original emphasis in Velleman 2008: 388).

Instruction was carried out by a 'scientific linguist', who provided language descriptions in the areas of phonology, morphology and syntax and created the teaching material, and a 'guide', a native informant whose task was to teach aural-oral skills through mimicry-memorization, pattern drilling and question-and-answer

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techniques. The guide never used English. The meaning of the sentences he modelled was explained by a ‘group leader’, a student who had been selected to read the English translations of the original sentences. Phonograph records were provided for those groups which did not have a native-speaker guide and for further listening practice. Trainees were also introduced to the anthropological culture of the language they were learning in the so-called ‘area study’ (Velleman 2008: 389–90). The project led to the publication of self-study manuals for 22 languages, the *Spoken Language* series. Exemplary is *Spoken Spanish*, organized in five parts made up of six units each. The five parts progress from survival situations to general themes such as ‘government’, ‘the military’, ‘industry’ and ‘culture’. Activities include transformational drills, oral translations, question-and-answer interactions, multiple-choice and matching exercises, aural practice with instant translations and ‘Conversation’, which continues the translations in role plays. Each unit ends with a vocabulary list with the English equivalents (Velleman 2008: 390–1).

Meanwhile, at the English Language Institute (ELI) founded in 1941 at the University of Michigan,<sup>5</sup> Fries was developing the Michigan Oral Approach. The novelty of this methodology was the introduction of contrastive analysis for designing language-specific teaching materials that focused on the early stages of language learning.

The most efficient materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner.

(Fries 1945: 9)

The aim of the Oral Approach was to build up ‘a set of habits for the oral production of a language and for the receptive understanding of the language when it is spoken’ (Fries 1945: 8). To achieve this goal within a reasonable time, Fries devised intensive language courses for adult learners, with drilling exercises containing enough vocabulary to make the sound system and the structural system work so as to create automatic and unconscious habits (Fries 1945: 3). For example, for Spanish-speaking learners, Fries proposed isolating ‘the most similar sounds in Spanish words, as “perro” for [ε] or “mismo” for [z] or “dedo” for [ø]’ (Fries 1945: 25). As regards word-order patterns, Spanish speakers had to ‘develop a habit of placing single word modifiers of substantives before the words they modify’ (Fries 1945: 33).

Fries also observed crucial differences between languages at the level of lexis:

The struggle with new words through a two language dictionary which seeks to give word equivalents in the two languages is exceedingly laborious and ineffective. Practically never do two words (except possibly highly technical words) in different languages cover precisely the same areas of meaning.

(Fries 1945: 7)

An example of a lexical mismatch between English and Spanish is offered by the word *mesa*, which is not used in many of the situations in which *table* is used, e.g. *table of figures*, *table of contents* and *timetable*. Conversely, *mesa* occurs in many expressions in which *table* is not used (Fries 1945: 40).

Also, Fries devised a 'slot-filler' grammar in which English sentences were described in terms of fundamental 'patterns' containing slots that could be filled by four 'form-classes' (corresponding to nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs) and 15 'function words'.

First there are the 'function words', those words which, although some of them may have also full-word meaning content, primarily or largely operate as means of expressing relations of grammatical structures. These include the so-called auxiliaries, prepositions, conjunctions, interrogative particles, and a miscellaneous group consisting of the words for degree, for generalizing, the articles, etc.  
*(Fries 1945: 44)*

For example, the sentence *The boys do not do their work promptly* falls in the following pattern (Fries 1952/1957: 97):

GROUP	CLASS	GROUP	GROUP	CLASS	GROUP	CLASS	CLASS
A	1	G	C	2	A	1	4
The	boys	do	not	do	their	work	promptly

The knowledge of fundamental patterns provided the teacher with a model for constructing a variety of sentences using different fillers in the prescribed slots. For instance, the above pattern could be practised in drilling exercises by replacing different Class 1, 2 and 4 fillers.

Practice and repetition are crucially important for the development of 'the new set of habits that constitute the foreign language' (Fries 1948: 16).

Structural patterns can be pointed out and described, but a study of the statements of the pattern, making them matters of conscious knowledge, must never be allowed to become a substitute for constant practice and accurate repetition of the sentences themselves.

*(Fries 1948: 16)*

Assuming that structural differences between the L1 and the L2 were a major source of difficulty in language learning, Fries recommended the use of contrastive analysis for organizing teaching materials. For this reason he believed that

the teachers, to be most effective, must know, linguistically (not necessarily *practically* but 'descriptively') the native language of the students they teach.

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Such knowledge is not for the sake of practically using that language in the classroom but for the sake of understanding the precise nature of the difficulties with which the students are struggling.

