

Article

*Rise and Development of Language Methodology:  
a Historical Perspective*

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**Abstract**

All teaching methods are similar. Each method focused on reaching certain level of language proficiency. Failure to do so, another method will take over, and so on. Shift in theories of nature of language and language teaching and learning took place continuously, to date. Most of the recent issues of foreign language teaching, are in-fact rooted in the contemporary methods. In order to understand the present better, we should understand the past too. By having a glance through the past centuries, we can see how the foreign language teaching (FLT) methods were. Since the decline of the Latin in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, innovations in the methods of FL teaching had started. This will further promote teachers' professional knowledge (TPK) in foreign language education (FLE). This paper, will review the history of FL methodology. Its main aims are: to uncover the reality of FL methodology in the past, and to provide a better professional knowledge and teaching ability at classroom level, to all FL teachers.

**Key Words:** Latin language, Intellectual ability, Traditional method TM, Reform movement, Applied Linguists, Gouin's theory.



## บทความวิชาการ

### การพัฒนาการและวิัฒนาการทางด้านภาษาวิธีการสอน : แนวคิดประวัติศาสตร์

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#### บทคัดย่อ

ทุกวิธีการสอนเหมือนกันหมด แต่ละวิธีมุ่งเน้นเพื่อจะให้ได้ผลลัพธ์ที่ล้ำเลิศในด้านภาษา ถ้าไม่สำเร็จวิธีหนึ่งวิธีใด จะใช้วิธีอื่นต่อไป เป็นต้น การเปลี่ยนแปลงทฤษฎีธรรมชาติของภาษา การเรียนการสอนจะคงอยู่ต่อไปจนทุกวันนี้ ศตวรรษที่แล้วมา เราสามารถมองเห็น วิธีการสอนภาษาต่างประเทศ (FLT) โดยผ่านๆ ตั้งแต่การเคลื่อนไหวของภาษาلاتิน (Latin) ในศตวรรษที่ 16 นวัตกรรมวิธีการสอน (FL) ได้ริเริ่ม ทุกประเด็นปัจจุบันของการสอนภาษาต่างประเทศ ปัจจุบันนี้ สาเหตุที่แท้จริงมาจากการปฏิบัติแบบอย่างอดีต เพื่อทำความเข้าใจในปัจจุบันที่ดีกว่า เราควรเข้าใจ อดีตการตัวอย่าง ทั้งนี้เพื่อผลลัพธ์ อาจารย์ ที่มีความเชี่ยวชาญ ในด้านการศึกษาภาษาต่างประเทศ

การวิจัยนี้ จะเน้นถึงประวัติศาสตร์วิธีการสอน (FL) จุดประสงค์ หลักคือ เพื่อค้นหาข้อเท็จจริง วิธีการสอนภาษาต่างประเทศ ในอดีต เพื่อผลลัพธ์ อาจารย์ ที่มีความรู้ ความเชี่ยวชาญ และ ศักยภาพในการสอน ในแต่ละชั้นเรียน แก่อาจารย์ภาษาต่างประเทศ FL ทุกๆ ท่าน

**คำศัพท์หลัก:** ภาษาلاتิน, ศักยภาพในความคิด, วิธีการสอนแบบอดีต, การปฏิรูปแนวคิดใหม่, วิชาการสอนภาษาเชิงปฏิบัติ, ทฤษฎีของกูย์ส์ (Gouin's theory).



## 1. INTRODCUTION

Since the Latin<sup>1</sup> was the dominant language in Europe and the Western world, there was no a specific foreign language (FL) teaching method that had survived without being challenged by another. However, it is said “no method is perfect”, all methods are same and all emphasis on linguistic ability or proficiency. The so-called “modern methods” were products of traditional methods (TM). Kelly and Howatt, argued that many current issues in FL are not particularly new, they reflect contemporary responses to questions that have been posed later (Kelly, L., 1969: 20; Howatt, A., 1984:16). All foreign languages approaches focus on certain level of language proficiency to be achieved. Richard and Rodgers said: “Changes in language methods throughout the history have reflected changes in kind of proficiency that learners need. Such moves toward *Oral* proficiency rather than *Reading* comprehension as a goal, also included in the theories of nature of language and language learning”(Richard, J., and T. Rodgers,1986: 1) One of the language teaching requirements is the teachers’ professional knowledge (TPK).

