The Secret Life of Grammar Translation — Part 1

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Abstract

Grammar-translation, the method of teaching a language by the intensive study of its grammar and the application of that grammar to the translation of texts, is here examined in its full historical context. Beginning with the bilingual experiences of Roman schoolboys, this language teaching method has been associated with social constructs such as authority, elitism, conservatism, and the search for superior models of living. These, and other, constructs made it attractive at certain periods of language teaching history, and comprise its "secret" life. They in part explain why, despite the pressure of alternative methods, it continues to flourish in certain international contexts today. Part 1 of this paper deals with Roman education and the Reformation-Renaissance period. Part 2 will deal with the nineteenth century and the modern international language teaching situation.

1. Introduction

The so-called Grammar-Translation Method is commonly referred to by contemporary methodologists[1] in terms that leave the reader with no more than a sketchy idea of what this method entailed, except that it focused the student on both grammar and translation and was both boring and frequently brutal. It has thus been shut off from intellectual enquiry, with the result that progressive language teachers of today know little of its parameters and history, and are thereby at a loss to argue its pros and cons when faced with the

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1) E.g., H. D. Brown., *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. (New Jersey, 1994); J. C. Richards & T. S. Rodgers, *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, (Cambridge, 1986).

large numbers of teachers and educational systems in the world that continue to promote it. Its origins, techniques, advocates, critics, consequences, and so forth have been conflated into a number of "characteristics" which, though perfectly correct in themselves, do little to promote interest in a piece of language teaching history that obstinately refuses to leave the stage despite the hisses and boos of the audience.

Richards et al's definition of the Grammar Translation Method —"a method of foreign or second language teaching which makes use of translation and grammar study as the main teaching and learning activities"[2]— provides an initial focus through the words *its main teaching and learning activities*. In similar terminology, Stern discusses *its principal practice technique* as being "translation from and into the target language".[3]

These definitions challenge the historian of language teaching to pinpoint those periods in which detailed attention to grammar and its checking or reinforcing by means of translation played a *dominant* part in language teaching pedagogy. Simple translation, as Kelly says, "has existed during most periods of language teaching".[4] However, it was only the *dominant* practice during three specific eras, which we might tentatively identify as follows:

1. Roman education, which was bilingual Latin-Greek in both aim and practice.
2. Reformation-Renaissance education, in which the interplay of vernacular and classical education promoted continuous attention to grammar and translation.
3. Nineteenth century education, when interest in classical studies revived in prestigious schools and provided a grammar-translation

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2) J. C. Richards, J. Platt, & H. Platt, *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (London, 1992).

3) H. H. Stern, *Fundamental Concepts in Language Teaching* (Oxford, 1985), p. 453.

4) L. G. Kelly, *25 Centuries of Language Teaching* (Rowley, MA: 1969), p. 171.

model which modern language teaching copied.

Other periods might well be advanced as candidates for attention, but for reasons that will be offered below do not qualify for inclusion under the term grammar-translation. For example, the idea of linguistic equality — the notion that for grammar-translation to be the dominant method there must be some parity between the two languages — rules out whole centuries of language teaching during which learners simply learned a *lingua franca* (usually Latin, as in the Middle Ages) for which there was no equivalent vernacular language. Latin was simply learned as a self-contained whole, necessary for the practice of scholarship, religion, law, medicine, philosophy, and so forth. The opposite side of this "parity" coin can be seen in the latter part of the seventeenth century and through the eighteenth, when the vernacular languages had achieved a "living" status, and the classics were declared "dead". During this period intellectual energies were directed towards the formalizing of the living languages, and the practice of grammar-translation was confined to the now "dead" classics.

The spread of modern language teaching in the nineteenth century forced modern language teachers to search for a suitable method to teach "living" languages. In the absence of any other model grammar-translation appeared to offer a solution. Adamson's description of modern languages in the English Public Schools catches the situation well:

> It must not be forgotten that the schools had no traditional method of teaching a modern language and that the teachers not unnaturally followed in the main the procedure employed in teaching Latin and Greek. The general scheme included grammar (which meant much learning by heart), translation and the reading of French classical authors of the seventeenth century; and two hours a week sufficed for these things. Conversation in the foreign tongue was only exceptionally em-

ployed in special classes for the purpose; the aim was not speech or writing, but ability to read.[5]

There were other reasons as well. Howatt describes the original aim of grammar-translation, which was to make language teaching easier for the student. However, it simultaneously aimed to make modern languages appear difficult, so that they would compare favorably in the public eye with the classics. Other reasons for its popularity included the establishment of public examinations in the mid-nineteenth century, the mediocre language skills of teachers, plus the important fact that it came from Germany where it was practiced in the prestigious *gymnasien*, "the academic hothouse of the grammar-translation method".[6]

The result was that nineteenth century students were faced with tasks of quite amazing complexity (see Fig. 1). The order of presentation shown in Fig. 1 is maintained throughout the 520 pages of the text proper: rule, examples, and exercises. The sheer tedium can only be imagined: the verb *avoir* takes 13 pages to explain; the verb *être* eight; Chapter V, on the verb in general, takes 120 pages. The focus on rules, the neglect of speaking, the constant translation, the preoccupation with discrete sentences, and in particular the lack of more general human goals, was indeed a low point in language teaching.

