BEYOND MONOLINGUALISM: A VIEW FROM THE PAST

Andrea Nava[1]

1. INTRODUCTION

In a recent article, Leung and Valdés (2019) claim that a «multilingual turn» (May, 2014) seems to have taken hold in applied linguistics, although they are cautious about the impact that this theoretical perspective has yet had on the practical business of language teaching (Cenoz, Gorter, 2020). The authors' tentative attitude hints at the sea change such a turn – if it is indeed poised to become the new orthodoxy – would unleash, particularly within the Anglo-dominated applied linguistic contexts, where a «monolingual paradigm« (North, Piccardo, 2016: 7) was the undisputed framework of reference in both linguistics and language teaching throughout the 20th century (Cook V., 2001; Cook G., 2010). Despite applied linguists' diktats and methodological fads issuing from Inner Circle countries (Kachru, 1985) in the past century, reflection on and practice in English language teaching in Expanding Circle contexts such as the Italian one never really discounted the fact that languages are not learnt as isolated entities and for non-infant learners in particular, their L1 may be a bedrock from which they can build the acquisition of other languages (Butzkamm, Caldwell, 2009; Cook G., 2010).

In keeping with the recent revival of interest in applied linguistics/language teaching historiography (e.g. Smith, 2016; McLelland, Smith, 2018; Vicentini, Lombardini, 2019; San Vicente, 2019), this article aims to cast a historical glance at English language teaching materials in the Italian context in order to ponder whether (and how) the learners' L1 has been used as a bridge to the acquisition of English.

The article is organized as follows. I will first touch on a few key issues associated with the current multilingual turn and the 20th century monolingual paradigm. I will then introduce the corpus of English language materials I have investigated and the methodology of the study. The findings from both the quantitative and the qualitative analysis of the corpus will then be presented and discussed.

2. MULTILINGUALISM OR MONOLINGUALISM: A LONG-STANDING DEBATE

For the purpose of this article, monolingualism is defined as the view that language learning should aim at making learners approximate as much as possible the native speakers of the target language and this is best accomplished if the target language is conceived of and learned as an isolated entity. One major corollary of this tenet is that use of/reference to the learners' L1 in second language teaching is at best a waste of time and at worst a pernicious practice that needs eradicating. The hold that this paradigm had over applied linguistics and language teaching, particularly in Inner Circle countries, for most of the 20th century is nicely encapsulated by the terms «dogma» and «professional neurosis» used by Leung and Valdés (2019: 6) to refer to monolingualism.

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[1] Università degli Studi di Milano.

Although the word 'dogma' hints at the fact that monolingualism is often taken up by language teachers as an article of faith, the monolingual framework rests on well-known (applied) linguistic theories and language teaching methodological approaches, which have been discussed at length in recent works (e.g. Cook G., 2010; Hall, Cook G., 2012, Leung, Valdés, 2019). Some of the key arguments made in support of banishing the use of the L1 in language teaching are summarised below:

- the 'mimetic' (Howatt, 2009) fallacy – the idea that the conditions underlying the acquisition of one's L1 should be reproduced in the acquisition of another language;

- the 'compartmentalization' fallacy – the L1 and other languages are assumed to be separate compartments (Cook V., 2001);

- the 'subtractive' fallacy – the idea that the L1 represents «an unwelcome barrier to new language input and use» (Hall, Cook G., 2012: 294); as input is key to acquisition, the use of the L1 hampers the maximization of L2 input, thus robbing learners of learning opportunities.

One corollary of the monolingual framework is that translation as a learning/teaching activity (Widdowson, 2014; Pym, Ayvazyan, 2017) is usually frowned upon, although some methodologists do not rule out a limited use of translation from the second language into the native language (Stern, 1992).

