

DEMANDS FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS IN LANGUAGE TRAINING AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CENTURY

Zoltán STURCZ

Institute of Modern Languages, Hungarian Department
Technical University of Budapest
H-1111 Budapest, Hungary
Phone: +36 1 463-3126
Fax: +36 1 463-3121

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Abstract

Around 1910, considerable professional values had been accumulated in language teaching and language pedagogy in Hungary. Reforms in language teaching were initiated by the joint impulse of professional value accumulation, modern pedagogical trends, European influences, and social as well as economic demands. Reform efforts were coupled with struggles against the grammar-translation method and the introduction of the direct method. Advocates of the direct method attempted to establish a scientific basis for methodology, so naturally they had recourse to Hungarian linguists and linguistics. They formulated the professional demands on linguistics that would assist language teaching (grammatical systems, phonetics, etc.). Thus, in present terms, a practical applied linguistic work developed from the cooperation of language teachers and linguists.

Keywords: language teaching reform, grammar-translation method, direct method, language pedagogy, applied linguistics.

The period between 1910 and 1920 is really significant in the history of language teaching in Hungary: it can be taken as the first reform decade in language teaching in Hungary. In the course of the decade, two trends were opposing each other. One of them was represented by the followers of traditional Latin-Greek language teaching and the grammar-translation method, the other by the group of reformers supporting modern languages and following the direct method. The reformers, taking social demands into consideration, intended to summarize and systematize the methodology of language teaching and made a link between language teaching, linguistics, pedagogy, and psychology. One of the results of the reform decade is that the profession realized its own fortes, grew up, and wanted to define itself. One of its most important manifestations was that language teaching methodology was considered as a science forming a part of pedagogy, and that the elements of professional and methodological continuity were sought for in the past of Hungary. It was this way that predecessors such as E. J. Klemm, Szilasy, János, Mándy Márton, István, and Brassai, Sámuel were discovered. The same intention of finding its place and defining itself resulted in turning

towards related branches of science.

The strongest trend was the interest in linguistics. It was partly due to the fact that the advocates of the direct method got directly and practically connected to linguistics as a result of phonetics, but they had theoretical problems as well, for example when grammatical structures or the relation between language and speech were to be tackled (Weszely, Boga). They developed links with Hungarian linguistics through linguists who were close to language teaching reform, along the line of Brassai – Hunfalvy – Weszely – Gombocz.

The issues raised by the reform reached beyond methodology in the narrower sense and were found to have several points of contact with the assumptions and incentives of linguistics, pedagogy, and psychology as well. The reformers clearly saw that neither methodology nor language teaching could make headway without these related branches of science. As early as 1914, Bakonyi, Hugó put this into the following words: '...teaching any modern language will come up against insurmountable difficulties until the problems closely related to language teaching have been solved partly by psychologists and partly by linguists on the basis of positive data and have agreed on certain fundamental principles.' (BAKONYI, 1914). In his opinion, linguistics is a 'basic science' of methodology as well because 'language as a tool applied most universally' can be raised by it and an infinity of questions can be clarified: linguistics and language teaching should approach each other 'from the direction of application or, of practice'. Others, including Kaiblinger, for instance, have an even more practical understanding of the linguistics required by language teaching, from which, in present terms, the picture of applied linguistics is taking shape. In connection with the theoretical and linguistic appreciation of the work of Brassai, Kaiblinger says: 'I dare to name his oeuvre practical linguistic science as he really attempts to provide society and humankind with a great cultural strength, language knowledge by the least amount of energy possible.' (KAIBLINGER, 1910). 'Practical linguistics' is named by others as 'empirical linguistics' or 'experimental linguistics', 'the most fertile soil' an objective of which is language teaching. The expectations from this practical linguistics are also outlined. Three fields are defined for scholars in Hungary as common subjects of methodology and practical linguistics:

1. usable, practical grammars serving the living language (deduced from language use and thus systematized), where syntax is considerably emphasized;
2. lexis, systematized according to scientific principles; and
3. the elaboration of practical phonetics.