Even though the attempt to transfer the grammar-translation method to modern languages was a dismal failure,[7] it had been the main language teaching method for rather more than two millennia. It was the traditional way to learn a language. However, during the three periods mentioned above

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5) J. W. Adamson, *English Education 1789–1902* (Cambridge, 1964), p. 241.

6) A. P. R. Howatt, *A History of English Language Teaching* (Oxford, 1984), p. 136.

7) A short but sharp critique of the grammar-translation method is to be found in R. Lado, *Language Teaching* (New York, 1964), p. 4, and p. 92.

Figure 1.   Grammar Rule: Levizac's *Grammar of the French Tongue*
(Longman, 1840, P. 430):

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379.   It has been observed, (No. 357) that the conjunction *que*, used before the indicative mood, coming after the verb, expressing an act of the mind in the affirmative form, is never to be omitted in French.   This shows that that conjunction does not *in itself* govern the subjunctive mood, as is erroneously though by most learners; but there are, however, several cases in which *que* requires that mood after it.   They are when *que* is used instead, or in the sense, of the following conjunctions: *à moins que, avant que, sans que, jusqu'à ce que, quoi-que, soit que*, which are themselves always followed by the subjunctive.

<div align="center">Examples.</div>

J'attendrai *que* la pluie soit passée.   I shall wait until the rain be over.
   (*jusqu'à ce que*)

Je ne sortirai pas *que* vous ne m'ayez payé. (*avant que*)   I shall not
   leave the house before you pay me.

<div align="center">Exercise.</div>

1.   Give me your letter *that* I may send it to the post-office.
2.   He says that he will not marry *until* he has a profession.
3.   He cannot play, but he hurts himself.

(1) *Que* for *afin que*; to send, *envoyer*.
(2) To marry, *se marier*, *que* for *avant que ne*; profession, *état*, m.
(3) Cannot, *il ne saurait*, *que* for *sans que -ne*.

— Roman, Reformation-Renaissance, and the nineteenth century — it took on identifiably vigorous forms, resulting in changes that altered the direction of language teaching.   The initial thrust was Roman, during which time a set of associations and connections were put in place that have scarcely changed since.   In the Reformation-Renaissance, changes in the linguistic landscape — particularly with the demise of Latin as a *lingua franca* — turned grammar-translation into a new entity.   Finally, the low point reached in the nineteenth

century makes understandable the eagerness with which the Reform Movement of the 1880s was greeted.

2. Grammar-Translation in the Roman Context: Foundations

Roman education was bilingual Greek/Latin from about the second century B.C.[8] The young child learned elementary Greek together with his first language, Latin, from his nurse or from a slave-tutor (*paedagogus*), as Quintilian sets it out. "The study of Latin ought therefore to follow at no great distance and in a short time proceed side by side with Greek" (*Non longe itaque Latina subsequi debentet cito pariter ire.*[9]). At the age of about seven the student proceeded to the school run by a *grammaticus*, a teacher of literature and languages, though often more accurately just a grammar teacher. Specifically, the *grammaticus* taught "the art of speaking correctly and the interpretation of the poets" (*recte loquendi scientam et poetarum enarrationem*[10]). Grand as this sounds, the student actually began with the sound systems of Latin and Greek, presented formally and contrastively. The eight parts of speech — following Aristarchus and Palaemon — came next, and with these came declinations and conjugations, as Quintilian says, "Boys should begin by learning to decline nouns and conjugate verbs" (*Nomina declinare et verba in primus pueri sciant*[11]). His approval of translation can be seen in his comment, "Our earlier ancestors thought highly of translation from Greek into Latin" (*Vertere Graeca in Latinum veteres nostri oratores optimum iudicabant.*[12]) and he goes

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8) J.-A. Caravolas, *Précis D'Histoire 1, 1450–1700*, p. 1. (Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1994), p. 12.

9) Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, I, 1, 14–15. (H. E. Butler, Ed., Loeb Classical Library, 1920).

10) Ibid, I, 4, 4–5.

11) Ibid, I, 4, 22.

