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Introduction: Building the History of Language Learning and Teaching (HoLLT)

NICOLA MCLELLAND and RICHARD SMITH

The papers presented in this issue are the result of a workshop held at the University of Nottingham in December 2012 as part of an Arts and Humanities Research Council research network *Towards a History of Modern Foreign Language Teaching and Learning* (2012–14) intended to stimulate historical research into language teaching and learning. This, the first workshop in the programme, focused on exchanging information on the history of language learning and teaching (HoLLT) across the different language traditions, for it had become clear to us that scholars working within their own language disciplines were often relatively unaware of work outside these. We hope that this special issue — with overview articles on the history of English, French, German, and Spanish as second/foreign languages — will help overcome that lack of awareness and facilitate further research collaboration. Charting the history of language teaching and learning will, in turn, make us all better informed in facing challenges and changes to policy and practice now and in the future. It is instructive in the current climate, for example, to realize that grave doubts were held about whether second foreign languages could survive alongside French in British schools in the early twentieth century (McLelland, forthcoming), or to look back at earlier attempts to establish foreign languages in primary schools (Bayley, 1989; Burstall et al., 1974; Hoy, 1977). As we write, language learning in England is undergoing yet more radical change. Language teaching for all children from the age of seven is being made compulsory in primary schools from 2014, while at Key Stage 3 (up to age 16), where a foreign language has not been compulsory since 2002, the most recent programme of study for England has virtually abandoned the recent focus on intercultural competence and now requires learners to ‘read great literature in the original language’,¹ a radical change in emphasis compared to the previous half-century, which seems to reflect a very different view of what language learning is for. We seem to be little closer in 2014 than we were at the dawn of the twentieth century to answering with any certainty the questions that lie at the very foundations of

¹ Languages Programmes of Study: Key Stage 3 National Curriculum in England (September 2013), p. 1 [online] <https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/239042/PRIMARY_national_curriculum_-_Languages.pdf>.

language teaching: who should learn a foreign language, why learners learn, what they need to learn, and what we want to teach them — answers that we need before we can consider *how* we want to teach. The research programme begun under our research network is intended to help us to take ‘the long view’ on such questions.

Thirty years ago, Stern (1983: 76) lamented the lack of research in the history of second language teaching and regretted the inevitably ‘short memory’ of language teaching theory that is its result. While there has been progress in a few areas, much remains to be done, especially in Britain. Before introducing the articles which follow, then, we shall briefly summarize the state of the field, measuring progress against research desiderata identified by Stern (1983: 113–14). There are now a number of detailed and well-documented studies of language teaching and learning in given periods in particular countries, at least for some parts of Europe. We have a history of language teaching in Belgium up to the early twentieth century by Maréchal (1972); for the Netherlands, Kuiper (1961, for German) and (for French) a more recent series of publications including by Kok Escalle (e.g. 1997; 1998; 1999; 2006; 2007), Kok Escalle & Strien-Chardonneau (2006; 2007) and Frijhoff (e.g. 1996; 2013). For France, we have work by Puren (1998; 1994). For Germany, see Schröder (1980; 1982; 1983; 1985) and Hüllen (2005), as well as Hüllen & Klippel (2000; 2005). For the history of learning and teaching particular languages as foreign languages, we have for Spanish Sánchez (1992), for German Glück (2002; 2013), and a number of publications for French including Kibbee (1991) for French in England up to 1600, Hammar (1991) for the learning of French in Sweden before 1807, Fernández Fraile & Suso López (1999) for French in Spain, Kuhfuß (2014) for French in Germany, Vigner (2000) for the history of French teaching in its African colonies, and, more recently, a series of studies by Sanchez on French in colonial Palestine (e.g. Sanchez 2011),² as well as contributions in Frijhoff & Reboullet (1998). For the history of English language teaching, see Howatt with Widdowson (2004).

In France, an international society devoted to the history of French teaching and learning was established in 1987 (SIHFLES, *Société Internationale pour l’Histoire du Français Langue Étrangère ou Seconde*), and since then a steady stream of themed conference has resulted in publications in its series *Documents pour l’histoire du français langue étrangère ou seconde* (see the article by Besse in this issue). Meanwhile, a small number of scholars in Germany have made important contributions, especially through compiling bibliographies of primary sources, work which has laid the foundation for further research. Let us note here the three-volume history of the methods of teaching English in Germany from 1800–1960 (Macht, 1986–90), Klippel’s study of learning English in Germany in the period 1700–1900 (Klippel, 1994), and work by Konrad Schröder providing bibliography and studies of the history of English teaching in Germany up to 1900 (Schröder, 1975; and 1969 for English at universities to 1850) as well as comprehensive bibliography of the history of the wider teaching of modern foreign languages in the German-speaking countries (Schröder, 1980–85 — a second edition is in preparation). Other important bibliographies are

² Note also the much older study of the teaching of French in Tudor and Stuart times by Lambley (1920).

noted by Glück in his article in this issue. We also have comprehensive documentation, in seven volumes, of the official state guidelines and prescriptions on the teaching of modern languages in Germany for the period 1700–1945 (Christ & Rang, 1985).

