

Port-Royal and the Seventeenth-Century Paradigm Shift in Language Teaching

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Introduction: Latin Hegemony and Cartesian Thinking

Several aspects of modern language teaching can best be understood by examining the work of the remarkable group of teachers and philosophers collectively known as Port-Royal. In 1638 the religious society of the Jansenists founded the school of Port-Royal des Champs in Paris, and by coincidence brought together a scholarly group whose writings were to have educational impact far beyond their actual daily teaching. The “little schools” they established existed sporadically until 1660, but because Jansenism was regarded as almost heretical they were beset by controversies, closures, and hostility from the dominant educational practitioners, the Jesuits.¹⁾ Consequently, they probably never taught for more than 14 years in all. But the dozen or so “solitaries”, plus others such as the poet Racine—who was in part educated by them—and Blaise Pascal, who

1) The Jansenists were followers of Cornelius Jansen (1585–1638), Bishop of Ypres. Jansen’s critical attitude towards the Jesuits was shared by his friend and one time student companion Saint-Cyran, and was carried over when the latter became director of Port-Royal in 1635. The enlightened educational views of the Port-Royalists, and the conduct of their “petits-écoles”, soon became further causes of friction between the Jansenists and the Jesuits. For an excellent summary of these opposing attitudes see Garon Wheeler, “Port-Royal Tradition of General Grammar” in E. F. K. Koerner and R. E. Asher (eds.), *Concise History of the Language Sciences* (169–174), (Oxford, 1995).

derived moral and intellectual strength from their religious stance, caused a paradigm shift in all areas of teaching, and particularly in language teaching.

The salient aspects of Port-Royal, and its influence on linguistic thought, have been much discussed.²⁾ However, its influence on language teaching has so far been underestimated by the historians of language teaching,³⁾ perhaps because the Port-Royal schools never taught modern languages as such. However, particularly within the European context, the ideas set out in Lancelot and Arnauld's *Grammaire générale et raisonnée* of 1660, commonly known as the *Port-Royal Grammar*, were to open up significant new strands in the thinking about how languages might be taught. Most important among these new ideas, and the one which underpins everything else, was their view, radical at the time, that language was the creation of man rather than a gift of God.⁴⁾ This was not an act of hubris, for these were sincerely religious men, but rather an application of Cartesian philosophy. Descartes had held up mankind's linguistic ability as the separating line between men and beasts, and had thereby excluded God from the debate about the origins of language. Instead of reflecting God's mind,

2) See, for example, Maria Tsiapera and Garon Wheeler, *The Port-Royal Grammar: Sources and Influences* (Münster, 1993); Hans Aarsleff, *The Study of Language in England 1780–1860* (Minneapolis, 1983); Louis G. Kelly, *25 Centuries of Language Teaching* (Rowley, MA, 1969). For a comprehensive treatment of the schools see H. C. Barnard, *The Little Schools of Port-Royal* (Cambridge, 1913). Extracts from the Port-Royal writings are in H. C. Barnard, *The Port-Royalists on Education* (Cambridge, 1918). Also, Charles-A. Sainte-Beuve's massive *Port-Royal* (Paris, 1908) has been edited by Maxime Le Roy (Paris, 1954). The linguistic background to Port-Royal is given in V. Salmon's review of *Cartesian Linguistics*, by Noam Chomsky: *Journal of Linguistics*, 5/1, April, 1969, 165–187.

3) However, see A. P. R. Howatt, *A History of English Language Teaching* (Oxford, 1984), 80. Also, Kelly, *op cit.*, 47–49, 55, 138 and elsewhere.

4) See Pierre Juliard, *Philosophies of Language in Eighteenth-century France* (The Hague, 1970), 12–13.

language was now seen as reflecting mankind's mind, and as such was directly connected to the human ability to reason. Just as human reason could be analysed and investigated in rational terms, so too could language.

This demystification of language made all languages, and all language teaching, in a general sense equal. In particular, languages all shared an identical underlying structure, a corollary of which was that pedagogic practice should be common across all languages. This was an important change of perspective because in the schools the paradigmatic status of classical learning and the concomitant debasement of the vernacular were still facts of life. The implications of this "parity" view of languages were not arrived at quickly, and their development in the publications of the Port-Royal teachers can be traced from the early 1640s until their publications ceased in the late 1680s. Almost certainly, the initial step towards the developed concept set out in the *Grammaire générale* was in the form of a reaction against the traditional views and practices of the Jesuits.⁵⁾ In fact, the Port-Royalists' dislike of the Jesuits inspired the alternative methods of instruction that they practised, particularly regarding the teaching of Latin.

Latin, it should be noted, occupied a position that is somewhat difficult to pinpoint using modern language-teaching terminology. Only from the late nineteenth century did terms such as "vocabulary acquisition", "pronunciation", and "listening skill" take on the particular meanings that we understand today. For the five centuries of its monopoly Latin was the *primus*

5) Tsaipera and Wheeler, *op cit.*, give a good picture of the "unremitting prescriptivism" of the traditional approach, adding that it "mirrored very accurately the obedience to authority that was characteristic of the upper classes of the time" (12).

inter pares of the three holy languages—along with Greek and Hebrew—and it was clothed in garments which distinguished it from more sombre languages. The special status of classical Latin dates from the fifteenth century humanists, some of whom were trying to import its norms into Latin as a Church language. Central to both the Church and to education, it created at its peak what a recent writer has called a “unitary intellectual Europe” in which “learning was expressed in Latin”.⁶⁾ Beyond these academic confines there was a whole “Latin dimension” to Western civilisation, embracing all occupations and all levels of society. However, the way Latin was presented in the classroom does not equate with the modern meaning of “learning a foreign language”, nor did it supply us with a ready-made metalanguage with which to discuss language acquisition. Latin was simply a fact of life, learned to some degree by all of Europe. For the many it constituted basic literacy,⁷⁾ and for those who aspired to non-manual occupations it had to be learned thoroughly in its spoken and written forms. But, for language teachers, the legacy of this whole instructional effort is remarkably meagre.