12) Ibid. X, 5, 2–3.

on to praise Cicero and others who made a regular practice of it. Translation was a regular part of the school day, as Marrou says: "comme nos écoliers, les petits Romains pratiquaient l'exercise de la traduction du grec en latin et du latin en grec".[13]

The fact that Cicero did regular translations out of Greek, that his writings contain a lot of Greek, and that orators were expected to deliver occasional orations in Greek, draws attention to the bilingual needs of educated Romans.[14] These needs sprang from the Roman view of Greek civilization as a superior entity, whether in philosophy, literature, medicine, or science. It has been said that "Grammar and jurisprudence are the only two sciences in which Roman scholars did original work".[15] Even for their splendid architecture the Romans depended on Greek theory.

In grammar, the Roman grammarians — Donatus, Servius, Priscien — did work that was original only in the sense that it formalized and expanded earlier Greek work; essentially they followed the Greek model set out by Dionysius Thrax. The transition from Greek to Roman thinking is clear in Varro (116–27 BC), though even before him the whole pattern of Roman pedagogy was already in place. It was

> a literary tradition, which is essentially bilingual; dialect mixtures, both horizontal and vertical, and an awareness of linguistic diversity; an educational system emphasizing reading and writing and attending consciously to matters of form e.g., spelling, and of style; and a more than passing acquaintance with Greek linguistic and philological scholarship in both its Stoic and Alexandrian versions".[16]

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13) H. I. Marrou, *Histoire de l'éducation dans l'antiquité* (Paris, 1948), p. 374.

14) A. Gwynn, S. J., *Roman Education from Cicero to Quintilian* (Oxford, 1926), pp. 93–94.

15) Ibid, p. 146.

16) Daniel J. Taylor, "Varro and Early Latin Language Science". In E. F. K. Koerner ↗

After Varro, as Taylor says, grammar became the first of the liberal arts, and "grammatical acumen becomes the hallmark of an educated individual".[17]   By the middle of the first century AD grammar had attained a prominent position in Roman life, and this continued even more strongly in the second. Declensions and conjugations were formally set out, possibly by Palaemon, and two enduring features of grammatical explanation make their appearance: barbarisms and solecisms.   These were, as Taylor says, to feature strongly in future grammatical thought.[18]

The Roman student progressed from his grammatical studies in Latin and Greek to the reading of Greek classics.   In due course, once a Latin literature had been established, it was quickly adopted by *grammatici*.

> Now the Latin *grammaticus* was able to draw on a literature which was genuinely comparable with the classical literature of Greece, and which had the added advantage of being thoroughly national in its spirit.   Virgil was accepted immediately as the national poet of Rome: Petronius calls him simply 'Roman Virgil'.   Horace's *Odes* were hardly less national, and they must have been the joy of schoolmasters from the first.[19]

Two important themes are expressed above: the literature theme and the nationalist theme.   The literature theme was to develop into being the virtual definition of western education; that is, western education took a turn at this point towards literature, with the the word "educated" being understood until very recently as referring to a person who had an easy familiarity with the

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& R. E. Asher (Eds.) *Concise History of the Language Sciences* (Pergamon, 1995), p. 103.

17)   Ibid, p. 106.

18)   Daniel J. Taylor, "Roman Language Science in the Early Empire". In E. F. K. Koerner & R. E. Asher (Eds.) *Concise History of the Language Sciences* (Pergamon, 1995), p. 108.

19)   A. Gwynn, S. J. *op. cit.,* p. 54.

classics.[20] The longevity of this idea is symbolized by the "Battle of the Classics" in American education in the 1880s and 1890s,[21] and the continuing interest in the classics today.

The nationalist theme is more diffuse, but should not be neglected. Greek and Roman education had been directed specifically towards public service to the state, which was regarded as the noblest vocaton a man could have. Grammar and, with the Romans, translation, was therefore the first step towards a life of public service, and grammar itself was characterised by a drive towards rules and regularity. Neither Greeks nor Romans had any interest in a multilingual-multicultural world, holding outsiders as barbarians, and — in grammar — outside intrusions into their respective languages as barbarisms. The discipline imposed on and by language from early schooling onwards bore a symbolic — and perhaps actual — relationship with the discipline required for the expansion of the Empire. What might nowadays be described as a "mindset" favoring rules and regularity was imparted, similar to the ethos encouraged by the British Public Schools at the height of the British Empire.

As well as establishing a connection between grammar and literature, and between grammar and nationalism, several other connections were also set in place. One — perhaps obvious — was the connection between this kind of education and urban surroundings. The great cities of the Roman world, and later the Renaissance and nineteenth century worlds, were home to books and libraries, printing presses and schools, and later cathedrals and universities. These urban environments usually offered little scope for other

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20) J. W. Adamson, *The Illiterate Anglo-Saxon* (Cambridge, 1944), p. 63. (Originally delivered as a lecture in King's College, London, November, 1920).

21) See F. Rudolph, *Curriculum* (San Francisco, 1977), Ch. 5, especially pp. 180–188.

aspects of education such as physical and musical education.[22]   More pre-cisely, Roman education sentimentalized the countryside and agriculture, and even the language to be used by Quintilian's ideal orator was to be different from the ordinary language of uneducated people.[23]   The result was that an urban elite was isolated and differentiated from the bulk of the population.

