A BRIEF HISTORY OF LANGUAGE TEACHING

I. Latin 500 years ago

II. 16th century Latin replaced with English, French and Italian

III. England 16th to 19th century, Latin in ‘grammar schools’

Importance of Latin: to develop intellectual abilities

*When once the Latin tongue had ceased to be a normal vehicle for communication, and was replaced as such by the vernacular languages, then it most speedily became a ‘mental gymnastic’, the supremely ‘dead’ language, a disciplined and systematic study of which was held to be indispensable as a basis for all forms of high education.* (V. Mallison, cited in Titone 1968:26)

IV. 18th century: Beginning of modern language teaching (taught like Latin)

Examples of sentences students translated in the foreign language classroom.

- *The philosopher pulled the lower jaw of the hen.*
- *My sons have bought the mirrors of the Duke.*
- *The cat of my aunt is more treacherous than the dog of your uncle.*

(Titone 1968:28)

V. 19th & 20th century (1840’s – 1940’s): The Grammar Translation Method

**Principal characteristics:**

1. The goal is to learn a language in order to read its literature or in order to benefit from the mental discipline and intellectual development. (A way of studying a language through detailed analysis of its grammar rules, followed by using this knowledge to translate sentences and texts into the target language.)

2. Reading and writing are the major focus. (Speaking and listening are not considered to be important).

3. Vocabulary lists are based on reading texts and words are taught through bilingual word lists, dictionary study and memorisation. (In a typical Grammar-Translation text, grammar rules are presented and a list of vocabulary items are presented with their translation equivalents and translation exercises are given).

4. The sentence is the basic unit of teaching and language practice. (Much of the lesson is devoted to translating sentences into and out of the target language).

5. Accuracy is emphasised. (Students are expected to attain high standards in translation.)

6. Grammar is taught deductively. (Rules are presented by the teacher and students practice the rules in translation exercises.)

7. The student’s native language is the language of instruction. (New items and comparisons between the foreign language and the student’s native language are used in the classroom.)

VI. **PRE-REFORM MOVEMENT**

- The Frenchman **C. Marcel** (1793-1896)
  - Connection between child learning his/her language and foreign language teaching.
  - Importance of meaning
  - Reading taught before other skills

- The Englishman **T. Prendergast** (1806-1886)
  - The 1st to record the observation that children use contextual and situational cues to interpret utterances and that they memorise phrases and routines in speaking.
  - He proposed the first “structural syllabus”.

- The Frenchman **F. Gouin** (1831-1896)
  - He developed an approach to teaching foreign language based on his observation of children’s use of language.
  - Gouin series
  - His emphasis was on teaching new items in a context that made meaning clear, and that used gestures and actions to convey the meaning.

VII. **THE REFORM MOVEMENT (an approach to language teaching)**

- During the 1880’s linguists like Henry Sweet (England) and Wilhelm Viëtor (Germany) began to bring credibility and acceptance to reformist ideas.
  - Henry Sweet (1845-1912) *The Practical Study of Languages*
  - Wilhelm Viëtor (1850-1918) *Language Teaching Must Start Afresh*

- 1886 International Phonetic Association & its International Phonetic Alphabet

- REFORMERS BELIEVED THAT:

  1. Spoken language is primary (oral-based methodology)
  2. Phonetics in teaching and teacher training
  3. Learner should listen before seeing language in written form
  4. Words presented in sentences and practised in meaningful contexts not isolated
  5. Grammar taught inductively (after practising in context)
  6. Avoid translation, although mother tongue could be used to explain new words or check comprehension.
VIII. **THE DIRECT METHOD** (NATURAL METHODS)

- Principles and procedures of the Direct Method:
  1. Classroom instruction only in target language.
  2. Teachers only taught everyday vocab. and sentences.
  3. Oral communication skills organised around question – answer exchanges between teachers and students in small groups.
  4. Grammar was taught inductively.
  5. New teaching points introduced orally.
  6. Concrete vocab. taught through demonstration, objects and pictures; abstract vocab. by association of words.
  7. Speech and listening comprehension were taught.
  8. Correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasised.

- Coleman Report → Study in 1923 in US

**GROUP DISCUSSION:**

What should the goals of language teaching be? Should a language course try to teach conversational proficiency, reading, translation, or some other skill?

What should the role of the native language be?

What teaching techniques and activities work best and under what circumstances?