*(Fries 1945: 14, original emphasis)*

The point made by Fries in connection with the linguistic knowledge that teachers need to acquire reveals his opposition to the use of the students' first language in the classroom, the consequence of a strict interpretation of the principle of habit formation in second language acquisition. Also, Fries' statement carries the implication, made explicit by Robert Lado (1957/1981), that dissimilarities between languages cause difficulty in learning because of language transfer.

Individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture – both productively and when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and culture as practiced by natives.

*(Lado 1957/1981: 2)*

This thought underlies the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, which posits that contrastive analysis can predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulty in language learning. Lado's assumption gave rise to a large body of empirical research that compared native and foreign language systems in order to discover the sources of learning difficulties and errors so as to create effective teaching materials. Lado's seminal work in Contrastive Analysis contributed significantly to understanding language transfer phenomena in language learning. These insights influenced the development of the notion of Interlanguage put forward by Larry Selinker (1972, 1992). The Interlanguage Hypothesis holds that learners create a (partly) separate linguistic system in which interlingual identifications and language transfer are generated, as will be discussed in section 2.1 in connection with L2 translation.

### 1.8 The Audiolingual Method

Following the launching of the first Russian satellite on 4 October 1957, the US government recognized the crucial need for expanding foreign language education. A year later President Eisenhower signed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) into law. Funds were provided for conferences, the study and analysis of modern languages, the development of teaching materials and teacher training in summer institutes, which were designed to enhance language proficiency and the knowledge of contemporary methods. Drawing on the Structural Approach and behaviourist learning theory, applied linguists elaborated a methodology suitable for teaching languages in US colleges and universities, where the goal was to enable learners to use 'the new language as its native speakers use it' (Brooks 1964: xii).

The new method recognized the ‘significance of language as communication’ and ‘stressed the importance of the audio-lingual aspects of language learning’ (Brooks 1964: 228–9), i.e. ‘hearing-speaking activities’ (Brooks 1964: 263).<sup>6</sup> It became widely employed not only in secondary and higher education, but also in Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools programmes that were set up throughout the United States in the 1950s. Audiolingualism formed the basis of numerous coursebooks such as *Lado English Series* (Lado 1977) and *English 900* (English Language Services 1964).

The theory of language informing the Audiolingual Method was the same as the one adopted by the American Structural Approach, while its principles of language learning drew mainly from B. F. Skinner’s model of human behaviour. This consists of three observables: responses, reinforcement and environment. Responses can be either elicited by a stimulus or emitted freely without the application of an obvious stimulus. The two main types of reinforcement are positive, which means that reinforcement occurs by the gain of something (e.g. food), and negative, which refers to something that is reinforcing by virtue of its termination (e.g. a loud noise). Both positive and negative types of reinforcement lead to an increase in the frequency of performing a given behaviour, while no reinforcement leads to its extinction. Behaviour is shaped and maintained through operant conditioning, which involves learning to give a response that has been positively reinforced by a reward (Roth 1990: 268–78).

Audiolingualism espoused Skinner’s general definition of verbal behaviour as ‘behaviour reinforced through the mediation of other persons’ (1957: 14) and of ‘instruction’ as ‘[t]he change which is . . . brought about in the behaviour of the listener’ (Skinner 1957: 362).

The student comes to emit certain kinds of responses, both verbal and non-verbal, because of verbal stimuli occurring under certain circumstances. Lectures, demonstrations, texts, and experiments all increase the verbal and nonverbal repertoires of the listener or observer through processes of this sort. In the field of history, the effect is almost exclusively a modification of the student’s *verbal* behaviour, and he carries much of this change in his behaviour as a speaker in the form of intraverbal sequences. In the practical sciences, a more important effect may be to establish nonverbal modes of response.

*(Skinner 1957: 362–3, original emphasis)*

Importantly, the proponents of the new method put forward the following principles of language learning:

- 1 Foreign language is the same as any other kind of learning and can be explained by the same laws and principles.
- 2 All learning is the result of experience and is evident in changes in behaviour.



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- 3 Both first and foreign language learning consist of developing the correct behavioural responses. However, the former is achieved with relative ease, while the latter is a special accomplishment that requires setting up optimal classroom conditions that imitate L1 acquisition as far as possible.
- 4 Foreign language learning is a mechanical process of habit formation.
- 5 Language learning proceeds by means of analogy rather than analysis.
- 6 Errors are the result of L1 interference and are to be avoided or corrected if they occur.

*(Ellis 1990: 21–5)*

Audiolingual learning theory formed the background to a set of basic tenets of language teaching.