Our present FL education systems, do pay very little attention to the history of FL methodology, and that teachers know very little about it!! Teachers should know both (theory) and (practice) in order to have a better teaching skills and abilities. As such, many questions were raised nowadays, such as: What is the teachers’ professional knowledge? How far useful it is?, Why many FL teachers

nowadays do not know the history of FL methodology? Etc.

This paper, addresses the above problems, and will trace the “trends” of the L2\FL methodology. The paper’s aims are: (a) to raise teachers’ awareness in their profession, (b) to relate the profession knowledge of language teachers with the process of teaching at classroom level, or to upgrade teachers ability at classroom level, and (c) to improve students ability in all language skills at “achievement” and “proficiency” levels. The paper will present the results in relation to the following topics: (a) Background of Latin language (Its rise and decline, and its new role), and (b) Background of contemporary teaching methods (Origin and nature of grammar translation method ‘GTM’, direct method ‘DM’, oral approach ‘OA’, and audio-lingual method ‘ALM’).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research Problem

Language education will be better planed for future only by tracing the educational condition and reality in the past. Our present foreign language education systems nowadays, do not include the background or history of L2\FL methodology as main part of any text, and the teachers pay very little attention about it!! The consequence of this is reflected on the weakness of teachers in their quality of teaching. Teachers aught to know both (theory) and (practice) and relate them, in order to have a better teaching skills or application. All these processes bring about “teacher-awareness”.

<sup>1</sup> Latin: language of ancient Rome, spoken by Latin people, *Little Oxford Dictionary*, Oxford:

## 2.1 Research Approach

The paper adopts a “historical research approach” of FL education in line with its nature. It also adopts “descriptive research approach” in which characteristics of FL education are described as they were taking place in the past. In addition, the paper describes the L2\FL methodology historically, in order to upgrade language education system quantitatively and qualitatively. It further, adopts “comparative approach” to language education as it compares and contrasts FL teaching events in the past with the one at present.

## 2.3 Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data were gathered by surveying related references in FL education in the past and present. After the (historical) and (pedagogical) information are gathered, facts are analyzed and discussed. The analysis included main factors: Background of Latin, background of contemporary teaching methods (CTM), and later methods.

## 3. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

### 3.1 Background of Latin Language

#### Rise and Decline of Latin Language

Some languages in the West were more powerful than the others, as in the case of English today. Latin emerged during the 15<sup>th</sup> century as the most powerful and dominant language in the Western world<sup>2</sup>. Latin was the language of education, commerce, religion, communication, government, etc. Later, more

than seventy percent (70%) of the Western population was heading towards bilingualism and multilingualism.

The phenomenon of bilingualism and multilingualism, had been significant and a heated issue in the West throughout the history of foreign language (FL) education. This brought about the need for the study of FL in the West. As the result, languages other than Latin, such as: French, Italian, and English emerged in Europe due to changes in political situation there. These languages *challenged* the Latin which dominated the Western world during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, the importance of Latin had been *declined*. Richards and Rodgers described the status of Latin after other European languages had appeared, they said: “As the status of Latin *diminished* from being a living language to an occasional subject only in school curriculum, its study took new functions.

#### The New Role of Latin Language

Latin, said to be declined during the 16<sup>th</sup> century as a dominant language in the West But it remained strong and powerful for the following *Methodological justifications*:

*First:* It was widely believed that Latin develops learners’ “intellectual abilities” and its study is an “educational end” itself. Mallison cited in Titone saying: “When once Latin tongue failed to be normal vehicle for communication, and was replaced by the vernacular languages, it became a mental gymnastic only” (Titone, 1968: 26). Brown added that foreign language education in schools in the Western world was *synonymous* with the learning of Latin or Greeks. It was strongly believed that Latin promotes

<sup>2</sup> Includes: Europe, U.S., France, Germany, Italy, etc.



intellectuality through *mental gymnastics*. Latin was taught by means of what had been later called *classical method* which focused on: grammatical rules, memorization of vocabulary, conjunctions, translation of texts, and written exercises (Brown, H. D., 2001: 18).

**Second:** Another new function for Latin was that, it became the basis for *FL school curriculum* in Europe. Pioneer studies on classical Latin writings and analysis of its grammar and rhetoric, later became a *model* for *FL education* as from 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Children attending the so-called “grammar schools” from 16<sup>th</sup>- 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in England, were: first, given a tough introduction to *Latin grammar*. The introduction was taught through rote methods. Latin school syllabus included grammatical rules, conjugations, *translation*, practical drills with sample sentences, and use of parallel bilingual texts and dialogues.

