

**A "PLEA" for L1 USE IN L2/ FL
LEARNING.
THE BILINGUAL METHOD.**

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ABSTRACT

Research into Bilingualism has opened up a new way to make the teaching of foreign languages a more exciting, humane, rewarding, and above all effective activity. The bilingual method is one of the most "daring" methods that attempted to rehabilitate initial L1 use in the process of L2/ FL learning. This article attempts to explain the techniques put forward by this method as well as the objectives targeted.

RESUME

l'auteur de la méthode dite bilingue- en l'occurrence le professeur C.J. DODSON [1] - ne préconise nullement le retour à l'utilisation de la méthode traditionnelle indirecte (the Grammar Translation Method) . En effet, dans la méthode traditionnelle de l'enseignement des langues étrangères , la langue maternelle était omniprésente dans le processus de l'apprentissage de la langue cible (i.e.: la langue cible était enseignée via la langue première). DODSON recommande plutôt l'utilisation judicieuse de la langue maternelle de l'apprenant comme un support pédagogique précieux, particulièrement dans les phases initiales de l'apprentissage de la langue cible. Cet article va s'efforcer d'explicitier non seulement les techniques proposées par cette méthode mais également les objectifs qu'elle s'assigne.

For many years, writers on language methodology have tended to stress techniques for teaching the code but have had relatively little to say about how language learners can be taught to use the code effectively in terms of authentic communication in real life situation. It is little wonder, therefore, that the category of bilingual education intended to allow originally monoglot children to acquire an additional language up to bilingual standards received great attention recently, especially in Europe, Canada, and Japan. A great deal of research projects and empirical investigations were successfully carried out, monitored and tested.

The Bilingual Method is a teaching method that aims at leading the learner towards true communicative competence in the target language, namely towards fluency and accuracy in the spoken and the written word alike. It also aims at training the pupil, within such a learning framework that he can attain true bilingualism in the sense that he can switch from one language to another with greater ease and accuracy, while keeping the two systems apart. The bilingual method rejects the direct method assumption that L2 or FL should be learnt along the same lines as the young monolingual normal child acquires his first and only language (usually his mother tongue) in his natural environment. It advocates instead, that

" the model for L2 or FL teaching methods should be the natural second language learning process of the young bilingual, not the language learning process of the young monolingual, who by definition, has no experience whatever of acquiring a second language". (DODSON 1985, P. 29).

The bilingual theory is based on empirical investigations and intensive experimentation about bilingual language development. It stems mainly from the discoveries that :

1. Every bilingual has a preferred and a L2 for every discrete area of experience ("Preferred" is used as a term having a neutral, psychological connotation different from the individual's subjective preference for one particular language.) A preferred language is that language in which a bilingual, whether developed or developing, finds it easier to express himself, in specific areas of experience, at any given moment, without hindrance. The term "preferred" can only be used in association with the term "second" or "third" (etc.)... Language as it refers only to the language of bilinguals and foreign language speakers.

The status of preferred language (stronger language) in conjunction with L2 (or weaker language) is neither stable nor static. It fluctuates depending on the individual's contacts with a language in any given domain and, ipso facto, "preferredness" may be reversed or transferred. This will depend on the intensity and the frequency of the individual's contacts in either language.

2. The young bilingual in his attempt to make use of his weaker language (L2) as soon as possible as an effective means for communication, takes a number of "short-cuts". However, for the acquisition of preferred language utterances for new areas of experience, the developing bilingual uses the same strategies as the ones used by the monolingual child in the process of acquiring new areas of his L1. (These

strategies mainly relate to private medium- orientated speech [2] of both monolinguals and bilinguals).

- He imitates and repeats words and phrases heard before.
- He permutes and recombines known utterance-elements in order to generate new utterances and even new concepts.
- He adds new elements to already known utterances in order to expand their meaning and their function.
- He relates together a number of known words and utterances in a flow of speech.