The ideas of practical linguistics and grammar naturally take shape in Brassai's work, but as early as 1884, linguist Hunfalvy, Pál formulates that 'pedagogical grammars assisting fluent speech' should be available for

learning good Latin, German, and French because in his opinion the lack of success is not due to practical grammars but to 'bad grammars systematized on a linguistic basis'. Later on, Hunfalvy analysed some of the Hungarian grammar books and language textbooks published at the turn of the century, and formed devastating opinions about them. (HUNFALVY, 1884). Another, more theoretical approach to this problem, that is, the issue of pedagogical grammars is to examine the correlation between language, language knowledge, grammar, and linguistics. This is raised by Weszely, Ödön from the point of view of teachers and linguists. In his work titled 'The role of grammar in pedagogy', he writes the following: '... those who learn languages, do not learn grammar. Grammar, at its most, serves for making practical application conscious.' (WESZELY, 1905). The fact that it was declared and manifested by Hungarian scholars is important because the advocates of the grammar-translation method identified language learning with learning grammar several times. Weszely's proposition supported by the followers of the direct method is opposed to this standpoint.

In the field of lexical research, the cooperation and the mutual motivation of language teaching and linguistics proved to be successful. To the initiative of Balassa, József, doing historical and descriptive statistical research into lexis, Bakonyi, Hugó, a language teacher began to research lexis more thoroughly and achieved significant results from the viewpoint of language teaching, which might as well be considered as a result of applied linguistics. He chose as his main subject the examination of the vocabulary of a child in the mother tongue and its collation with language teaching because 'the development and extension of a child's vocabulary naturally refers to the way of teaching a foreign language and improving its vocabulary. New viewpoints can be obtained for the method of learning foreign languages as well.' (BAKONYI, 1921).

The studies of Bakonyi present similar analyses from abroad, publishing an immense statistical bibliographical material, but his influence was actually exerted by the collation of Hungarian child language analyses with foreign language teaching. Teachers were motivated by his suggestions on considering the limitation and qualitative compilation of vocabulary, the psyche, gradation, receptivity, and age: reflections as well as suggestions related to vocabulary, vocabulary teaching, and to the relation between active and passive vocabulary were published one after the other, reviewing the material of a given language, teaching phase, or textbook in terms of qualitative and quantitative systematization. The approach starting from theory and research had thus been introduced into teaching practice in this field as well.

The reform forces, the supporters of the direct method, and linguistics got directly connected, most naturally, through phonetics and the approach to it. This is a natural phenomenon since the direct method was the first method to be developed from linguistics, more specifically, from phonetics.

Ever since its initiation, the direct method continuously and strongly has depended on phonetics, and it can be established that 'it expanded along the phonetic line of Victor-Sweet-Jespersen-Passy', as one of our language teachers put it in the 1910s. This thorough phonetic grounding and orientation was due to the emphasis of the method on living spoken language. In Hungary, a relatively crystallized opinion was formed following the exaggerations at the turn of the century, stating that phonetics formed an integral part of the method and was not one of its 'tricks', playing a really significant part in the establishment of living language use. Actually, the principles formulated by Passy and Rambeau within the organization of the International Phonetic Association in 1897 were introduced by a book on the direct method written by Philipp, Kálmán on the basis of 'the experience gained in French school practice' and 'in the interpretation of Guernot' in the 1910s. On this basis he declares that teaching a living language does not depart from letters but from sounds, which is a rule especially to be observed in the elementary phase since sounds are dominant elements of all languages. This is the reason why descriptive or practical phonetics instead of historical or experimental phonetics should be applied. He, as well as teachers in general in Hungary deem the following to be a problem to be examined: '1. What is the benefit of phonetics in teacher training. 2. If it is possible to teach phonetics at lessons and how to approach it and realize it in practice.' (PHILIPP, 1911). So, all in all, a practical method is sought for good 'phonetic practice'. As far as the approach of Hungarian scholars and reformers is concerned, it is increasingly emphasized that besides the correct pronunciation of sounds and words, 'word stress, sentence stress, and stress of meaning' should have appropriate attention, and that 'unnecessary phonetic practice should be avoided.'

The fact that methodology in Hungary tried to find its way towards linguistics was the first important step for it to develop from a mere method into a really systematic science since in the course of cooperation and mutual approach the profession of language teaching became more profound and problems were to be solved on the basis of joint consideration. Although the majority of problems did not get clarified in sufficient detail, in most instances the propositions themselves as well as the formulation of certain axioms made the method progress towards becoming a science and it was made clear that the problems of language teaching could not be solved without the assistance of linguistics and a special branch within it, namely applied linguistics.

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