This divisive aspect of education was unfortunate, as it not only confirmed the elite status of the grammar-educated boy, but also confirmed in him the idea that authority — in this sense the admiration and emulation of the past — was fundamental to the educational process, and therefore to life.   Whatever was old was good.   Unlike his uneducated cousin, who probably wished to move as rapidly as possible towards a better, more modern future, the gram-mar boy was immediately oriented towards the past.   He began to pay hom-age — via translation, imitation, and emulation — to the great authorities of the past.   This became, to all intents and purposes, the "tradition" of studying the classics.   By the Medieval period this tradition was so firmly established that one authority talks of the "overweening respect for authority as set forth in the written word"[24] at that time.

"Authority" may also be taken in the sense of a rule, or set of rules.   The achievement of the Roman grammarians — based on Greek models, as seen above — in reducing a mass of linguistic data to a fixed set of rules was seen as significant.   Of course rules brought about exceptions and other deviations, and it was the function of the grammar teacher to separate the "proper" use of

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22)   C. Atherton, "Children, Animals, Slaves and Grammar". In Y. L. Too & N. Livingstone, *Pedagogy and Power* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 217.

23)   Teresa Morgan, "A Good Man Skilled in Politics: Quintilian's Political Theory". In Y. L. Too & N. Livingstone, *Pedagogy and Power* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 258.   Also R. K. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (California, 1988), pp. 20–21.

24)   J. W. Adamson, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

words from the unacceptable.[25] He could range through the ancient authors detecting barbarisms or solecisms, or simply insisting on his authoritative judgements:

> The grammarian was, first, the guardian of the language, *custos Latini sermonis*, in a phrase of Seneca, or "guardian of articulate utterance" in the description of Augustine. He was to protect the language against corruption, to preserve its coherence, and to act as an agent of control:[26]

By the time of Quintilian, in the first century AD, the tension between rules and ordinary usage (*consuetudo*) was already a well developed topic that exercised the minds of grammar teachers then as now. There was also a further complication: that the great authors themselves, the very subject of pupils' study, often broke the rules. These departures from the norm had to be explained by the *grammaticus* somehow or other. Atherton contends that the pupils took part in a linguistic progression, which might be briefly set out in three steps : (a) the initial separation of the pupils from the mass of their friends whose language was "intrinsically flawed and irregular", (b) progression to an understanding of the rules and control over them, and (c) an awareness that there could be "departures from rules" provided these departures were legitimized by "the authority of literary status, age, or 'good' usage, and classified by the grammarian's expertise".[27] Rules, the keeping of them, and the departing from them, were therefore central to the teaching of language. This provided the Roman child with a paradigm of life itself:

> The grammarian's true lesson was applicable far outside the sphere of language: all infringements of rules are classifiable; some are permissible;

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25) C. Atherton, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

26) R. K. Kaster, *op. cit.* p. 17.

27) C. Atherton, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

others are not, and appeals to higher authority are justified only when the infringements belong to one or other of the accepted groupings. These groupings and their authority are *given*, beyond questioning or appeal, at least by children.[28]

Quintilian's ideal orator, "a good man skilled at speaking" (*vir bonus dicendi peritus*) was therefore as much a moral ideal as a linguistic one. The education that would make him both morally good and oratorically able can therefore be seen as an essentially conservative one, and it was this view of life that was transmitted to pupils whose position in society was likely to be significant.

To sum up, Roman education established connections between grammar and translation leading to literary sophistication on the one hand, and ideals of education that were derivative, urbanized, normative, and fundamentally conservative on the other. Atherton sums it all up as "the *merits* of regularity".[29] Many of these terms apply to the teaching of language in the Reformation-Renaissance period, and to the nineteenth century as well. Possibly they also have explanatory power regarding the prevalence of grammar-translation today.

3. The Reformation-Renaissance: Rebuilding the Fabric

Translation and grammar re-emerged as major activities in classrooms during the period from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. In a certain sense they had never left, but the thirst for education at this time, as symbolized by the founding and re-founding of schools, broadened their application into secular — rather than religious — areas. Humanist thinking led to a new interest in re-aligning education with the cultural ideals of the classics, particularly as

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28) C. Atherton, *op. cit.*, p. 243.
29) C. Atherton, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

expressed by Cicero and — in a specifically educational context — Quintilian. Cicero had looked back into Greek education, finding there the perfect training for the orator, that is, for the man who in his maturity would provide leadership based on his knowledge of the world and of literary-philosophical ideas. For Cicero, Greek culture was a superior culture, the model of a perfect society. Its aristocratic and heroic attributes were those he wished Romans to achieve. Quintilian, too, had looked to Greek culture for the educational framework that would enable the perfect orator to emerge. A similar question was faced by the humanists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: how to produce ideal leaders for their societies.[30] The obvious solution was to do what the Romans had done: seek out a superior culture and emulate it. They wanted what has been called a "structuring framework" that would produce the "key figures the society needs", or more exactly,