But, unlike his monolingual counterpart, it has been found that the bilingual child uses two additional strategies in his striving to develop competence in his weaker language (L2) at the earliest possible moment and thus increase the learning rate in his L2. Both strategies are bilingual and medium orientated activities. The first of these bilingual strategies is used when the child is talking to himself, either when he is alone or in company (private speech acts). The second bilingual medium-orientated technique is used when he is interacting with others. (Public speech acts).

During his private speech , it has been observed that the young bilingual compares and contrasts utterances from both his preferred and his L2, by making equivalent utterances in both languages, one after the other, in order to strengthen his L2 utterance and thus, help to separate it from his L1 equivalent utterance, and at a later stage , to differentiate the two languages as two distinct media.

During his public speech, the young bilingual asks those who are more proficient in his L2 than himself, for the meaning in his preferred language, of the L2 words and sentences he does not understand or about which he is uncertain. He also asks for L2 utterances through his preferred language, so that he can make use of his L2 as soon as possible.

Example: How do you say "snow" in French?

By so doing, the developing bilingual takes linguistic "short-cuts" to facilitate his learning and increase his L2 proficiency as quickly as possible, so that he is capable of satisfying a particular non-linguistic need as soon as it arises, via his L2. So, throughout his L2 acquisition process, the developing bilingual is initially satisfying a linguistic need by constantly comparing and contrasting his two languages, in order to meet a subsequent non-linguistic need (such as for example satisfying curiosity, acquiring knowledge) through his L2.

He also seeks other bilinguals' help, during his public interactions, for correct and appropriate equivalence in his preferred language, for L2 words and sentences he has not understood. He , thereafter, shifts from a merely medium-orientated level where his mind focuses mainly on the linguistic forms and the appropriate elements of the language to be used, to a message-orientated level of communication [3]

where his main concern is to transmit a personal message and thus, satisfy an immediate non-linguistic need via this language. To increase his learning rate and the level of proficiency in his L2 as a vehicle for communication, the developing bilingual uses his preferred language as a basic frame of reference. As a result, his L2 development becomes easier and also faster. However, as his fluency and accuracy in his L2 increases, he comes to rely less and less on his bilingual medium-orientated activity, and thus operates more and more at a monolingual message-orientated level through his L2. This in time, could become his preferred language in given areas of his experience, depending on the frequency and intensity of subsequent contacts in either language.

Following the bilingual method, a developing bilingual attains communicative competence in his L2, in a framework of fluctuating activities between bilingual- preferred / second language medium - orientated communication and monolingual second language message-orientated communication, bearing in mind that his bilingual medium-orientated communication decreases as his communicative competence in his L2 increases, and that both communicative levels are indispensable to help the child develop into a balanced bilingual.

The "short-cut" activities mentioned before, encompass linguistic practise steps through which the developing bilingual will eventually engage in a true communicative interaction. Though, they are both medium-orientated strategies, they are both essential for message-orientated communication to take place. Furthermore, they are accounted as initial basic steps in the Bilingual Method, for any lesson cycle. (DODSON. 1967)

BILINGUAL MEDIUM-ORIENTATED COMMUNICATION AND ITS ROLE IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

The bilingual method advocates that the learner's preferred language (i.e.: the Mother Tongue in most cases) should not be completely banished from the L2 or FL classroom, but rather used as an invaluable teaching aid in the learning process. Indeed, experience has shown that whatever method is used, the L2 or F.L learner always tends to construe the novel events encountered in the FL environment, in terms of the conceptual systems and matrices available to him in his preferred language and uses the language at his disposal as a tool for meaning acquisition in the target language. So, keeping in mind that L1- as a reference system - is very important to the L2 / FL learner in any subsequent language learning, it is unlikely that the simple exclusion of overt verbal stimuli in his L1 in the classroom context, would automatically eliminate the effect and the influence of the L1 on the

learning of an additional language. On the contrary, using the learner's L1 and, thus, making him more aware of things he knows implicitly about his own language, may be one of the best teaching devices available to the language teacher.