The humanist renaissance saw the ending of medieval Latin and its replacement by classical Latin, with Cicero as the writer par excellence to be emulated.⁸⁾ For the student this represented no improvement whatso-

6) Françoise Waquet, *Latin or the Empire of a Sign* (London, 2001. Originally published as *Le latin ou l'empire d'un signe*, Paris, 1998. Translated by John Howe), 1.

7) Indeed, one reason for its continued application in the schools of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was that it was easier to teach a child to read using Latin, which was phonetically transparent, rather than by using a vernacular—such as English or French—which was pronounced differently from its appearance on the page.

8) The following analysis follows that of V. Salmon, in ‘Joseph Webbe: Some Seventeenth-Century Views on Language-Teaching and the Nature of Meaning’. In ↗

ever, but rather an increase in the amount of grammar to be learned. This was because of a heightened need for elegance, and because of a decrease in the amount of Latin he encountered in his daily life. The ensuing grammar overload brought forth a steady line of reformers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Writers such as Ascham (1515–1568), Mulcaster (c. 1530–1611), Montaigne (1533–1592), Brinsley (1566–c.1630), and Locke (1632–1704) proposed what today would be called an acquisition model, and looked for ways to decrease the amount of grammar to be learned. Among the various reforms suggested were, for example, a move towards first language acquisition methods (Montaigne and Locke), the elimination of grammar and the introduction of a method based on collocations (Webbe), and the implementation of a systematised course including parsing and translation (Brinsley⁹).

First language acquisition interested these writers on account of its potential to improve the efficiency of Latin teaching. Certainly change was needed, and writers such as Hawkins have argued that in the second half of the seventeenth century changes can indeed be discerned in Latin instruction. He identifies Comenius (1592–1671) as the single most influential agent of that change, a view shared by Howatt.¹⁰ One example of the radical nature of Comenius' thought can be seen in his thinking on the learning of vocabulary. In his *Orbis Pictus* (1658, but written in the early 1650s) he offered a vocabulary-acquisition course illustrated by pictures, in

↘ V. Salmon, *The Study of Language in 17th-Century England*, (Amsterdam, 1979), 15–31.

9) See V. Salmon: 'John Brinsley: 17th-Century Pioneer in Applied Linguistics'. In V. Salmon, *The Study of Language in 17th-Century England*, (Amsterdam, 1979), 33–46.

10) Eric W. Hawkins, *Modern Languages in the Curriculum* (Cambridge, 1981), 103. Also Howatt, *op cit.*, 33.

which the new vocabulary was embedded in a coherent narrative. This narrative structure replaced the traditional word-list, providing the pupil instead with an easier and more meaningful method of acquiring vocabulary. His deliberately “student-centred” approach involved an inductive methodology in which the example preceded the rule, and this did *not* win him friends among traditionally minded teachers at the time. Even the Port-Royal teachers, despite their otherwise progressive views, were wedded to the idea of a rule-based methodology. Indeed, their concept of rational grammar assumed that even a young pupil would be able and willing to cope with the complexities of a rule-first approach.¹¹⁾

A number of common themes can be seen in the thinking of these reformers: (a) a general desire to make the learning of Latin easier; (b) an anti-grammar, anti-rote learning bias; (c) an awareness of the vernacular and its possible uses in the classroom; and (d) an interest in translation as a practical, time-saving technique. Unfortunately—and this is important—these reformers failed to alter practice at the school level despite the value and originality of their ideas. Howatt, for example, uses the words “sterile” and “isolated” to describe Webbe’s work.¹²⁾

The experimentation that took place at Port-Royal was neither sterile nor isolated, a fact proved by the anger it so frequently aroused. The Port-Royalists, like the reformers mentioned above, sought to make the learning of Latin easier, and virtually all their conclusions and techniques had been anticipated by others. But on one point they differed radically: rather than seeking a return to first language models, or to illustrated textbooks, or to an anti-grammar stance, they turned instead to the existing language abili-

11) Comenius’ earlier writings, *Porta Linguarum* (1631) and *Janua Linguarum* (1633), were certainly known to, and criticised by, the Port-Royalists.

12) Howatt, *op cit.*, 38.

ties of their pupils, that is, to their mother-tongue French. The native language, they believed, offered an opportunity to apply to language teaching the rationalism so recently expounded by René Descartes (1596–1650) in his *Discours de la méthode* (1637). From this vantage point the Port-Royalists questioned the traditional verities of language teaching, and, more importantly, they did so from inside the system: physically from their position in a group of schools in and around Paris, and intellectually as “solitaries” dedicated to the teaching of Latin and the pursuit of philosophy.