The primary goal of foreign language learning is oral proficiency. Dialogues and drills form the basis of classroom practice in the early stages. Reading and writing are introduced later in the syllabus. To begin with writing consists of copying practised sentences. Then students write out variations of grammar patterns or write short essays with the help of framing questions. Dialogues are used for repetition and memorization to achieve correct pronunciation, stress, rhythm and intonation. After a dialogue has been memorized, grammatical patterns in the dialogue are selected by the teacher and practised in various types of drill exercises in which the students repeat an utterance aloud as soon as they hear it (read by the teacher or on tape in a language laboratory).<sup>7</sup>

*(Richards and Rodgers 2001: 58–65)*

More specifically, Nelson Brooks (1964: 156–61) listed 12 kinds of drills: repetition, inflection, replacement, restatement, completion, transposition, expansion, contraction, transformation, integration, rejoinder and restoration. As regards the role played by the learners' L1 and translation in the procedures that the teacher should adopt, Brooks recommended '[t]he subordination of the mother tongue to the second language by rendering English inactive while the new language is being learned' (Brooks 1964: 142). Practice in translation was admitted 'only as a literary exercise at an advanced level' (Brooks 1964: 142). Starting from the premise that '[n]o translation is worthy of the name so long as it bears the slightest trace of the language from which it comes' (Brooks 1964: 255), Brooks argued that only when they were sufficiently advanced should students be coached in this useful skill, in the following way:

A paragraph is read and reread a number of times until all its significance has been absorbed and is clearly held in mind. Then the original is put aside and the paragraph is written in the other language. Once this is done, a comparison may be made for the clarification or addition of details.

*(Brooks 1964: 256)*

Brooks' position is in line with Lado's, who stated that 'translation cannot be achieved without mastery of the second language. We, therefore, teach the language first, and then we may teach translation as a separate skill, if that is considered desirable' (Lado in Malmkjær 1998a: 5). Moreover, Brooks recommended the teacher's literal translation into the L1 only as a means of comparing one language with another 'in terms of their vocabularies, item by item' as bilingual dictionaries do (Brooks 1964: 184). However, the literal translation of a message, statement or sequence of utterances was considered deleterious.

It is quite possible to use English to identify the meaning of single, isolated words, without involving translation at the propositional level at all. The reason for this is that the transfer of meaning at the word level is essentially a matter of lexical meaning only, while the matching of whole utterances always involves structural patterns as well, and these often interfere with and are harmful to the internalized behavior patterns of the student in the target language.

(Brooks 1964: 185)

Towards the end of the 1960s, Audiolingualism came to be considered an inadequate methodology in the light of the new emphasis that was placed on the functional and communicative potential of language. Nevertheless, its stance on translation as a means of facilitating comprehension remained unchallenged, as will be discussed below.

## 1.9 Communicative Language Teaching

The origins of the Communicative Approach (or Communicative Language Teaching) date back to the late 1960s, when language education expanded significantly in Britain to meet both the needs of the children of permanent residents from Commonwealth countries and those of a growing number of overseas students who required either general-purpose or specialized pre-college instruction in English. In this climate of innovation and expansion in language teaching, the British government supported four major research projects (Howatt 2004: 248):

- the 'Survey of English Usage' directed by Randolph Quirk at London University in 1960, which produced *A Grammar of Contemporary English* (1972) and is ongoing at University College London;
- the 'Programme in Linguistics and English Teaching' (1964–71) directed by M. A. K. Halliday whose aim was to create innovative mother-tongue teaching materials for schools;
- the *Scope* project (1966–72) directed by John Ridge and June Derrick at the University of Leeds, which created teaching materials for English as a second language in primary schools;

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- ‘Primary French’ (1963–74), which comprised a Pilot Scheme to evaluate the proposal to introduce French into primary schools, as well as the Nuffield Foreign Languages Teaching Materials Project that was mentioned in section 1.6.

It became clear that that the situational settings created by teachers to explain the meanings of new grammar patterns were no longer suitable for equipping learners with the knowledge and skills that were relevant to their specific linguistic, academic and professional exigencies. ‘What was needed’, Howatt observes, ‘was a more analytical approach which accepted that “situations” were made up from smaller events: asking for things, expressing likes and dislikes, making suggestions, and so on’ (Howatt 2004: 249–50). This new analytical approach was developed in the 1970s by the proponents of Communicative Language Teaching, which provided a framework for syllabus design based on functional categories rather than language structures as proposed by Situational Language Teaching. Crucially, it was considered ‘a radical mistake to suppose that a knowledge of how sentences are put to use in communication follows automatically from a knowledge of how sentences are composed and what signification they have as linguistic units’ (Widdowson 1972: 17). Therefore, learners had to be taught what values sentences may have in text and discourse as ‘predictions, qualifications, reports, descriptions, and so on’ (Widdowson 1972: 17).