"It seems indeed, incongruous that the language teacher should be the only teacher who is expected to violate the

most fundamental educational principle, namely that the pupils must proceed from the known to the unknown, from the simple to the complex" (DODSON 1967, P.173)

It is, of course, wisest from the psychological point of view to progress from the known to the unknown. Since the child's earliest concept formation has occurred with the aid of his mother tongue, this is also the best medium both for expressing these concepts and for learning new notions anchored in the existing concepts. From a pedagogic point of view, it is obvious that the child will learn quicker through his native tongue than through an alien linguistic medium.

In the bilingual method, the learner's preferred language is used as an essential teaching aid, in the learning process, until the learner is capable of integrating the sounds of the target language, with the things and concepts they actually represent in the real world.

The use of his preferred language is thus a simple concept transposition, from L1 to the L2/FL, that will help the learner to dispense with his preferred language "CRUTCH" and eventually think in the target language. It is not translation for the sake of translation.

It is important to realise that the mother tongue or the preferred language is used by the teacher, as a **cue for concept causation** to help the learner differentiate his two languages as two separate systems, and thus reduce and eventually eliminate cross-language interference that hinders the target language development. The L1 words have, therefore, no bearing whatsoever on the L2 or FL terms, during the learning activities, as there is no direct link between them. Meaning and imitation experiments conducted by DODSON and his proponents showed that the use of the L1 as **an initial conveyor of meaning** has no detrimental effect whatsoever on the quality of subsequent FL responses

On the contrary, giving an initial mother tongue equivalent improved the quality of the pupils' subsequent responses in the same way as it does for the developing bilingual.

a- They were immediately certain of meaning as they could integrate their FL utterances with the concepts and the things they actually represented from the start.

b- They had far greater amount of time available for language practice since they had already acquired meaning for their FL utterances.

In other words, the use of the learner's L1 at the beginning of the language learning process saves time, in the sense that the pupils know that they are not supposed to translate, but just recall the previously practised FL utterances when they hear the Mother- Tongue stimulus. However, the intervention of the L1 at a later stage of language learning serves no pedagogical purpose but wastes time.

Following the Bilingual Method, the methodological principle relying on the assumption that L2 or FL learning is a replication of L1 acquisition proved to be totally fallacious. Indeed, if monolingual message -oriented activities are taught at the beginning of the lesson cycle, true communicative competence will remain out side the reach of most learners; mere reproduction of memorised monolingual FL pattern drills and artificial FL interactions are not enough for the learners to achieve accuracy and fluency in the target language. In this respect, it is argued that:

" Over reliance on pre-planned answers and controlled situations where the pupils' responses are almost totally predictable hinders the pupils' development towards true communicative competence".

(BUTZKAMM and DODSON. 1980, P.293)

The reason is that pre-planned answers are only likely to be "devised" by structural means that usually ignore and can not take into account the degree of unpredictability essential in spontaneous communication. True communicative events, in real-life situation, are basically unpredictable both linguistically and paralinguistically. Hence, it is vital to create and foster such " life-like" atmosphere in the FL classroom.

Further research in language learning procedure revealed that the differences in the language strategies used by the developing bilingual in the acquisition of his L2 with that of his monolingual counterpart, were similarly reflected in the data obtained during intensive empirical investigations into L2 and FL learning variables for pupils and even adults learning an additional language at such later stages (DODSON.1982). It was shown that the acquisition of that language area which was not the preferred language, differed from the acquisition process for L1. It was found that , just like the developing or developed bilingual, L2 and FL learners have, for any area of experience only one preferred language in which they find it easier to communicate, and thus satisfy immediate non-linguistic needs.