Their particular theoretical stance, allied to their extensive practical experience, was all consolidated at the end of the Port-Royal period in the *Grammaire générale* (1660). Three important ideas relevant to language teaching emerged from their efforts: (a) a rational critique of classical—primarily Latin—teaching, (b) the development of a vernacular methodology, and (c) vigorous advocacy of translation as the central task of language learning. In ways that will be traced below, these three points impacted all subsequent thinking about language teaching, being particularly relevant to our understanding of nineteenth-century practices, which in turn produced the reaction known as the Reform Movement, from 1870 onwards.

The Rationalisation of Language Teaching: Clearing the Ground

Descartes had called for the application of common sense to practical matters, with the result that for the Port-Royalists common sense became the methodological touchstone for language teaching. Descartes’ theory, plus their own practical classroom experiences, led them to question afresh the traditional way in which languages were taught. One of their first targets was the Flemish grammarian Despauter (or Despautère, the Flemish grammarian Van Pauteren, 1460–1520), famous for his doggerel rhymes to facilitate the learning of Latin. The fact that the Jesuits admired him and

used his books compounded his sins in Port-Royal eyes: "Now to my mind the use of Despauter neither helps them [pupils] nor facilitates the learning of rules; for it is a difficult work, written in Latin and quite unintelligible in many places".¹³⁾ This comment was written by Pierre Coustel (1621–1704) in 1687, but reflects one of the earliest convictions of the Port-Royalists: that a language should not be taught by giving the rules in that language. Since medieval times Latin had been taught directly by the giving of rules in Latin, though this burden must have seemed slight to pupils, compared to the overall use of Latin in the system and the amount of Latin a child absorbed throughout his educational life.¹⁴⁾

Pierre Nicole (1625–1695), who entered Port-Royal as an experienced teacher in 1646, was of the same opinion: "Et le sens commun fait voir d'abord qu'on ne doit pas se servir de celles [méthodes] où les regles de la Grammaire sont exprimées en Latin".¹⁵⁾ Nicole, who may have been one of the truly original thinkers about language teaching, wanted language teaching to be conducted in the first language. He also held a range of strong opinions on everything else to do with language teaching. For example, he objected to the use of tables—then becoming common—for the presentation of grammatical material, and to the kind of flashcards then in use, on both of which he comments that they make language learning look deceptively easy. Those who would do away with grammar altogether are dismissed as lazy people who don't want to take the trouble to learn it. Nobody is exempt from his criticism: Comenius' lexical approach in his

13) Coustel, *Règles*, etc., in Barnard (*op cit.*, 1918), 157. Original 1687.

14) See Waquet, *op cit.*, pp. 8–9 for the extent of Latin learning in France up to about 1750.

15) Pierre Nicole, *De l'Education d'un Prince* (1670), Ch. XXV, pp. 39–40. And common sense makes us realise immediately that one shouldn't make use of those [methods] in which the rules of grammar are expressed in Latin.

Janua Linguarum (1633) is put down as “un livre où il n’y a que les mots à apprendre”.¹⁶⁾ Learning by heart, argues Nicole, is a good exercise, but should not be attempted with weak students. An oral approach is, he suggests, difficult or impossible to implement because of the lack of proficiency among teachers. In a similar vein he is critical of attempts to get students to speak Latin all the time, since they don’t know enough to make sense and the effort inhibits the development of their first language.¹⁷⁾ More positively, Nicole advocated a reading and translation method which took into account the student’s abilities and interests and was largely conducted in the child’s first language — a method found in many foreign-language contexts at the present time.

The Port-Royalists’ opposition to learning the rules of a language in the language itself was arrived at by the simple but liberating thought that Latin was, after all, “just another language”:

If one were learning Spanish, Italian, or German, for example, it would be an unheard-of thing to use rules written in Spanish, Italian, or German; for this would argue that one both knew and did not know these languages at one and the same time—an obvious contradiction.¹⁸⁾

In modern terms, the view expressed here was that Latin should be learned as a foreign language rather than as a second language. The sacred trappings, particularly how it should be taught, should be stripped away. No diminution of Latin was thereby implied, because in fact the Port-Royalists revered Latin and only wished to see it successfully taught. But for purposes of analysis and pedagogy they equated it with the

16) Nicole, *op cit.*, p. 41. A book in which there are only words to be learned.

17) Nicole, *op cit.*, Ch. XXIV.

18) Coustel, *Règles, etc.* (1687). In Barnard (*op cit.*, 1918), 157.

vernacular languages. This viewpoint cleared the ground for a fresh start in language teaching, and suddenly we hear the authentic voice of the imaginative teacher:

Nouns substantive may be compared to persons of rank who usually go with their train and their suite. The adjectives are like the attendants who are obliged to follow their masters wherever they go and who serve to make them appear with greater magnificence and pomp. And so if a noun substantive is masculine or nominative or singular or plural, the adjective has to follow suit.¹⁹⁾

This might well have come from any subsequent period of language teaching, though not before. The agreement rule is exactly the same, the presentation quite different. The Port-Royalists had at least cracked the mould, if not broken it completely.