While monolingualism was not just the default paradigm but also a «practical expediency» (Cook G., 2010: 18) in language teaching in the 20th century, at a time when an increasing number of monolingual native speaker teachers were to be found in all corners of the world, multilingualism has a longer, albeit chequered, history. The latest stage of this process is the enthusiastic adoption of a view of language learners as «plurilingual, pluricultural beings» (Council of Europe, 2020: 30) in the 2020 *Companion* to the CEFR, where mediation as the fourth language activity envisioned by the framework is finally given a set of fully developed descriptors[2].

Multilingualism as the use of the L1 (and translation) in the learning/teaching of another language has traditionally been associated with the Grammar Translation method. For example, in a recent well-documented article, Kirk (2018: 22) lists it as the first distinctive feature of the method. It has, however, been argued (Cook G., 2010; Siefert, 2013) that descriptions of this method in language teacher education materials are often partial and inaccurate, based as they are on second-hand information, while hardly ever relying on the close scrutiny of actual teaching materials. This may have contributed to the «mythologizing» of the method, with «claims about the detriment of using the mother tongue» being «a dominant component of the myth» (Siefert, 2013: 32). Close analyses of language teaching materials have revealed that the L1 is used in different ways and to different degrees by different authors associated with the Grammar Translation method, and translation is not necessarily conceived of as just a painful exercise of turning artificial sentences in the L1 into the L2 (Siefert, 2013, Pym, Ayvazyan, 2017).

As convincingly shown by Butzkamm (2003, 2007) and Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009), extending the time span of their investigation to before the advent of the Grammar Translation method, multilingual language teaching materials also viewed the L1, and translation, as a way to foster the learners' understanding of lexis and structures of the L2 quickly and efficiently, thus reducing the need for lengthy metalinguistic explanations, which are routinely viewed as one of the major shortcomings of the method. Different approaches were to be found in textbooks which relied on combinations of

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[2] It should be noted in passing that, according to North and Piccardo, 2016, it was the monolingual *dogma*, still prevalent in the 1990s, that led to the fact that mediation was underdeveloped in the original 2001 CEFR.

literal and freer translation of L2 input texts – a non-exhaustive list of options (based on Butzkamm, Caldwell, 2009: 60-62) is shown below:

- the L2 text is accompanied by a literal translation as well as a free translation;
- the L2 text is accompanied by a line-by-line parallel literal translation – the layout enables the learner to spot correspondences in sentence parts between the L2 and the L1 texts;
- parallel translation of the L2 text is provided without explicit signalling of correspondences between sentence parts in the L2 and the L1 texts;
- only free translations are provided of texts students are already familiar with in their L1;
- translation takes account of the progress made by the learners: «Literal translation aids (usually in brackets) are only added where the languages deviate structurally and the student does not understand these deviations yet» (Butzkamm, Caldwell, 2009: 62).

Irrespective of the specific approach taken by each textbook author, Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009) stress the fact that, in these multilingual materials, the L1 is used both as a linguistic and a psychological 'bridge' easing the learners into the L2 – a form of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, Ross, 1976; Donato, 1994) whose use gets reassessed by the author/teacher as learners progress in their language study. The two authors go on to show us how language teaching material writers from the past can provide useful insights for current language teachers who teach in contexts where students have at least one shared language which can be used as a foundation to build on their knowledge of another language. In particular, the advantages of the «sandwiching» technique are highlighted, whereby quick episodes of free translation provided by the teacher follow the presentation of new L2 input. This fosters the process of «deforeignization» of the L2 and the efficient decoding of a message. While meaning is taken care of, the L1 can also be a help in the process of learners' 'noticing' (Schmidt, 2001) the form of the L2 input (Gallagher, Colohan, 2017). What they dub «mother tongue mirroring» is the use of literal translation «with a view to making the foreign structures salient and transparent to learners» (Butzkamm, Caudwell, 2009: 106). The L2 input is thus «reforeignized» – a literal translation highlights the constructional differences (i.e. in word order) between the L2 and the L1. As was mentioned above, these ways of providing scaffolding need to be adapted as learners become more proficient; for example, it is pointed out that «in order to work well as a didactic device, literal translations must become less literal as learners progress, and be restricted to those structures which they are about to learn» (Butzkamm, Caldwell, 2009: 107).