With hindsight, it was stated that:

" If children acquiring two languages in a bilingual environment take a variety of medium-oriented short-cuts as natural ways of increasing their communicative competence"

and if "one of the bilingual child's languages is the stronger (preferred) and the other the weaker (second) language for each area of experience at any given moment and, finally, if these short-cuts , especially those additional ones which the monolingual does not experience, are essential for the development of his second or weaker language for any area of experience, then it would seem appropriate that a pupil learning an additional language at a later stage in the classroom should follow similar developmental activities." (DODSON, March 1983. P. 411) Therefore

" if any 'natural' language learning procedure was to be repeated in the classroom, it should be the way a young bilingual learner and reinforces his L2, and not the way a child learns and reinforces his first and only language" (DODSON spring 1983, P.6)

The preferred language in most cases, is the L2 or FL learner's mother tongue, in normal classroom contexts.

It is advocated then, that L2 and FL learners need to pass through the same acquisition processes as the developing bilingual acquiring and reinforcing his L2. They need to experience bilingual preferred / second language medium-orientated activities in order to achieve communicative competence in their target language. The omission of such activities, will only retard their L2 or FL acquisition and thus impede their progress towards effective communicative competence.

THE BILINGUAL TEACHING PROCEDURE

The Bilingual Method comprises sequential learning steps. It is a progressive teaching method that goes from mere imitative exercises, to free spontaneous creative exercises within any lesson cycle. (6 - 12 lessons). In other words it leads the learner from bilingual medium-orientated communication to monolingual second language message-orientated communication for any area of experience. Its general methodological approach brings the learner from the actual language learning and role-taking activities - mainly teacher-monitored activities such as imitation, interpretation, substitution and extension, independent speaking of sentences- to the creative use of the target language and its spontaneous application in role-making and communicative acts performed by pupils. But, before the learner can create any utterance correctly, he is required to consolidate completely a basic situation (usually a dialogue), through the syntactic and semantic manipulation of a

series of basic sentences, until he reaches a fully creative level where he can make use freely and spontaneously of the L2 / FL learnt.

A lesson cycle begins with the presentation of a basic situation (a dialogue) involving new learning items and materials, and ends with groups of learners acting out their dialogues and discussing them with the rest of the class. In other words, the Bilingual Method leads the pupil, in any cycle, from knowing nothing about a particular range of language for a prescribed situation or area of experience, to a stage where he is able " to make use" of this language communicatively, to satisfy non-linguistic needs within the same cycle. (DODSON 1982).

It is significant that the learner in the Bilingual Method class is not desk-bound - He actually experiences the new language not only verbally, but also non-linguistically. He is permanently encouraged to interact verbally, paralinguistically and non-verbally throughout the learning process, especially at the role-making stage, in order to 'absorb' the target language in a 'natural' way.

The aim of the Bilingual Method is, therefore to bring the learners from understanding new utterances, structures and functions, to using them creatively in their own productions, and at a later stage, to 'make use' of all the acquired language for their personal communicative language content, for any lesson-cycle, is based on the frequency of communicative interactions (verbal, paralinguistic and non-verbal) pupils normally experience in and out of the classroom and school in their preferred language. (DODSON, 1982. P.7)

As we have seen, the Bilingual Method operates at two distinct interrelated, though fluctuating, levels of communication (i.e.: bilingual medium-orientated communication and second language message-orientated communication) to achieve fluency and accuracy in both the spoken and the written word. This depends mainly, on the learner's needs and the learning process requirements at a given point of the teaching cycle.

It is important, however, that medium-orientated communication should not be confused with mere language manipulation. It is communication in the sense that interactions take place and FL utterances are exchanged, but the participants speech intentions of such activities refer mainly to the language (the medium) and the best way to use it. At this stage, the learner is more concerned with complying to the teacher's requests, with satisfying initial linguistic needs than with conveying any genuine personal message. As learning a language is not merely the application of medium-orientated communication, it is necessary to bring the language learners to the point where he can 'make use' of the L2 or FL as an instrument to satisfy subsequent non-linguistic needs. The learner must develop strategies for using the medium to communicate messages as effectively as possible in concrete situations.

However, he can not 'make use' of the language as a means to satisfy something other than language, unless he has had enough practice and rehearsal at a medium orientated level (i.e.: rehearsal and practice in the phonological, morphological, syntactical and lexical aspects of the target language)

Nevertheless,

" The process should not be seen as an initial medium-orientated introduction followed months, or ever years later, by a change to a message-orientated communication. One level is closely tied to the other, and the content area of a basic situation used to develop the pupils.