> the production of a small, politically active minority who were heirs to a mature foreign culture, and who were thereby... hallmarked as of the requisite moral and intellectual calibre to make substantial contributions to their own developing communities.[31]

The classical world, broadly defined, appeared to offer the structuring framework the humanists sought, and it was assumed that emulating this model would also produce the key figures needed for leadership. As in the classical world, the perfect leader would have to be a man of words, and once again Quintilian's *vir bonus dicendi peritus* was invoked. At the very least the good man would know Latin, and since humanist thinking linked the study of the

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30) E.g., Erasmus, On the Education of a Christian Prince (*Institutio principis christiani*), 1516; Elyot, *The Book named the Governor* (1531); Machiavelli, The Prince (*Il princips*), 1536.

31) Anthony Grafton & Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities* (London, 1986), p. 220.

three sacred languages with the correct interpretation of the Bible, now both Greek and Hebrew were added. After all, Erasmus had written: "Our first care must be to learn the three languages, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, for it is plain that the mystery of all Scripture is revealed in them".[32] All the humanists concurred on the need for language study, regardless of whether they approached it from a religious standpoint like Luther, or from a linguistic-philosophical standpoint, like Melanchthon, or from an international humanistic perspective, like Erasmus. Further, the humanists practiced what they preached: they wrote grammars and made collections of colloquies for students, for example the *Regulae grammaticales* of Guarino Guarini and the colloquies of Erasmus and Vives. Opposition to this revival of language study was forceful and articulate[33] but did not for long hinder the movement.

Schools — the prime loci in which humanist ideals would be worked out — redoubled their efforts to provide a solid grammatical base for the new learning. When Henry VIII re-founded Canterbury Grammar School in 1541 the curriculum for the first year students was set out:

> In the First Class they shall learn thoroughly by heart the rudiments in English; they shall learn to put together the parts of speech; and to turn a short phrase of English into Latin; they shall run through Cato's verses, Aesop's Fables, and some Familiar Colloquies.[34]

Learning "the rudiments in English" meant learning by heart the basic rules of Latin: what a noun was, what a verb was, and so forth. The innovation of using English in the beginning stages of Latin grammar shows that teachers

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32) In Erika Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate* (Harvard, 1995), p. 112.

33) See Rummel, *op. cit.*

34) Arthur F. Leach, *Educational Charters and Documents 598 to 1909* (Cambridge, 1911), p. 467.

were more aware than before of the value of the vernacular, and took the opportunity to educate the pupil in his own language while introducing the new one.[35] English, in fact, had been seen in grammatical texts from the early fifteenth century, a point which could be taken as the origin of the pedagogical grammar movement: the desire to simplify the initial learning of grammar. Turning "a short phrase of English into Latin" became known to generations of schoolboys as "making Latins" or "vulgars", or "Englishes", in which the usher/schoolmaster gave the pupils some simple English phrases for translation into Latin. Entry into the Grammar Schools of England required basic literacy in English, so that work on "grammar" could begin immediately. For example, the founding documents of Bury St. Edmunds School in 1550 state: "Let them seek elsewhere the ability to read and write [in English]. Let ours give nothing but the rules of grammar and the learning of the Latin and Greek tongue".[36] As Foster Watson said, "The movement known as the Renascence [sic] may be briefly described as the attempt to return to a study of grammar (including in this term literary appreciation of authors) and rhetoric — (which served as a systematic analytical study of good Latin style)".[37]

The actual business of learning Latin, Greek, and occasionally Hebrew is well attested.[38] It was based on the "traditional" version inherited from the Romans,[39] but with two significant changes. The first of these was that the

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35) Kenneth Charlton, *Education in Renaissance England* (London, 1965), p. 121.

36) Kenneth Charlton *op. cit.*, p. 99.

37) Foster Watson, *The Old Grammar Schools* (London, 1916), p. 8.

38) On Latin, see Foster Watson, *op cit.*, Ch. 8; also Kenneth Charlton *op. cit.*, Ch. 4. On Greek, see Grafton & Jardine, *op. cit.*, Ch. 5. On Hebrew, see G. Lloyd Jones, *The Discovery of Hebrew in Tudor England: A Third Language* (Manchester, 1983).