Recent surveys of language students, teachers and teacher trainers (Gallagher, Colohan, 2017; Wach, Monroy, 2020; Gallagher, Geraghty, 2021) show that the main stakeholders in the language learning enterprise seem to have growing awareness of the possible benefits of a judicious use of the L1 in L2 language learning. Teachers and teacher trainers appear to be aware of the advantages of L1 use for both «medium-oriented» (e.g. providing metalinguistic explanations) and «framework-oriented» (e.g. classroom management, providing instructions) purposes (Rolin-Ianziti, Varshney, 2008). Findings from survey research, however, also point to the fact that attitudes may be affected by sociocultural and institutional contexts. For example, the Spanish teacher trainees in Wach and Monroy's (2020) investigation appeared to be less in favour of L1 use than their Polish counterparts – perhaps as a reaction to having personally experienced, as L2 learners themselves, what they considered unsuccessful monolingual teaching. Within the rigid context of the CELTA training programme, with its overarching monolingual philosophy, the teacher trainers who took part in Gallagher and Geraghty's (2021) investigation, and

in particular the non-native English speaking trainers, often «articulated ways in which the L1 plays a part in second language acquisition while at the same time strongly recommending monolingual approaches as best practice» (Gallagher, Geraghty, 2021: 18).

3. L1 use in Italian textbooks of English

The sources quoted in the previous section are mainly Anglo or Central European scholars targeting language teaching practices and materials mostly originating in Inner Circle countries. The aim of the rest of the paper is to shift the focus to the Italian context and the teaching of English as a foreign language, as historical research into English language teaching materials published in Italy is still in its infancy, although some progress has been made in the last few years (e.g. Vicentini, Lombardini, 2019).

For the purposes of this study, a diachronic corpus of English language teaching materials has been gathered, spanning over a century. Details of the corpus are provided in Table 1. All of the materials were intended as coursebooks rather than reference books and feature both theoretical explanations and practical parts. The authors were academics or in some way affiliated with Italian institutions of higher education and thus are supposed to have been familiar with contemporary scholarship in English language description and language teaching. A specific readership of university language students is explicitly targeted only by the more recent materials, viz. those published in the 1970s-1990s. As was the custom until the last few decades of the 20th century, language teaching textbooks in the Italian context tended to cater to an undifferentiated audience of secondary and post-secondary students, adults enrolled in evening courses and self-study.

Table 1. *Corpus of 20th century English language teaching materials published in Italy*

1872, T. Cann, *Grammatica teorico-pratica della lingua inglese*

1933, M. Hazon, *Corso di lingua inglese moderna*

1957, A. Zanco, G. Caliumi, *Grammatica della lingua inglese*

1964, E. Chinol, *Grammatica dell'inglese moderno*

1973, J. Garrett, J. A. Turnbull. *Primo anno di inglese per studenti italiani*

1991, J. Jenkyns, *La parola degli inglesi.*

The analysis of the corpus involved two stages. In the first stage, I tried to gauge to what extent the students' L1 (Italian) was used in the materials. I identified (cf. Table 2) six main 'sites' in the materials where the L1 showed up: in the grammatical/metalinguistic explanations, in the presentation of examples (i.e. examples are provided with Italian translations), in the instructions for the practical part (e.g. exercises), in the presentation of lexis (lexis is presented through bilingual lists, featuring the Italian equivalents of English terms), in the translation exercises (students are asked to translate sentences/texts from the L1 as well as into the L1), in the dictionary (i.e. a bilingual dictionary is provided as part of the material). The results of the analysis are shown in Table 2. 'I' refers to the use of Italian, 'E' to the use of English. Jenkyns (1991) does not feature sections specifically aimed at the presentation of lexis. The practice of providing a bilingual dictionary as part of the coursebook materials is adopted in two materials only, and seems to have been fallen into disuse by the second half of the century.