Claude Lancelot and the Idea of Pedagogic Grammar

If Latin could now be analysed as a foreign language several adjustments could be made to the traditional approach. One of these involved the amount of grammar that could realistically be taught, and further, how it could be taught. Claude Lancelot (c.1615–1695), one of the Port-Royal teachers, approached the problem of pedagogic grammar through a series of “new method” books,²⁰⁾ starting with his *Nouvelle Méthode de Messieurs de Port Royal pour Apprendre Facilement et en peu de temps la Langue Latine* (1644, then subsequent editions and a major revision in 1656). In his “new method” Latin grammar Lancelot not only gave the rules in French

19) Ibid., 171.

20) G. A. Padley, in his *Grammatical Theory in Western Europe 1500–1700* (Cambridge, 1985, 316), discusses the special significance of the word “méthode” at this time, arising from Descartes’ “preoccupation” with it.

verse, but rejected what he called “the minutiae of grammar”.

J'ay eu soin aussi d'éviter quelques observations qui m'ont paru moins utiles, me souvenant de la parole excellente de Quintilien, *Que c'est une partie de la science d'un Grammarien vraiment habile, que de sçavoir qu'il y a des choses qui ne meritent pas d'etre sceuës.*²¹⁾

The idea that there are areas of grammar that are “moins utiles” introduced some degree of selection into the Port-Royal textbooks, though it should be added that Lancelot's own grammar book ran to 654 pages. However, Lancelot's concern to reduce the burden of learning is also evident in his *Avis Au Lecteur, touchant les Regles de cette Nouvelle Méthode*, in which he sets out, and then demolishes, the three ways in which Latin was traditionally taught.²²⁾ These were:

- Give the rules in Latin verse, like Despautère.
- Give the rules in French prose.
- Give the rules in Tables.

Despautère's Latin verses for remembering the rules were described as “obscurs en quelques endroits”. Those giving the rules in French prose were on the right track, but presenting rules in Tables was only suitable for “des hommes avancez en âge”, with the comment: “il est difficile qu'elles puissent servir generalement à des enfans”. He talks glowingly of children's imagination and in particular their memory skills — “Il n'y a que

21) “I have been careful to avoid some observations that seemed to me not very useful, remembering the excellent saying of Quintilian that it is part of the science of a really skilful grammarian to know that there are some things that are not worth knowing” (Preface, 8th Edition, Paris, 1696). (Trans. By A. D. Jones. London, 1898), 13–14.

22) The *Avis* contains no page numbers, making accurate identification of the pages impossible.

la memoire qui soit forte et agissante dans eux" — which should be taken advantage of in teaching them a language.

This leads Lancelot to his main innovation, which is that the rules of Latin should be presented in French verses.²³⁾ Using language that would grace any modern dust jacket, he unashamedly says that this method will render things "si claires & si intelligibles" for the pupils, with the added advantage that the rhythm of the syllables will not permit them to change or forget the words. To the rational mind all this was obvious:

Car qui est l'homme qui voulût presenter une Grammaire en vers Hebreux pour apprendre l'Hebreu, ou en vers Grecs pour apprendre le Grec, ou en vers Italiens pour apprendre l'Italien? N'est-ce pas supposer qu'on sçait déjà ce qu'on veut apprendre.²⁴⁾

Lancelot was here putting into practice the Port-Royal "line", that the teaching of Latin, or any language, should take place in the mother tongue: "Il est visible que nous nous devons servir de notre Langue maternelle comme d'un moyen pour entrer dans les Langues qui nous sont étrangères et inconnuës".²⁵⁾ As well as being very much in the spirit of the times, the idea of teaching Latin through the first language was supported by some-

23) Example: Under "Declensions", Regle XII, Des Noms en R:

Ceux in R ajoutent IS

Fur, furis; Honor, honóris.

Neanmoins Farris vient de Far,

Comme Hépatís se fait d'Hepar. (Lancelot, *Nouvelle Methode Latine*, 1644/1696, p. 62)

24) Lancelot, *ibid.*, Preface. Who would want to present a grammar in Hebrew verses to learn Hebrew, or in Greek verses to learn Greek, or in Italian verses to learn Italian? Isn't this to suppose that one already knows what one wants to learn?

25) Lancelot, *ibid.*, Preface. It is obvious that we should make use of our mother tongue as a means of entry into languages which are strange and unknown to us.

thing novel: a psychological interest in the pupil's ability to learn a language. The Port-royalists recognised that there were weak as well as strong pupils, and that a pedagogic rather than comprehensive view of grammar was needed. This fresh "insight" has been attributed to the fact that the Jansenists "were more deeply aware of the peculiar characteristics of the child's mind (as distinct from that of the adult) and so proceeded further with the process of simplification".²⁶⁾

Lancelot based his simplification—which really meant using his French verses rather than the out and out simplification of lexis, syntax and so forth, as happened later—on classroom experience. However, with French being used to give the rules of Latin a further point arose: In order to understand even the simplest Latin rules, a knowledge of the grammar of one's mother tongue was a necessary precondition. In fact, the pupil needed a working knowledge of the grammars of both languages if he was to make the kind of progress desired at Port-Royal schools. The young scholar was therefore actively engaged in sorting out two grammars—that of his native language and that of Latin—and although both were presented sympathetically, the analytical burden was considerable. However, the compensating factor, as R. N. Coe has suggested, was that the Port-Royal system, like all Cartesian systems, followed "a clear and unmistakable 'order' and sequence in which all ideas had to be presented to make them intelligible".²⁷⁾ Order and sequence therefore came to characterise the Port-Royal system, and as long as this was present the pupil could be faced with relatively complex material. Consequently, "there was no objection to the teaching of gram-

26) R. N. Coe, "The Idea of 'Natural Order' in French Education, 1600–1760". *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 15/2, pp. 144–158, (May, 1957), 147.