For the history of modern foreign language teaching in Britain, the equivalent research foundations are almost entirely lacking,³ and the research landscape is patchy. Watson's survey of the *Beginnings of Modern Subjects in England* (1909) remains a key source. Hawkins (1987) is the closest to an overview of the history of modern language teaching for the British context, particularly useful for its discussion of the late nineteenth-century reform movement (Hawkins, 1987: 117–53). Ortmanns (1993) presents a wealth of facts and figures on the history of German teaching in Great Britain up to the year 1985, and McLelland (2014) will provide a history of the nature of German learning in Britain since 1500. Wegner (1999) compares the history of German as a foreign language in France and England in the twentieth century, also comparing developments in didactic theory with the evidence of textbooks themselves. Muckle (2008) is a history of the Russian language in Britain, a 'historical survey of learners and teachers'.

For non-European traditions, the history of language learning and teaching (HoLLT) appears to be largely untouched, though some snippets can be gleaned from surveys of the history of linguistics of the various traditions (e.g. in Auroux et al., 2000–06: Vol. 1) and from the history of missionary linguistics.⁴ For example, del Valle (2000: 234) discusses Arabic grammars of Hebrew; Sasse (2000: 67, 70) notes materials for the learning of Chinese by Korean speakers, including Korean glosses of Chinese from the fifteenth century onwards, as well as for the learning of Japanese, Mongolian, and Manchurian; Kaiser (2000: 82) documents growing interest in Japan in learning Korean, with the first textbooks for learning Korean dating to 1729; Scharfe (2000: 131) notes the emergence of textbooks for teaching Sanskrit as a foreign language from the fourth century onwards. As for European influence, from the eighteenth century onwards numerous grammars of Indian languages were written by and for Europeans (Shapiro, 2000: 178; cf. also n. 5 above on missionary linguistics).

As regards studies of major trends or events in the recent history of language teaching, Puren (1994) is a history of 'eclecticism'; see also Puren (1988) for a history of language methodologies in France. An important contribution is the five-volume documentation of the Reform Movement in language teaching in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, by Howatt & Smith (2002), with a very useful introduction (Vol. 1, xi–xliii) and including reprints of the bibliographies of Reform Movement literature compiled by Hermann Breymann (1895; 1900), even if the riches they contain have barely begun to be investigated. Work by Gilbert (published in a series

³ See, however, the bibliography in McLelland (2014) for the history of German learning in Britain.

⁴ For an impression of the field of missionary linguistics, see the most recent issue in the series *Missionary Linguistics*, Zwartjes et al. (2009). For recent surveys of the study of 'exotic' languages by Europeans, see articles 126–36 in Auroux et al. (2000).

of articles 1953, 1954, 1955) remains the most comprehensive overview of the Reform Movement as viewed from the perspective of its influence in Britain. Just as the history of foreign language learning in Britain has been relatively neglected until recently, the growing prominence of English language teaching around the world has only recently begun to be reflected in an increase in UK scholarship which traces the history of ELT and the history of ‘applied linguistics’ more widely. Apart from Howatt & Smith (2002) and Howatt with Widdowson (2004), Smith’s two collections of resources relating to the history specifically of Teaching English as a Foreign Language, 1912–61 (Smith, 2003; 3005) have helped to lay foundations in this area.

Much remains to be done in charting the history of particular aspects of language teaching. After Kelly’s pioneering anthology of texts arranged by themes such as ‘teaching pronunciation’ and ‘writing the foreign language’ (Kelly, 1969), Caravolas (1994; 2000) documents reflections on particular aspects of language learning up to the end of the eighteenth century, including the role of memory, the role of the first language, the role of grammar, error correction, the roles of teacher and learner, learning vocabulary, how to read, write, speak, and pronounce in the foreign language. Guthke (2011) examines the gradual emergence of literature in textbooks of German in Britain between 1770 and 1830. Risager (2007) examines the more recent history of teaching ‘culture’ in the foreign language classroom. Reinfried (1992) offers a history of visual media in the teaching of French as a foreign language, and in so doing also provides an excellent general history of developments in language teaching theory.

There are as yet relatively few biographical and critical studies of the personalities, ideas, and influence of great language teaching practitioners and theorists. For Britain, Van der Lubbe (2007) has provided the first book-length biographical study, devoted to the author of the first grammar of German (Martin Aedler, 1680). Flood (1999) presents the biography of Adolphus Bernays (1794–1864), appointed to teach German at King’s College London in 1831. Two other nineteenth-century figures who have received attention are Claude Marcel (Smith, 2009) and Thomas Prendergast (Atherton, 2010). Brief biographies of Otto Siepmann and Walter Rippmann (influential in British modern language teaching in the early decades of the twentieth century) are provided by Whitehead (2004) and McLelland (2012; Paulin, 2010); see also Paulin (2010) on Karl Breul, who made important contributions to teacher training in the late nineteenth century. In relation to twentieth-century history, Smith (1999) has focused on the pioneering applied linguistic and ELT work of Harold E. Palmer. Many, many others, of whom we know only what their textbook title pages reveal, would reward closer study. Another desideratum identified by Stern that is only just beginning to be tackled is historical studies of language *learning*, based on a systematic review of historical biographies and autobiographies. Here the volume *Fremde Sprachen in frühneuzeitlichen Städten* (ed. Häberlein & Kuhn, 2010) is valuable for the range of methodologies its contributors variously adopt in order to trace the history of foreign learning languages in the early modern period, in particular the exploitation of archive material, from town records to ego-documents; see now also Glück et al. (2013, reviewed in this issue).