Table 2. *L1 use in English language teaching materials published in Italy*

	Explanations	Examples	Instructions	Lexis	Translation	Dictionary
Cann, 1872	I	I	I	I	I	I E
Hazon, 1933	I	I	I	I	I	–
Zanco Caliumi, 1957	I	I	I	I	I	I E
Chinol, 1964	I	I E	I	I	I	–
Garrett Turnbull, 1973	I E	I E	I E	I	I	–
Jenkyns, 1991	I	I E	I E	–	I	–

What emerges from this preliminary analysis is that until at least the last few decades of the 20th century, English language teaching scholars working in Italy wrote teaching materials which featured extensive use of the L1. This is despite the hold that the monolingual approach appears to have had on English applied linguistics and language teaching in Inner Circle contexts over the same period of time. The L1 is exploited consistently across the corpus to provide metalinguistic explanations (except in Garrett, Turnbull [1973] where some explanations are also provided in English). Relying on the L1 'to talk about the L2' is commonly associated with the Grammar Translation method, which – somewhat unfairly, as pointed out above – is routinely criticized for prioritizing lengthy and unnecessarily detailed L1 metalinguistic explanations, thus robbing learners of opportunities to be exposed to the L2. In keeping with what survey research into English language teachers' attitudes has shown, the L1 is also frequently used in this corpus of English language teaching materials for 'framework' purposes – in particular, to provide instructions for practice activities. Where lexical lists are provided, these are always accompanied by Italian translations. Translation from the L1 into the L2, i.e. where the source texts are in the L1, also shows up consistently across the corpus. On the other hand, in the more recent books in the corpus, examples are often provided with no Italian equivalents.

In order to attempt to uncover the rationale behind L1 use in the historical corpus of English language teaching materials published in Italy, I will now attempt a finer grained analysis of a restricted sample of coursebook extracts.

3.1. *L1 as a mediation tool*

The notion of 'mediation' plays a key role in applied linguistics theories and approaches in the 21st century and takes pride of place in the 2020 *Companion* Volume. I will borrow definitions and categorizations of mediation underpinning the *Companion* to try to make sense of some of L1 use practices in my historical corpus.

An overarching definition of the mediation process stresses the act of 'bridging' engaged by mediation: «[…] the aim of the mediation process, defined in the most general

terms, is to reduce the gap between two poles that are distant from or in tension with each other» (Coste, Cavalli, 2015: 12). North and Piccardo (2016) identify different forms of mediation: linguistic, cultural, social and pedagogical. All of these forms of mediation are taken to apply both interlinguistically (between languages) and intralinguistically (within the same language). Linguistic mediation involves not only translating and interpreting (e.g. from the L1 into the L2) but also rephrasing or summarizing a text (with source and outcome being in the same or in different languages). Cultural mediation entails developing cultural awareness of an L2 as well as one's L1 (e.g. awareness of use of «idiolects, sociolects and of links between styles and textual genres», North, Piccardo, 2016: 9). Social mediation focuses on the social element involved in «helping two or more persons to communicate who are unable to communicate alone because they cannot understand each other» (North, Piccardo, 2016: 10), but extends its remit to conflict prevention or resolution more generally. Finally, pedagogic mediation concerns both the more cognitive aspect of mediation, whereby knowledge creation is fostered by scaffolding or collaborative interaction in the classroom and the teacher-led process of creating the conditions for cognitive mediation to take place.