Linguistic competence must be immediately extended at a message-orientated level to allow pupils to develop communicative competence". (DODSON, spring 1983. P. 6).

In fact, " as his proficiency in his L2 increases, the learners will rely less and less on prior medium-orientated confirmation of any message-orientated utterance ". (DODSON 1984. P.23)

He may wish to make .although he will never be able to do entirely without his medium-orientated activities.

In the Bilingual Method, these two levels of activity occur parallely and in the same sequencing, in the development process of reading and writing.

The significant thing about the Bilingual Method is that it insists on the creative use of language, where the target language is a tool rather than an end in itself. It makes sure that every language item learnt, in any lesson cycle, could be used immediately as a means for learning something other than language and thus ensures that message-orientated communication does take place within the bounds of the current lesson. It makes certain that every input of a basic situation is made the point of departure of several output (learner's created) dialogues and 'texts'. In other words, the Bilingual Method attempts to develop and achieve genuine communicative competence in each situation, no matter how limited the range in both the oral and the written word without ignoring the learners' needs for structural simplification and orderly progression of techniques.

IN SUMMARY

The Bilingual Method incorporates a methodology that organises the class situation in such a way, that the pupils' non-linguistic needs relate not only to curricular areas but also to extra-curricular areas,

keeping in mind the needs and interests of the learner. In addition, it attempts to enable the learner to 'make use' of the target language in genuine interactions and spontaneous performances, such as role-playing and role-making activities, and thus achieve a satisfactory communicative competence not only within the bounds of the FL class, but also in the domains found outside FL classrooms. Thus, sustained progress towards accuracy and proficiency is further aided by the use of a whole range of resource-materials, usually selected according to the learner's needs and interests.

CONCLUSION

The bilingual method has been experimented and tested in real school situations, particularly in Wales, with a great deal of success (DODSON September 1982.)

It gradually started to spread as a possible 'redress' for some language teaching misconceptions, especially in bilingual education, in a number of countries such as former West-Germany, New Zealand, Japan, Canada, Sri-Lanka and India.

If due consideration is given to the fact that there is no panacea in F.L.T, it can be asserted that the Bilingual Method is well-worth trying in the Algerian Foreign Language Teaching context, especially in the early stages of the foundation school education. Indeed, after years of intensive experimentation, under strict control, the Bilingual method proved to be more effective and efficient than many teaching methods without demanding an inordinate linguistic ability on the part of the non-native teacher.

The learning sequences shown in the above diagram represent a complete lesson cycle of four or more lessons, depending on the amount of materials and resources available, the complexity of the subject, and the interest of the pupils in the subject-matter taught.

In Role-Taking, the learner might be mainly rehearsing the language of a set-piece. He is, then, operating at medium-orientated level. The other form of Role-Playing, where the learner might in the main, be transmitting a message through Role-Making, refer to message-orientated communication.

Source: C.J. DODSON, 1985. Second Language Acquisition and Bilingual Development

ENDNOTES

[1] **C.J.DODSON** is a professor of education and director of the centre of Bilingual and Language Education in the university college of Wales- ABERYSTWYTH- Wales (U.K.)

[2] **Medium-Orientated Communication**: is the learning stage where the learner's attention is mainly focused on the target language and the language learning process. At this level, many linguistic interactions take place and a number of FL utterances are produced, but the speech intentions of such acts refer to the language and the best way to use it, to comply to the teacher's demands.

[3] **Message-Orientated Communication**: is the learning level where the language learner is no more aware of the linguistic forms and the language learning -process, but loses himself in a true communicative act that is of real importance to him. (i.e.: he is 'making use' of the language as a means to satisfy immediate non-linguistic needs such as satisfying his curiosity, resolving uncertainty, expressing opinions, acquiring knowledge, etc....)

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