Stern himself (1983: 75–116) still offers a very good review and summary of earlier of the teaching of foreign languages, including Titone (1968) and Kelly (1969). Wheeler’s *Language Teaching Through The Ages* (2013) is an engaging book of thirty-odd short features on key figures and movements in the history of language learning, although it does not make full use of the research published in languages other than English (some of it noted here). To some extent Wheeler’s book underlines our lack of knowledge, though: most of his chapters on the pre-modern era deal with materials for teaching Latin, or with other topics in the history of linguistics that have little immediate connection to the teaching of modern foreign languages. (See also the review by Kelly in this issue.) Despite the value of surveys such as those by Caravolas (1994: 66–120; 2000: 3–40) and Hüllen (2005), a general history of language teaching and learning remains a desideratum.

To help us approach that ultimate goal, a comprehensive history of language education, this special issue will, we trust, increase awareness across discipline boundaries of some of the progress that has been made in the HoLLT, and stimulate further research by drawing attention to different approaches and methodologies. The four papers here by Henri Besse (research on the history of teaching and learning French), Helmut Glück (German), Aquilino Sánchez (Spanish), and Howatt & Smith (English) are by the leading authorities in their respective language disciplines, each written in response to the request to provide an ‘overview of the field’. The result is imperfect. First, as readers will see, our contributors interpreted their brief in very different, though complementary, ways, as the research focus in each language tradition has varied. More significantly, important languages are completely unrepresented here, including Italian, Portuguese, and Russian, as well as the Scandinavian languages and, of course, all non-European languages. However, it is a start.

The first paper of the volume is on French not only because French is still the first foreign language in Britain, but also because the history of researching French as a second or foreign language is the most established, dating back over a quarter of a century, with its dedicated society, founded in 1987 and publication series (noted above). In the first of the essays in this volume, then, Henri Besse documents the history of research in the field, and argues (as we have above) that understanding the past is crucial to making informed decisions in the present, both in language teaching/learning policy *and* practice, but points out that, despite the relatively long history of the society, its dissemination to a wider audience of teachers and policy-makers has yet to reach the level that the society’s founders hoped for.

Besse recalls Ferdinand Brunot’s identification of three approaches HoLLT: socio-cultural, pedagogical, and linguistic. Of these three strands, it is the first that is most prominent in the second contribution, by Helmut Glück, who provides the first overview in English of how German has been taught and learned in Europe, with emphasis on the sociocultural: who were the learners of German, where in Europe was German most learnt, and domains of usage. Glück reminds us that for the period up to 1800, at least, most language learning was informal — it occurred outside of institutions, and, furthermore, often without the help of any written materials at all. For readers of German, Glück’s own monographs remain the key references for the period up to 1800 (Glück 2002, 2013), but his overview provided here will

be of value to those who do not read German. The period since then is relatively poorly researched, though for Britain see Ortmanns (1993) and now also McLelland (2014, forthcoming), and the very rich study by Koch (2002) examining the history of German teaching and learning in Russia from all three perspectives noted above: sociological, pedagogical, and linguistic.

In our third contribution, Sánchez provides a comprehensive account of the learning of Spanish in Europe (see also Sánchez, 1992). It is particularly interesting to note the relative strength of Spanish in Britain in the eighteenth century, for in the twentieth century Spanish was a latecomer to formal school language education, although it has now ousted German as the second foreign language.

The final paper provides an overview of the history of teaching what is, outside the UK, the first foreign language: English. Howatt & Smith present a valuable corrective to existing histories of ELT, which they see as rather dominated by the history of the US experience. Howatt & Smith's periodization emphasizes continuities as well as discontinuities, and distinguishes more clearly between passing fads and longer-term shifts in practice than have previous histories, which have tended to reel off methodologies like 'beads on a string'. Concentrating more on the British and European context, the authors call for further such 'localized' histories of language teaching and learning.

The four papers above are preceded by the transcript of an interview we recorded with John Trim, three months before his death in January 2013.⁵ In that interview, John Trim reflected not just on his own personal history of shaping the direction of language teaching and learning in Britain and Europe during the twentieth century (with a legacy lasting well into the twenty-first century with the Common European Framework of Reference, now used world-wide), but also reflected on the importance of the history of language teaching and learning for reflecting on current policy and practice. We hope that our readers will agree with John Trim, and that they will take the rich surveys presented here as a starting-point to find out more.

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⁵ The video is available at: <http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/elt_archive/entry/video_interview_with>.

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