Examples of the L1, being exploited for the purposes of pedagogic/cognitive mediation, are provided by the metalinguistic explanations in the historical corpus of English language teaching materials. I will first comment on three extracts from Chinol (1964). In the first extract, Chinol focuses on the difference between *no* and *none*: «Il corrispondente pronominale di *no* è *none*, che vale 'non uno', 'neppur uno', 'nessuno'» (Chinol, 1964: 50). The author resorts to L1 translation to highlight not only the meaning of *none*, but, what is more important, to hint at the pragmatic connotation of this pronoun ('neppur uno'), which has a more marked/emphatic value than the construction *not … any*. It could be argued that the use of carefully chosen translation equivalents (not one, but three possible equivalents are provided) is more effective in conveying subtle metalinguistic features than what would necessarily be a lengthy explanation.

The second extract focuses on the morphophonological alternation for the plural of nouns in English: «Se il singolare termina in [s] …, il plurale termina in [iz] (con 's' dolce come in 'sdegno')» (Chinol, 1964: 24). In this case, the author is trying to mediate the realization of a phoneme represented in the book through the technical convention of IPA transcription. This is done through an L1 example featuring the same phoneme («'sdegno'») alongside a non-technical remark («con 's' dolce»).

The third extract highlights a difference in usage between Italian and English: «In italiano si dice indifferentemente 'lo vedo ogni giorno' e 'lo vedo tutti i giorni'. Con tali espressioni di tempo in inglese si usa sempre *every*, mai *all*» (Chinol, 1964: 59-60). The Italian examples alert the learner to the fact that *every* and *all* are not usually interchangeable, unlike what is often the case in Italian. Like in the first extract, resorting to L1 exemplification saves the author from providing a long metalinguistic explanation on the different uses of *all* and *every* in English.

I would like to argue all three uses to which the L1 is put in the above extracts (providing translation equivalents, clarifying technical knowledge, highlighting interlinguistic similarities and differences) represent instances of cognitive mediation. The learner is first asked to focus on what is already familiar ground (their L1), honing their metalinguistic awareness – an instance of intralinguistic mediation – e.g. learning that a grapheme may have more than one realization in Italian (<s> may or may not be realised as 'dolce'), and then led into unfamiliar territory, using their heightened language awareness to make sense of English lexicogrammar.

Besides cognitive mediation, the L1 is also exploited in the corpus with a view to fostering cultural mediation, again involving both inter- and intralinguistic awareness. As

an example, I will draw on an extract from the introductory sections of Hazon's (1933: 29) coursebook:

> L'effetto dello *slang*, nell'udirlo, è simile a quello prodotto da un italiano che, parlando nell'idioma gentile, senta il bisogno, nella foga del discorso, di aiutarsi con qualche espressiva locuzione dialettale. Lo *slang* è spesso vivace e pieno del caratteristico humour anglo-sassone.

The author is trying to do two things here. On the one hand, he needs to convey to the learners what slang is and what role it plays in the Anglo-Saxon sociocultural context of the time. On the other, he needs to justify his choice of introducing a limited number of examples of slang in his coursebook – at a time when even English grammar books aimed at native speakers tended to focus exclusively on literary, formal language (Anderwald, 2016). In order to 'deforeignize' the Anglo-Saxon sociolinguistic situation, Hazon turns the learners' attention to their own context. Even the well-educated audience which Hazon's book targets were apt to rely on code switching or code-mixing in more informal situations – intermingling Italian with lexicogrammatical constructions or lexical items from their local 'dialect' for pragmatic purposes. The learner is thus led to reflect on the fact that language use does not occur in a vacuum, and appropriacy of language choices depend on the context and the purposes of communication. If slipping in a word or two in dialect is perfectly acceptable within the right communicative context in Italy, the same goes for slang in the Anglo-Saxon context. A cultural 'bridge' is hence built between the two contexts, and this is made possible by the critical awareness (North, Piccardo, 2016) that learners are led to develop about their own language use.

The coursebook extracts I have commented on in this section point to the fact that the use of the L1 in historical English language materials published in Italy is often aimed at bridging a gap – not only linguistic but also cultural and cognitive – between the two poles represented by the L1 and the L2. Not unlike the view of mediation underpinning the recently compiled *Companion* to the CEFR, such bridging process entails developing both intra- and interlinguistic awareness.