39) When Quintilian wrote his *Institutio Oratoria* in 95 A.D. his ideal *grammaticus* did not have any textbook to follow; but by the time Augustine was a schoolboy in the ↗

contents of instruction — Latin — had changed, because by the ninth century it had "irrevocably narrowed down to liturgy and the written word".[40] Thereafter the teaching situation was a foreign language one, with the exception that the students studying it were, for the most part, familiar with its sounds from their religious training.[41] There were no native speakers, with the result that spoken Latin in the Reformation-Renaissance period developed strongly accented forms that were sometimes incomprehensible internationally. Despite this, pupils everywhere were taught to speak Latin, though the "narrowing" of the language placed greater emphasis on the written forms such as the grammar and literature, and promoted further written forms such as dictionaries.

Specific classroom innovations regarding grammar and translation at this time were very few, the only one of note being the "double translation" usually associated with Roger Ascham. In fact the method had a far earlier provenance, since Vives in 1531 had suggested double translation as an effective classroom method, as can be seen in the advice offered below:

> Boys, having been taught to speak correctly, should constantly practise speaking; having been taught how to compose letters and make verses,

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350s the *Ars minor* of Donatus was established as the basic introduction to Latin, and continued as such for at least a millennium after that. The Romans, in short, had constructed a *system* consisting of the eight parts of speech all set out in the relatively modest amount of 4,500 words. To this was added in about 520 A.D. what amounted to a second-level textbook, the *Institutio grammatica* of Priscian. Latin was thereby equipped with a tradition that never died. Aelfric, writing around the year 1,000 A.D. leaned heavily on these two books, and by the 12th century they were simply assumed to represent the way Latin should be taught. See James J. Murphy "The Teaching of Latin as a Second Language in the 12th Century". *Historiographia Linguistica*, VII, 1/2. pp. 159–175. (1980).

40) Auerbach, 1965, p. 121. In Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 165.

41) Murphy, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

they should constantly write letters, verses, compositions. They should do double translations from Latin into the vernacular and back again to perfect their command and understanding of the language.[42]

When Ascham wrote in 1570 the method worked as follows:

> The master first helps the child construe and parse a passage from Sturm's edition of Cicero's letters; the child then translates the passage into English on his own in a paper book; the master then takes from him the textbook; after an hour, the child then translates his own English back into Latin in another paper book; then the master lays the textbook, Ciceronian 'original' alongside the child's effort, and without chiding, gently shows him where Cicero would have used a different word, or syntactical arrangement.[43]

But double translation did not require any major shift of emphasis or methodology. The humanist definition of grammar was still very much as Quintilian had it. Here is the Italian Niccolò Perotti in 1468: *Grammatica est ars recte loquendi recteque scribendi, scriptorum et poetarum lectionibus observata* ("Grammar is the art of speaking and writing correctly, observed in the reading of writers and poets").[44] Grammar thus linked speaking, writing and the reading of literature (e.g., Cicero, Virgil, Terence, and Caesar) into a holistic language and culture program. The old grammars of Donatus and Priscian were available at the beginning of this period, and by the end there were many vernacular grammars available to the schoolteacher. In general

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42) Joan Simon, *Education and Society in Tudor England* (Cambridge, 1967), p. 114. Simon is here summarizing Vives' *De Tradendis Disciplinis* (Trans. F. Waston, Cambridge, 1913).

43) Warren Boutcher, "Pilgrimage to Parnassus: local intellectual traditions, humanist education and the cultural geography of sixteenth-century England". In Y. L. Too & N. Livingstone, *Pedagogy and Power* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 130.

44) In Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy* (Baltimore, 1989), p. 162.

the pupil began with three years of grammatical instruction with the usher, or junior master. In the first year he was introduced to Latin grammar, learned basic vocabulary, and held simple conversations (pairwork); by year two he was translating Latins, speaking and writing in Latin, and reading elementary material; in the third year he reviewed and improved on everything done earlier, did Biblical translations both ways, read *Aesop's Fables*, studied Comenius' *Janua Linguarum*, and read more widely, particularly from religious texts.[45] At that point the pupil's grasp of Latin grammar — particularly the speaking and writing appropriate to that level — was assumed to be adequate to the task of starting on serious literary work with the master, including translation and writing. Greek also started in the fourth year, and possibly Hebrew in the sixth. Only the evidently modern arrivals — Biblical texts and Comenius and the study of Hebrew — were different from what a Roman schoolboy had experienced.

The second of the major changes in the Reformation-Renaissance time was the printing press. The outpouring of books at this period meant that a well equipped humanist school had a library of 250–300 books, including "classical authors, grammars, vocabularies, dictionaries, fables, dialogues, rhetoric, oratory, letters, phrases, anthologies".[46] As Eisenstein points out, print also meant that the need to rely on memory was decreased, and it was no longer necessary for the pupil to literally sit at the master's feet. Indeed a bright pupil could easily surpass the master in learning a language or a skill.[47] Memory work was certainly not eliminated, however, particularly at the lower levels of grammar learning. Further, vernacular translations of the classics

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45) Based on Hoole, *New Discovery of the Old Art of Teaching School* (1660).