27) Coe, *op cit.*, 145.

mathematical abstractions, provided that these were presented in a logical and systematic order".²⁸⁾

Specifically, their view of the pedagogic process was that the teacher, for his part, was expected to offer a coherent and logical account of a language in a lively and entertaining way, relating the target language to the pupil's own. The pupil was expected to rationalise this account with his own linguistic system — his mother tongue — in an attempt to reconstruct what the teacher had dissected. The pupil was therefore engaged in analytical linguistic comparison, a process familiar to all who have tried to learn a new language and often more formally called contrastive analysis. But its expression in the writings of the Port-Royalists was long lasting, and it was not until the full impact of Locke's ideas was felt in the eighteenth century that a move was made away from engaging the pupil's mind in this way.

The idea of introducing rational rather than traditional thinking into the structure of language teaching, that is, into the ordering of the curriculum, was not new. In England, Brinsley and by Webbe, to give just two examples,²⁹⁾ had attempted in various ways to make language learning easier. Comenius' experiments with vernacular translations and with pictures had also considered the needs of the pupil. But the Port-Royalists' systemic approach contained within it the seeds of future developments in curriculum theory and syllabus design, because they were prepared to apply a whole system of thought — rationalism — to the business of language teaching and learning. If their contribution was not totally original, it was at least more comprehensive than their predecessors, and certainly

28) Coe, *op cit.*, 146.

29) See Vivian Salmon, "Effort and Achievement in 17th-century British Linguistics". In T. Bynon & F. R. Palmer (Eds.), *Studies in the History of Western Linguistics* (Cambridge, 1986), 69–95.

came at a time when society was more receptive to such ideas.

Translation in the Classroom: (a) Oral, and (b) Written

Rationalising the amount of grammar to be learned was seen by the Port-Royalists as going hand in hand with a vernacular methodology. Historically there was nothing new about using the vernacular, as its pedigree stretched back to Roman times.³⁰⁾ But the idea of using the vernacular to teach Latin depended, in practical and psychological terms, on one important assumption: that the vernacular language was equal to the Latin. That is, linguistically the vernacular had to be equal to the nuances and subtleties of Latin; and psychologically it had to be accepted by educated people as having the same authority as the classical language.³¹⁾ In classrooms, of course, the vernacular languages had been introduced in sixteenth-century Europe, but only in order to cater to the less able student, or to boost the spread of education, or for political reasons. They had never been considered on a par with Latin. But from the beginning of their unique association in 1638, the teachers of Port-Royal felt sufficiently confident in the French language to put into practice a full teaching programme involving French and Latin equally.³²⁾ Never before had it been shown so bluntly that the day of the vernacular languages had arrived. This "equal-

30) See Malcolm Benson, 'The Secret Life of Grammar-Translation'. In Hugh Trappes-Lomax (Ed.), *Change and Continuity in Applied Linguistics* (Clevedon, 2000), 35-50.

31) Françoise Waquet shows that from the seventeenth century onwards there was, for Latin, a "decline of the spoken language in the academic world", and by the eighteenth "the vernacular [had] entrenched itself in education" (*op. cit.*, 153). Written Latin had a longer lifespan, being kept alive in the religious and educational arenas up to modern times. But, as Waquet also shows, the vernaculars came to be seen as more "convenient", especially in the eighteenth century.

32) Tsiapera and Wheeler, *op. cit.*, 95.

ity" view informed all the Port-Royalists' pronouncements on teaching, and underpinned the notion of universal grammar that was later expressed in the *Grammaire générale*.

With Latin being taught in the Port-Royal schools through the medium of French, the students' first language, French was now central to all aspects of their methodology. Lancelot favoured bringing in modern French authors to supplement the classics, and from this he developed his own method of teaching pupils to read:

Je le prens phrase à phrase. Je leur dis le françois mot à mot, & ils me le redisent en latin. S'ils font quelque faute, je la leur fais voir; & s'ils se servent d'un mot qui ne soit pas propre, je leur en fais mettre un autre, & je le rejette toujours jusqu'à ce qu'ils aient trouvé celui de l'auteur ou un équivalent. S'ils manquent à attraper son tour ou sa liaison, ils font la transition par un autre particule & donnent un autre tour par le relatif, par le participe, &c.³³⁾

Lancelot is here equivocal about the need for exactness, emphasising instead the need to find an appropriate translation that would reveal the correct meaning. He also advocated a lot of practice, following the thoughts of Petrus Ramus (1515–1572). He praises

that maxim of Ramus: few precepts, and a great deal of practice: and therefore that as soon as boys begin to have a smattering of these

33) I take it phrase by phrase. I say the French word by word, and they tell it to me in Latin. If they make any mistake I tell them, and if they use a word that isn't correct I make them give another, and I always reject it until they have found the exact word of the author, or an equivalent. If they fail to find his turn of phrase, or the way it is connected together, they make the transition with another word and give a different turn of phrase with the relative, the participle, etc. In Fontaine, *Memoires pour servir a l'histoire de Port-Royal*, 2 (Utrecht, 1736, 479). Lancelot may have written this in the 1670s.