The L1 as a mediation tool is exploited consistently in the books in the corpus, all of which feature extensive sections in the L1. Starting from the second half of the 20th century, some of the authors appear to feel the pressure of the prevailing monolingual paradigm. In the preface to his *Grammatica,* Chinol (1964: 4) explicitly refers to the 'tyranny' exerted by the L1 on the L2, referring in particular to the practice of viewing English grammar exclusively through the lens of the Italian one:

> Il punto di partenza non è più la domanda: come si traduce questo e quello, come si traduce 'ne' o 'che' o non so che altro. Il punto di partenza sono le strutture della lingua straniera.

What the author is advocating is not a ban on the L1, which he skillfully relies on as a mediation instrument in his book, as was shown above, but viewing the L2 not as a mere deviation from the L1 but as a self-standing system. Echoes of structural linguistics and the audiolingual approach can be detected in Hazon's proposal of using «*patterns* e *drills*» (Chinol, 1964: 5) as a way of introducing students to the English language on its own terms.

I would like to briefly mention another aspect with regard to the tension between the bilingual and the monolingual paradigms. While all but one of the authors of the books published in the first half of the 20th century are Italian, the authors of the two more recent books hail from Inner Circle countries. A distinctive feature of the 20th century monolingual paradigm was the view that the native speaking L2 teacher is superior to the

non-native speaking L2 teacher, if only because they 'own' the language and have a more natural command of it (Phillipson, 1992; Cook G., 2010). Reference to this ideological view of the native speaker teacher is clearly made in the introduction to Garrett and Turnbull's (1973: 1) coursebook:

> […] Essendo scritto da professori inglesi, qualificati e di una notevole esperienza didattica, la parte inglese è idiomaticamente esatta ed aggiornata. […] Contiene molte domande in inglese che, poste da insegnanti inglesi, aiuteranno a parlare spontaneamente la lingua e a pronunciarla correttamente. […] Sono questi i vantaggi […] che non offre alcun libro scritto in Italia da un italiano […].

In the above extract, the authors claim that their book is superior to any other English language teaching coursebook written by Italian authors as a result of their 'Englishness'. This is taken to be a guarantee of the fact that the English it features is 'authentic' – it mirrors the idiomatic use of the language made by native speakers. While the learners targeted by the book are still exclusively Italian speakers, the teachers who the authors are ideally addressing are English native speakers like themselves. In keeping with the native speaker ideology, they alone are thought to be capable of providing opportunities to practise spoken English in authentic contexts and offer correct pronunciation models.

4. CONCLUSION

In this article, I have sketched a broad-brush picture of two ways of viewing language learning and teaching, which, following G. Cook (2010), I have called monolingualism and multilingualism, with the former having been the default approach (or rather the one which gained the most support) in the 20th century, at least in the Western world. While multilingualism seems to have become the dominant paradigm in the 21st century – at least in applied linguistics, if not yet in language teaching – historical analyses of language teaching textbooks which view the learners' L1 as a resource rather than a hindrance show that there may be lessons to be learnt from the past and help us to debunk 'myths' handed down from careless language teaching historiography.

In the Italian context, the L1 seems to have been used extensively in English language materials published in Italy across most of the 20th century, although there is no gainsaying the fact that pressure to conform to the prevailing monolingual paradigm started to be felt by authors and publishing houses in the last few decades of the century. While historical English language teaching materials are often simplistically associated with the Grammar Translation method, and hence viewed as of little value to the modern English language teacher and scholar, the study presented in this article, albeit small-scale and exploratory, has uncovered instances where the L1 is exploited not as a mere 'crutch' or as the default lens through which the L2 is viewed, but as a mediation tool – in ways not dissimilar from what is envisaged under the umbrella term of mediation as a fifth communicative activity in the recently published *Companion* to the CEFR.

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