46) Foster Watson, *op cit.*, p. 110.

47) Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 35.

simultaneously altered the status of the schoolmaster, who was no longer the sole authority on a text, and increased the opportunity to do translation as a classroom activity, since available printed authorities existed and could be referred to. As Simon politely puts it, such translations "enabled less knowledgeable masters to teach both English and Latin much better than in the past".[48] One result was that the literary connection — that is, the progression from basic grammar-translation work to the study of literary texts — received a boost from the printing revolution.

The printing revolution also compartmentalized Europe in the sense that individual nation-states worked within their own languages. In England, English began to appear in elementary grammar texts, such as Holte's *Lac Puerorum or Mylke for Children* (1479) and later in the texts of John Stanbridge (c.1520, popular for lower work) and of Robert Whitington for more advanced students.[49] The Stanbridge text was set out in a way that was to become familiar to later students of Latin:

Amo/as/at	I love
Doceo/ces/cet	I teach
Lego/gis/git	I rede
Audio/is/it	I here[50]

This initial presentation of Latin by way of vernacular translation was new, and marked yet another break with the scholastic Church tradition. Further, the increasing number of translations in the vernaculars[51] brought the ideals of classical civilization into school systems all over Europe. The Graeco-Roman world was identified with western civilization, and emerging nation-states vied

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48) J. Simon, *op. cit.*, p. 400.

49) A. F. Leach, *The Schools of Medieval England* (London, 1915), pp. 301–2.

50) K. Charlton, *op. cit.*, p. 107.

51) See G. Highet, *The Classical Tradition* (Oxford, 1949), Ch. 6 and elsewhere.

to show themselves heirs to this rich "background". It was all distinctly nationalist in flavour, and Latin was effectively rendered independent of the Church.[52]

So far we have mentioned the change in the content of Latin and the presence of printed materials as two of the innovations surrounding Reformation-Renaissance grammar instruction. A third point to be considered here is the backlash that occurred as a consequence of printing and the new liberal atmosphere of the times. This took the form of controls being placed on what should be taught and learned. Roman education had experienced this earlier, when grammar teachers had to be licensed by the Emperor particularly whenever moral, religious, or political norms appeared to be threatened. In England, grammar itself came under state control in 1540, when Henry VIII mandated Lily's grammar for use throughout all schools. There was continental precedent for this, as the grammars of Melanchthon (Germany, c.1521) and Despautere (France, 1537) had already been given official status. The reason offered was the expected one: that if boys changed schools they would, under the new system, find themselves using the same textbook. Lily's grammar was successively authorized by Edward VI and later Elizabeth 1 (1559), and in 1604 it was again confirmed. As late as 1638 the Norwich Visitation of Bishop Montagu asked "if there were any [unlicensed] schoolmaster in any parish who taught 'public grammar,' to write or read, or 'in private house'? Who are they?".[53] Although teachers of grammar had long been monitored in England,[54] the Reformation transfer from Catholic to Protestant appeared to increase rather than decrease the amount of control the Church

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52) See Eisenstein, *op. cit.*, pp. 82–83.

53) Foster Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

54) Adamson, *op. cit.*, p. 41. In 1423 the Abbot of (Saffron) Walden charged two chaplains with teaching "the alphabet, graces, and other higher (= Latin) books" illegally.

wielded. In this sense the Protestant rebellion was a double-edged sword: wanted because of its articulate attack on Catholicism but distrusted because its liberal thinking could be turned against other Protestants, which in fact did happen. The modest controls on grammar teaching may have been only "a slight matter"[55] in comparison with the larger program of control, but indicate the political sensitivity that in the past has surrounded the subject, particularly during liberal or transitional periods.

These attempts to control grammar teaching were not unrelated to the view of the grammarian as the custodian of language; both sprang from a desire not to allow a changing situation to get out of hand. Control, as we have seen, had been present in Roman education, and was now reiterated by Vives.[56] It was soon taken up by all the humanists with the added point that it also applied to the vernacular. In fact, the vernacular languages of this time badly needed classical grammar to give them credibility, and here we can detect the beginnings of the imposition of classical grammar on vernaculars such as English. The custodian of the classics therefore became the *de facto* custodian of the vernacular as well:

> Au temps de la Renaissance, les grammairiens de toute l'Europe considèrent les parlers vernaculaires avec un certain mépris. N'étant pas encore codifiés, ils se présentent, à leurs yeux, comme des idiomes de qualité inférieure, vulgaire. Une langue a une grammaire et des règles comme le latin; les dialectes n'en ont pas. Le principe de l'analogie qui caractérise le latin et le grec, pensent-ils, ne peut leur être appliqué.[57]

The fact that the vernaculars did not easily succumb to the strictures of

55) Foster Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
56) Vives urged schoolmasters to "become 'custodians of the treasury of their language' [Latin mostly] and to pay particular attention to the vernacular as an essential step towards improving educational practice". Simon, *op cit.*, p. 400.
57) Caravolas, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