rules, it would be proper to lead them into the practice, by putting into their hands a few select dialogues, or some of the purest and clearest writers, such as Caesar's commentaries, and making them translate into their mother tongue part of Cicero's easiest epistles, in order to learn both languages at the same time, reserving to compose in Latin, till they are more advanced, this being without doubt the most arduous part of grammatical learning.³⁴⁾

This method—"making them translate" in order to learn both languages at the same time"—further aligned the teaching of Latin with vernacular teaching. At the lower levels the translation was oral rather than written, as oral translation was felt to be the most direct method in terms of reaching the original sense of the author, and also took most account of the emotional impact of the original. Writing Latin was reserved for the higher levels, a practice which may be seen as contrary to most translation-based methodologies, and in particular to the nineteenth-century "grammar-translation" way of teaching languages. The Port-Royalists rejected the idea of starting with written translation as "un ordre tout renversé et tout contraire à la nature", as Sainte-Beuve says.³⁵⁾

Practice took the form of a lot of dictation:

Having listened to the presentation of a Latin text in French, pupils were then required to take the text and rewrite it in 'the natural order', which was of course the order of the mother tongue itself.³⁶⁾

34) Claude Lancelot, 'Advertisement' to his Latin Grammar (Transl. T. Nugent, London, 1758), xxx. It is interesting to note that Ramus' Latin grammar had been translated into English in 1585.

35) Sainte-Beuve, Charles Augustin. *Port-Royal* (Ed., Maxime Leroy, Libraire Gallimard, 1954), 456. The remainder of the paragraph also relies on Sainte-Beuve's analysis, 456-7.

36) G. A. Padley, op cit., 318. It is of note that John Brinsley (1566-c. 1630) had anticipated much of this method in his *Ludus Literarius* (1612).

There was, however, a more pragmatic reason for oral translation: it would not interfere with the development of the first language, and indeed would probably strengthen it. On this point Guyot says, "French must be learned before Latin; and children must be grounded in the everyday, common style of French... that the Latin they learn will be unable to change and corrupt the purity of their French".³⁷⁾ This protective attitude towards French may be explained by the fact that in the mid-seventeenth century French was just achieving its freedom from Latin, and that that freedom was as yet neither complete nor secure. There was therefore understandable pressure to reinforce French in the young generation, and oral translation was seen as a means of teaching Latin while simultaneously accommodating the revised aim of inculcating French. In a similar vein, writing exercises were done first in French and later in Latin, content being supplied by the short stories, histories, and dialogues of the students themselves.

The continual movement between French and Latin meant that translation became *the* way to facilitate language learning. Translation itself, of course, was not new, and had been part of language teaching for centuries.³⁸⁾ Roger Ascham (1515–1568) had advocated his famous "double translation" in his *Schoolmaster* (1570). Nevertheless, it had not previously been the preferred teaching method. Coustel, for one, advocated its continual use:

Children then must be practised particularly in translation, because the application which must be employed in pondering the various expressions and for finding the sense of a Latin author exercises their intelligence and their judgement alike and makes them realise the beauty of the French as fully as that of the Latin.³⁹⁾

37) *Ibid.*, 317-318.

38) See Kelly, *op cit.*, 51.

39) Coustel, *Règles, etc.* (1687). In Barnard (*op cit.*, 1918), 165.

Another of the Port-Royal teachers, Pierre Thomas Du Fossé (1634–1698), talked lavishly in his *Mémoires* about the beauties of the French language in connection with translation. He also advises learners to:

Rendre notre traduction un tableau & un représentation au vif de la piece qu'un traduit: ensorte que l'on puisse dire que le françois est aussi beau que le latin; & citer avec assurance le françois au bien du latin.⁴⁰⁾

Du Fossé wants a translation be “extremely faithful and literal” so that “ci, par exemple, Ciceron avoit parlé en notre langue, il eût parlé de même que nous le faisons parler dans notre traduction.”⁴¹⁾ However, Du Fossé may have been somewhat out of step with his fellow teachers, as most of their comments on translation favoured a freer approach. Coustel, in a more typical comment, asks that the translator should “preserve the spirit and the genius of the author”.⁴²⁾ Despite these apparent disagreements over the precise approach to translation, the Port-Royal teachers used it in both directions at a time when most teachers conducted their classes only in Latin.

The *Grammaire générale et raisonnée* (1660)

Having now looked at the types of classroom practices advocated by the

40) Pierre Thomas Du Fossé, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de Port-Royal*, II, p. 176 (Utrecht, 1739). Make our translation a picture or vivid reproduction of the piece which is being translated; so that the French may be said to be as fine as the Latin and may be quoted with as much confidence as the Latin original. (Translation: Barnard, *op cit.*, 1918), 168.

41) Du Fossé, *Mémoires*, *op cit.*, p. 176. If Cicero, for example, had spoken our language he would have used the same words as we make him use in translation.” (Translation: Barnard, *op cit.*, 1918), 168.

42) Coustel, *Règles, etc.*, (1687). In Barnard (*op cit.*, 1918), 166.