The theoretical foundations of the communicative movement lie in the work not only of British linguists such as John Rupert Firth and M. A. K. Halliday, who brought about a shift in linguistic enquiry from a structural to a functional perspective, but also of the philosophers J. L. Austin and John R. Searle, who developed speech-act theory, and of the sociolinguists John Gumperz, Dell Hymes and William Labov, who demonstrated the importance of social context in determining verbal behaviour.

The new approach was launched during a Conference on ‘The Communicative Teaching of English’ held at Lancaster University in 1973. On the basis of the insight that language is a system for the expression of meaning, the goal set for language teaching was to develop ‘communicative competence’, which consists of the ‘knowledge’ and ‘ability for use’ of four parameters of communication, i.e. whether (and to what degree) something is (a) formally possible, (b) feasible, (c) appropriate and (d) done (Hymes 1972).

The distinctive features of the new pedagogic paradigm, which was further developed in the 1980s and 1990s and is now well established worldwide, are summarized by Johnson and Johnson (1998b) as follows:

- appropriateness (language use must be appropriate to the contextual situation);
- message focus (learners need to be able to create and understand real meanings);
- psycholinguistic processing (learners engage in activities involving cognitive and other second language acquisition processes);
- risk taking (students are encouraged to learn by trial and error);
- free practice (simultaneous use of various skills).

Central to the Communicative Approach is the notion of ‘activities’ designed to engage learners in cooperative work in groups or in pairs, which stimulates the ‘genuine use of language for communicative purposes’ (Howatt 2004: 258, 345). The concept of activities was elaborated and applied in the Communicational Teaching Project (or the Bangalore Project) directed by N. S. Prabhu in India from 1979 to 1984. It was run with groups of schoolchildren in Madras, Bangalore and Cuddalore and started from the premise that ‘successful language acquisition was the outcome of cognitive processes engendered by the effort to communicate’ in order to complete a task successfully (Howatt 2004: 347). The syllabus was based on graded ‘reasoning-gap activities’ such as mental arithmetic, map reading, solving puzzles and so on, which were familiar to the children and had clear answers. The children who took part in the project apparently enjoyed the course and acquired better listening comprehension skills compared with their peers who had attended conventional programmes (Prabhu in Howatt 2004: 349).

As for translation, the Communicative Approach recommends adopting it merely ‘to make sure that the learners understand what they are doing’ (Howatt 2004: 259). Translation is therefore included as a teaching strategy that facilitates the learning process, a position taken, to varying degrees, by most of the approaches and methods surveyed in this brief history of language teaching methodologies. However, translation as a classroom activity alongside other meaning-focused tasks that involve reading, writing, listening and speaking has, so far, been largely excluded from the range of skills to be developed as part of learning a foreign language. ‘Perhaps’, as Howatt tentatively predicts, ‘this is set to change’ (Howatt 2004: 259). Since the late 1980s, this prophecy has gradually been fulfilled, as will be demonstrated in the remainder of this book.

## Notes

- 1 The review presented in this chapter draws extensively on the second edition of *A History of English Language Teaching*, authored by A. P. R. Howatt with a chapter by H. G. Widdowson.
- 2 The Phonetic Teachers’ Association, renamed the International Phonetic Association in 1897, was founded in Paris in 1886. Its International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) was designed to enable the sounds of any language to be accurately transcribed (Richards and Rodgers 2001: 9; Howatt 2004: 196).
- 3 *An Introduction to the Teaching of Living Languages without Grammar or Dictionary* (Sauveur in Howatt 2004: 218–21).
- 4 The other manual was *Outline of Linguistic Analysis* (Bloch and Trager in Velleman 2008: 389).
- 5 The ELI was founded with the support of the US State Department as part of a larger linguistic and cultural policy aimed at promoting the spread of English in Latin America. The goal of the ELI, under the direction of Charles C. Fries and later Robert Lado, was to research how best to teach English as a foreign language in order to deliver intensive English training courses at the University of Michigan and create English teaching and testing manuals worldwide (Kramsch 2007: 241–2).
- 6 The term ‘audio-lingual’ was coined by Nelson Brooks (1964): ‘[s]ince the words *aural* and *oral* cannot be dependably distinguished in spoken English, the term *audio-lingual* is proposed instead when they must be used together’ (Brooks 1964: 263, original emphasis).

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- 7 In the language laboratory, introduced in American secondary schools, colleges and universities in the 1950s, students could carry out further dialogue and drill work. By 1958, in the United States there were 64 language labs in secondary schools and 240 in colleges and universities (Johnston and Seerley in Roby 2004: 525). By the mid-1960s, the number of language labs had grown exponentially: 10,000 labs had been installed in secondary schools and 14,000 in higher education institutions (Keck and Smith in Roby 2004: 525).