Latin and Greek, as is implied in the final sentence above, draws attention to a further complication: that when two languages are being translated it is necessary that they possess approximately equal expressive and intellectual power, and that they represent social structures broadly similar to each other. Where these are felt to be not on a par, as was the case with vernaculars during the Renaissance, the requirement for correct translation becomes urgent. The vernacular must be seen to acquit itself well! Thought of in this way, linguistic power also dictates who translates whose language, and even who learns whose language. For example, Renaissance Italians took eagerly to Latin and Greek, but showed little interest in learning foreign languages since their own language was so powerful and prestigious.[58] Modern parallels between languages such as English and Japanese confirm this view: Americans spend significantly less time learning the grammar and translating Japanese than Japanese do in learning and translating English.

The Renaissance leader was to be selected from among those who had shown the ability to handle both power-ful classical grammar and its power-less vernacular counterpart, as symbolized by the act of doing translation between the two. As Bassnett has recently said, "great moments of social transformation are marked by translation activity". She continues:

> a culture that perceives itself to be at a crucial stage in its development, for example, undergoing a strong nationalist phase, or reconstructing itself in a post-revolutionary context, turns to translation as a means of enrichment.[59]

Previously closed societies — such as nineteenth century Japan — have been vigorous proponents of translation, and this has led to the need for teachers

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58) Caravolas, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
59) Susan Bassnett, "Translating Across Cultures". In S. Hunston (Ed.) *Language at Work* (Clevedon, UK, 1998), p. 75.

able to lay the grammatical foundations for it. The majority of these teachers came from what Grendler — describing Italian education in the Renaissance — calls the "artisan" class, and had made their way into teaching by diligent study or occasionally by lucky patronage. They maintained a position superior to the artisan class from which they had come, but rather lower than the professional class of lawyers and physicians.[60] Occasionally they established themselves in the middle classes, and their own lives were thus symbolic of the social transformation that Bassnett discusses. In Britain the Grammar Schools functioned as places of social advancement in any case,[61] and frequently none more so than in the cases of both usher and master.

Unfortunately, these grammar teachers were hard to find, resulting in a generally low standard of accomplishment in the very area in which they professed to be expert. Often the requirement asked for a morally sound person who also knew grammar, as in the case of the Statutes of the Grammar School in Sevenoaks (Kent) in 1574. The requirement was for "one honest and mete man, sufficiently learned and expert in grammar, not being in Holy Orders, to teach grammar in the school".[62] The grammar teacher should thus have honesty as his first attribute, and knowledge of grammar second. The result of such employment criteria was that poor teaching and flogging became associated with grammar teaching at this time, though both had been in evidence in Roman education, and both were to reappear in the nineteenth century also. Talented teachers like Ascham, Brinsley and Hoole looked for innovative ways to help the weak teacher and to make the learning of grammar more

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60) Grendler, *op cit.*, pp. 36–41.

61) Foster Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 112: "Grammar schools revealed themselves as the institutions which made possible ecclesiastical, commercial, social advancement for the individual".

62) Foster Watson, *op cit.*, p. 112.

enjoyable. Thus double translation, authentic dialogues, the regular use of the L1, and other suggestions were set out. But school traditions died hard, and new ideas spread slowly. Despite the generalized criticism of grammar-translation "tyranny" from writers like Milton and Locke, and the emergence of a "naturalistic" school favouring direct methods, untalented grammar teachers continued to turn to the familiar grammar book and the cane.

4. Conclusion

Grammar and translation in the Renaissance period therefore carried forward all the traditions that had been established in Roman education: (a) the model of a better society whose symbolic foundation was the study of grammar; (b) urbanized, normative, conservative, and often elitist attitudes; and (c) a focus on literature. To these were added social and religious agendas that used education to rework the medieval world into a new, secular form. Grammar was standardized across Europe by means of generally accepted texts, and in Britain it was even more formally controlled by royal decree. Hebrew was added at the top of an already crowded language curriculum, though it has been noted that Latin had undergone a narrowing in the intervening years.

In the classroom some innovations were seen, but the period is marked more by its adherence to old grammar teaching models than by its novel features. One obvious change was that the rise of vernaculars across Europe altered the way grammar was initially presented to students. However, some of the other innovations stemmed from less noteworthy changes, such as the alarming association between grammar teaching and poorly qualified teachers who regularly resorted to violence. Thoughtful and articulate teachers set out curriculums and methodologies that are recognizably modern. The printing press, which certainly decreased the amount of memory work a stu-

dent had to do and allowed schools to acquire libraries containing good translations of the classics, had considerable impact, but might well have been more influential had it not been for the *ad hoc* structure of schooling and the ingrained traditions of grammar teaching.