Port-Royal teachers, it is possible to understand the rationale behind the *Grammaire générale et raisonnée*, which was put together by Lancelot and Arnauld in 1660. Commentators on this book have found it difficult to place, with three academic groups — philosophers, linguists, and teachers — all claiming separate significances for it. The fact of the matter is that in the seventeenth century these disciplines were not as sharply differentiated as they are today. Consequently, the book is a fine example of a seminal text, since it (a) interests philosophers reading the Port-Royal *Logic*,⁴³⁾ (b) opens up for linguists the subject of universal grammar, and (c) provides a coda to the practical language-teaching approaches and techniques of the previous 20 years, as seen above. Tsiapera and Wheeler argue that the *Grammaire générale* “was simply a pedagogical work”,⁴⁴⁾ and Padley suggests that its “immediate purpose” was to provide an introduction to grammar for the pupils of the *Petites Ecoles*.⁴⁵⁾ Padley further suggests that the book had the effect of publicising the Latin grammarians’ debates, which, if true, makes it the first contribution to the methodological debates of subsequent centuries right up to the present.

However, the more general significance of the *Grammaire générale* for language teaching should not be missed. Its treatment of language as an analysable object, rather than as a received tradition, altered how it might be approached and taught. Antoine Arnauld (1612–1694), in many ways the leading personage of Port-Royal life and thought, offered the idea that “language is the mirror of *thought*”.⁴⁶⁾ In modern terms this might not sound particularly revolutionary, but here we must see matters as they

43) Arnauld and Nicole, *La Logique ou l'art de penser* (Paris, 1662).

44) Tsiapera and Wheeler, *op cit.*, 15.

45) G. A. Padley, *op cit.*, 323.

46) G. A. Padley, *op cit.*, 324.

appeared at the time: The Scholastic-Medieval tradition had seen language as consisting of memory and imitation, with language learning—for example Latin—practised in accordance with that tradition. But if language is representative of thought, then it is also capable of being rationally analysed in grammatical terms, and more significantly, of being approached in a common sense way. The grammatical side of the *Grammaire générale* remains at best “esoteric”⁴⁷⁾ and moves sharply into the territory covered by the Port-Royal *Logic*. Assessments of its precise value to grammatical theory have ranged from the laudatory to the dismissive.⁴⁸⁾

But the application of rational thought to language generally and to language teaching in particular opened the way for numerous ideas over and above the purely classroom innovations which have already been discussed. Three examples will have to suffice here: (a) the usage problem, (b) the notion of efficiency in language learning, and (c) the universal grammar idea. In the *Grammaire générale* Lancelot and Arnauld grapple—perhaps rather inconclusively—with the problem of usage, a central concern for language teachers then and now. In their discussion of pronoun usage, for example, they offer the following: “in order to speak properly, one ought ordinarily to pay attention to this rule... save in the cases of phrases which are authorised by usage, or for which one has special reason for doing so”.⁴⁹⁾ This would appear to leave the question open, since opinions would clearly differ on whether a phrase really was “authorised by usage,” and how convincing the “special reason” was. At the end of Chapter IX Lancelot and Arnauld offer another version of the same point:

47) Tsiapera and Wheeler, *op cit.*, 129.

48) See Padley, *op cit.*, 318–324.

49) In Tsiapera and Wheeler, *op cit.*, 133.

Those modes of speech which are authorized by a general and uncontested use ought to pass as legitimate, even if they are contrary to the rules and internal analogy of the language. On the other hand, one ought not adduce them in order to cast doubt upon the rules and disturb the analogy of languages, nor should they be used to authorize as consequences of themselves other modes of speech which usage has not authorized.⁵⁰⁾

Their position is therefore one of accepting "uncontested use" even in defiance of the prescribed rules, but drawing a line at the use of these uncontested forms as a basis for accepting further "not authorized" forms. In short, they were aware of the dangers of uncontrolled freedom in matters of usage. Here we can see the Port-Royalists' radical views being held in check by an innate conservatism. Alternatively, their views may be accounted for as reflecting their "aim to explain usage rather than change it".⁵¹⁾ At the very least, Lancelot and Arnauld were flexible over the matter of promoting usage or tradition as a guide to pedagogic orientation. The equivocal nature of their conclusions should not blind us to the fact that they were re-vivifying a much-contested issue that is still with us today.

A second idea implicit in the *Grammaire générale* was efficiency in language learning. Proponents of other new "methods" at this time claimed that more could now be learned in three months than had previously been possible in ten years, and Port-Royal itself was not averse to being associated with this new idea. Part of this move towards efficiency, for the Port-Royalists, was that rote learning should be reduced, and that the vernacular should be used to explain new grammar, as we have seen. Reasoning powers were to be developed while memory work was to be reduced. Descartes' search for "method," had become a search for a more efficient,

50) Ibid., 136.

51) Padley, *op cit.*, 320.

easier, and more rational method of learning. In Padley's phrase, both usage and reason were at this time "pedagogically motivated".⁵²⁾

The *Grammaire générale* also proposed a third, far-reaching idea which was implicit in its title: that all languages have the same essential structure, and only differ in their surface realisations. This stemmed from the rationalist belief in the connection between language and thought. The Port-Royalists argued that if all men think rationally, and language is the product of thought, then language must be rational too. There is therefore a common and universal grammar behind each language, regardless of whatever surface form is being demonstrated. In other scientific areas the scholars of the seventeenth century were searching for the general and universal rules that would explain the new, post-Renaissance life. Language, too, should be describable within these universal terms. Aarsleff says:

It [universal grammar] was based on the simple consideration that if discourse is the image of thought and if thought is subject to the laws of reason, then discourse itself must reveal and illustrate the laws of reason... The original being the same to all people regardless of the language they speak, it follows that their individual copies must of necessity reproduce the same form or structure of this original, though the colors, the actual words and expressions, may differ.⁵³⁾

This view gives considerable support to the idea that equivalencies can be obtained across languages, and that the essential elements of one language are replicated in all others, just as Latin could be rendered into elegant French. Thus, all languages will have categories such as nouns, verbs, and all the other parts of speech, and specific instances of these can be matched one against the other. Although this bringing together of languages did

52) Ibid., 316.