When children reached the *basic proficiency* level, they were then introduced to *advanced grammar* and *rhetoric*. Schooling was harsh and deadly experience to the children. Teaching methods were tough and hard, as children were punished for any misconduct. As foreign language education approaches as such, many attempts have been made for reform. Kelly and Howatt put: “There were occasional attempts to promote alternative approaches to language teaching”. Some methodologist in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries had submitted their proposals for curriculum reform, including the way *Latin* should be taught.

**Third:** As a result of the reform movement attempts, modern European

languages (MEUL) in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, began to enter into common school curriculum (CSC). However, no any commonality in education had been achieved!! Instead, they again, implemented same methods of teaching traditional Latin! Textbooks contained grammatical rules, lists of vocabulary, sentences for *translation*, etc. *Speaking* skill was not the goal, and *Oral* practice was done in form of *Reading* aloud sentences which they already translated. The sentences were grammatically constructed without any link to real-communication, what so ever. Titone, cited the following *samples* of these sentences which to be *translated*:

1. The philosopher pulled the lower jaw of the hen.
2. My sons have brought the mirrors of the duke.
3. The cat of my aunt is more treacherous than the dog of your uncle.

The above sentences show that, they were only grammatically constructed. The sentences have no any sense of real communication or internal relationship. This is simply because the theory of language was mainly “*grammatical*”.

**Fourth:** By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these approaches of teaching Latin became the *standard* for the study of foreign languages. In the *mid-19<sup>th</sup>* century, typical school textbooks had consisted of chapters of grammar. The *grammar units* contained explanations on how to use them, with sample sentences. Textbooks writers during this period such as Seidenstucker and Plotz, *coded* their contents into (morphology) and (syntax), explained them, and



then let them be memorized. There were no any *Oral* drills, instead, there were few *Writing* and *Reading drills* as well. Seidenstucker and Plotz, also divided their texts into two parts:

*Part one:* which contains grammatical rules. *Part two:* which contains French sentences for their translation into German, and German into French. Titone cited the following examples of typical “*Sentences ready for translation*”:

1. Thou hast a book, 2. The house is beautiful, 3. He has a book and a dog. 4. We have a brad, 5. He has a kind dog, 6. The door is black.

The above sentences are not communicative-based, because the approach of language was “*to understand grammar*” and “*to translate*” only. All these approaches of teaching, later known as “*grammar translation method GTM*”.

### 3.2 Background of Contemporary Teaching Methods (CTM)

#### Origin and Nature of Grammar Translation Method (GTM)

In its definition, Rouse had quoted in Kelly saying: “grammar translation method: is to know everything about something rather than the thing itself” (Kelly,1969: 53). It was earlier established that Latin traditional methods (LTM) were the origin of the grammar translation method (GTM). Rather, according to Richard and Rodgers, grammar translation method was originated in Germany by German scholars. Another argument put by Stern which says: “The grammar translation method was in fact first known in the US as Prussian-method,

this claim is supported by a book written by B. Sears (an American classic teacher) published in 1845”(Stern,1983:455). Whether these claims were right or wrong, the GTM remained a powerful one during its time.

Howatt stated “7 major characteristics” for GTM, they are:

1. Its prime goal is to learn the language for intellectual reading, and analyze grammar.
2. Reading and writing skills are the major focus, and speaking skill is ignored.
3. Vocabularies are selected from texts that have been read, and words are taught through bilingual *word-lists*, and memorization.
4. Sentences are the major ‘units’ and bases for teaching\learning practices.
5. Accuracy is emphasized. Students are expected to attain high standards in translation, etc.
6. Grammar is taught deductively (by presentation, then study of the grammar rules.
7. Students’ native language is the medium of instruction.

GTM had dominated Europe as from 1840s to 1940s, and still remains to be used in many parts of the world today. However, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, some factors contributed to the decline of GTM, they are:

1. The increasing linguistics demands not only among Europeans but countries all over the world.
2. The demands focused on *Oral* interaction and communication for more and better understanding.
3. This brought about the reform movement among both “linguists” and



“applied linguists” which led by F. Gouin and others (Gouin, F.1892:66).

The reform movement that followed the GTM, suggested that language is better learnt “naturally” and “directly” and without any translation, like a child does. The reform also suggested *Oral* approach, and *Audio-lingual* method.