53) Aarsleff, *op cit.*, 14–15.

not offer much to practising teachers, it gave intellectual credibility to translation, as a valid way of transferring the meaning of one language into another. While it would be facile to make a direct connection between the universal grammar idea and the methodology embodied in the grammar-translation method, there is no doubt that if any linguistic rationale for the classroom methodology of the nineteenth century was needed, it lay in the Port-Royal thinking.

Conclusion: The New Paradigm Evolves

The Port-Royal ideas took hold slowly. Initially they had little immediate impact on the teaching of Latin, or of any other language. However, by 1684 the first influential educator to appreciate their ideas had emerged: Jean-Baptiste de La Salle (1651–1719) recognised the practicality of their ideas when he founded his Institute of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. He set out various guidelines in a working document—frequently edited and amended—that was eventually published in 1720 as *Conduct of the Schools*. It reflected a number of the Port-Royal ideas, for example in the use of the vernacular teaching method, particularly in the introduction of French at the earliest stage for learning to read.⁵⁴⁾

In the eighteenth century their writings were supported by a second influential educator, Charles Rollin (1661–1741), who from 1693 occupied the important post of Rector of the University of Paris.⁵⁵⁾ His *Traité des études* (1726–1728) contained many Port-Royal ideas, an unsurprising fact since Rollin himself was a Jansenist and had been a friend of Arnauld. In his

54) Barnard, *op cit.* (1913), 219.

55) For accounts of Rollin's extensive influence see Barnard *op cit.* (1913), 217–8; Albert C. Gaudin, *The Educational Views of Charles Rollin* (New York, 1939), especially 65–119; H. C. Barnard, *The French Tradition in Education* (Cambridge, 1922/1970), Ch. VI.

own classes he used Arnauld's *Règlement des Études pour les lettres humaines*, which had probably been prepared for the "little schools". As Rector of the university Rollin was in a position to implement changes, one of which was to introduce the study of French as a subject using the analytical framework of the *Grammaire générale*. This elevation of French was accompanied by a concomitant decrease in the "domination" of Latin.

By the middle of the eighteenth century much of the Port-Royal thinking had become accepted practice, though its demanding Cartesian emphasis on linguistic analysis and comparison had been dropped. The "natural" approach that took inspiration from Locke, and found its greatest expression in Rousseau, agreed with the Port-Royalists that the vernacular was both a worthy subject in its own right, and should be the medium of instruction in foreign language instruction, particularly for Latin. In other areas "common sense" began to be applied to the analysis of language, as, for example, when James Harris (1709–1780) attacked the idea of cases in modern languages:

There are no cases in the modern languages, except a few among the primitive pronouns, such as I, and Me; Je and Moy; and the English Genitive formed by the addition of S.⁵⁶⁾

Such forthright analysis was not easily accepted into modern language teaching, particularly when the Latin model, together with all its cases, was being held up as the model for foreign language teaching.

In the nineteenth century the Port-Royalists' belief in the efficacy of translation back and forth was narrowed to a preoccupation with grammar and translation, omitting the ideas of oral translation which had originally ani-

56) James Harris, *Hermes, or a Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Language and Universal Grammar* (London, 1751), 275.

mated it. It is therefore possible to see the Port-Royalists as to some extent responsible for some of the grammar-translation excesses of that time, though, as this paper has shown, that analysis does not do credit to their practice or their thinking on either grammar or translation. Further, their concept of universal grammar may be interpreted as giving support to translation as the language teaching exercise *par excellence*, but again this would be an inadequate analysis. A more subtle view comes from Ian Michael, who has indicated that the notion of universal grammar had the effect of inhibiting the development of separate methodologies for teaching the first language, the classics, and the modern foreign languages.⁵⁷⁾ This inhibition led, in early nineteenth century Britain, to a situation in which English, Latin and French were all taught in the same way and from similarly structured textbooks. This confusion was not untangled until into the twentieth century, by which time considerable branching had taken place, resulting in first-language and foreign-language teaching both looking quite distinct from Latin teaching, and also increasingly different from each other.

The next paradigm shift came when the Reform Movement of the late nineteenth century moved modern language teaching away from the grammar-translation method, whose origins in Port-Royalist thinking have been looked at in this paper. Subsequent major shifts—the Audio-lingual Approach influenced by psychology, and the Communicative Approach influenced by sociolinguistics—have all been predicated on the Cartesian conviction that language teaching is a logical and analysable activity that must respond to the ethos of the age in which it finds itself. The Port-Royalists were early exploiters of these ideas, bringing language teaching into

57) Ian Michael, *The Teaching of English from the sixteenth century to 1870*. (Cambridge, 1987), 319.

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line with the philosophical and social thinking of their times, and altering the terms of subsequent debates on how languages should be taught.

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