#### Origin and Nature of Direct Method (DM)

Direct method: means to teach the L2\FL directly without the use of translation to native or any other language, and same as child does. DM was first known as ‘Natural method’ as it was named by Gouin. Frenchman F. Gouin (1831-1896) was father of the traditional theories, Frenchman and an Englishman Prendergast, had their justifications in taking the Child as a *model* for teaching any L2\FL language program to adult learners. Gouin made observation on child linguistic behavior and concluded that L2\FL could be taught or learnt like the first language (L1). Gouin later established his theories and principles based on child’s linguistic experiences. Brown on the other hand, stated “8 Major principles” for direct method, they are:

1. Classroom is conducted in the target language.
2. Only daily vocabulary was taught.
3. Oral communication was graded.
4. Grammar was taught inductively.
5. New teaching points were taught by modeling and practicing.
6. Vocabulary was taught through demonstration and showing of objects.
7. Both speaking and listening comprehension were taught.

8. Correct pronunciation and grammar were taught.

Belitz cited in Titone the following “11 guidelines and steps” for teaching Oral skill under direct method DM:

1. Never translate but dominate.
2. Never explain but act.
3. Never make a speech but ask questions.
4. Never imitate the mistakes but correct.
5. Never speak with single words but use sentences.
6. Never speak too quickly but speak naturally.
7. Never speak too loudly but speak naturally.
8. Never speak too much but make the students speak much.
9. Never go too fast but keep pace with the students.
10. Never use the book but use your lesson plan.
11. Never be impatient but take it easy.

#### Origin and Nature of Oral Approach (OA)& Audio-Lingual Method (OLM)

The use of DM had weakened then declined in Europe by early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Consequently, the so called *Oral* approach and *Audio-lingual* method emerged. The origin of *Oral* approach was originated from the works of British “applied linguists” in the 1920s and 1930s. During this period, number of applied linguists developed their *methodological principles* in language teaching, the two most famous were (Chanstain, K.,1969), and (Palmer,H.,1923). The origin of *Audio-lingual*



method goes back to 1929 when “Coleman Report” recommended the “Reading-based Approach”, to be used in the American schools and collages. It also emphasized teaching “comprehension” of text besides the reading.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

In general, each area or aspect of knowledge has its own background. Foreign language education (FLE) always refers to its historical background in order to have a better picture for both past and present, for upgrading purpose. Through the past we can know the present better, using the method of “tracing the history” which is a “scientific method”. In-fact, all present issues of L2\FL education, are reflection of the past. The background of FL pedagogy goes to Latin language which dominated the Western world during the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Despite the fact that “no teaching method is perfect”, Latin was the most powerful language at a time. It was the only official language for the Western world, however, it had declined!! But why Latin declined? This happened simply because of the changes in the political structure that took place in the European countries. Consequently, the European languages emerged, and that importance of Latin had steadily weakened, decreased, then finally diminished, but was still powerful! Latin viewed nature of language as “language is a mental activity”. Its curriculum included: mental gymnastic, translation, and memorization. This method led to the emergence of GTM. Efforts of the reform movements by applied linguists brought about new approaches and methods. Innovation in FL pedagogy went on to include: Natural

approach, Direct method, Oral approach, Audio-lingual method, Communicative approach etc. These facts on FL pedagogy are important for all L2\FL teachers, for better professional knowledge and teaching skills.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

This research paper, had briefly traced the historical contemporary trends of foreign language FL pedagogy. It was established that, Latin was the only language which dominated the West during the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. However, the main reason for its decline was “the emergence of the European languages” that challenged the Latin later. Despite this, Latin remained unchallenged for it was the father of all subsequent FL methods that emerged later, to date. The major roles which played by the Latin language were: (a) It developed learners’ “intellectual abilities, (b) It later became a *model* for FL education in the West as from 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, (c) Modern European languages (MEUL) in the 18<sup>th</sup> century implemented same traditional methods of Latin which based on *Translation*, (d) approaches of teaching Latin later became the *Standard* for the study of foreign languages, beginning from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The translation method of Latin led to the emergence of GTM. The paper also stated that the *Reform Movement* that followed the GTM, suggested that language is better learnt “Naturally” and “Directly” without any translation, like a child does. Methods that succeeded GTM and the reforms were: *Direct* method, *Oral* approach, *Audio-lingual* method, *Communicative* approach etc. Hence, we can conclude that the historical-journey of FL methodology *Originated from Latin*.



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