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## **The Joy of Recognition— Explaining the Paradigm Shift in Foreign Language Teaching**

### Abstract

The contribution is a biographical report on the elaboration of enlightened monolingualism in foreign language teaching and includes the following parts: 1. Introduction: How I changed my mind – 2. Double comprehension – 3. Mother-tongue mirroring – 4. The generative principle – 5. The mother-tongue – mother of languages: Making sense of the world; Grammatical concepts – 6. All languages dance the same dance – 7. The joy of recognition – 8. Practice report: Children for future, children for peace.

### Sommaire

La contribution est un rapport biographique sur l'élaboration du monolinguisme éclairé dans l'enseignement des langues étrangères et comprend les parties suivantes: 1. Introduction: comment j'ai changé d'avis – 2. Double compréhension – 3. La traduction littérale – 4. Le principe génératif – 5. La langue maternelle, la mère des langues: Comprendre le sens; Comprendre la construction – 6. Toutes les langues expliquent le même monde – 7. La joie de la reconnaissance – 8. Exemple pratique: Children for future, children for peace.

### Zusammenfassung

Der Beitrag ist ein biographischer Bericht über die Ausarbeitung der aufgeklärten Einsprachigkeit im Fremdsprachenunterricht und umfasst die folgenden Teile: 1. Einleitung: Wie ich meine Meinung änderte – 2. Doppelverstehen – 3. Muttersprachliche Spiegelung – 4. Das generative Prinzip – 5. Die Muttersprache als Sprachmutter: Leben und Welt verstehen; Grammatik verstehen – 6. Alle Sprachen erklären die Eine Welt – 7. Die Freude des Erkennens – 8. Beispiel aus der Praxis: Children for future, children for peace.

## 1. Introduction: How I Changed My Mind and Adopted a Bilingual Approach

“The monolingual principle, the unique contribution of the twentieth century to classroom language teaching, remains the bedrock notion from which the others ultimately derive. If there is another 'language teaching revolution' round the corner, it will have to assemble a convincing set of arguments to support some alternative (bilingual?) principle of equal power.” (Howatt 1984: 298).

Part of my lifelong work as a teacher and researcher has been to bring about this bilingual revolution or, in other words, this paradigm shift. It is the result of a new language learning analysis, followed by a language teaching analysis as well as practical teaching applications. The latter field, i.e. teaching methods, had been marked by long-standing controversies, by the claims and counterclaims of language masters, authors of methods and propagandists of teaching materials. There were periodical swings of opinion such as for or against “grammar”, for or against “translation”, for or against pattern drill, and so on. Even today, there are stark, striking contrasts between commercial schools and language courses such as *Berlitz* and *Rosetta* on the one hand, which make “no translation” their central selling proposition and, on the other hand, for instance, *Assimil* courses which make systematic use of their learners' native language in various ways. By the way, *Rosetta* and *Berlitz* schools got it all wrong.

It so happened that, at the time when I changed from a grammar school to a new comprehensive school, I came across C. J. Dodson's *Language Teaching and the Bilingual Method* (1967)— one of those happy coincidences that gave my professional life a new turn. The newly established comprehensive school started out with 14 fifth grades, and I had four English beginners' classes with 5 periods a week. For the first time I taught children across the whole ability range. That alone was a real eye-opener.

I immediately started putting Dodson's ideas to the test. Having four parallel classes, what I tried with one class I could try again in another, and do it differently in a third or a fourth class. Tinkering with Dodson's ideas, experimenting with them, trial and error – a private field study, without statistical control, of course.

I didn't take long to find out that Dodson's bilingual techniques worked best. The joy of discovery. Dodson wrote, on the basis of statistically controlled classroom experiments: "Drastic re-thinking for language-teaching methods is called for" (Dodson 1967: 16). So I did just that. I started rethinking what I had been taught and practised as a teacher so far. I found that conflicts about teaching methods could best be solved by taking a fresh look at how languages are acquired generally, in and out of classrooms, and by comparing different acquisition situations, including mother tongue acquisition. It was an attempt at getting our theoretical house in order. So, my book *Psycholinguistik des Fremdsprachenunterrichts*, first published in 1989 (<sup>3</sup>2002), had a chapter on "Natürliche Zweisprachigkeit", focusing on bilingual children. These children used their skills in one language to help themselves progress in the other. In other words, the natural strategies of young developing bilinguals made the exclusion of the MT from the FL classroom seem almost perversely wrong. Incidentally, I found that Leopold's classical four-volume-study on bilingual children was largely unknown by the teaching profession, perhaps because it appeared in the war years (1939-1949). On the other hand, it was an easy read for Germans since Leopold focused on German-English bilingual children. One may safely assume that Dodson was unimpressed by the direct method orthodoxy of the day because he himself was a natural bilingual, with an English father and a German mother.

Advocates of monolingualism were content with the standard remark that children learn their first language without recourse to another language, so why not other languages as well? Rarely was the question asked, how do they actually do it, what do the children and what do parents naturally do when their children acquire their mother tongue. What skills do little children have or develop when they pick up a first language? What are the skills they would naturally transfer when encountering a foreign language? A book emerged from this work which I published with my brother, a psychologist: *Wie Kinder sprechen lernen: Kindliche Entwicklung und die Sprachlichkeit des Menschen*. [How children learn to talk: Child development and the linguistic nature of man] (first published 1999; <sup>4</sup>2019).

## 2. Double Comprehension as the Prime Requirement

What is the prime requirement, what is the essential condition for language learning to take place? Comprehension is central. It is the key to learning any language. Comprehensible input, usually defined as understanding messages, is the necessary condition for language acquisition. But - it is not sufficient. Understanding messages is not enough. Learners must not only understand what is meant, but also how it is said, that is, how the meaning components combine to produce the message.

(Ital.) <i>Quanti anni hai?</i>	
How old are you?	(Understanding the message)
How-many years have-you?	(Understanding the structure)

Children will only make progress if they receive input that is comprehended at two levels, input that is both semantically and syntactically transparent.

Parents speak to them accordingly. They help them understand utterances as they emerge naturally from situations, and children are good intention-readers. But more than that, they speak to them in ways that make it easier for them to segment the sound stream and break the utterance down into its meaningful parts, and children are good pattern detectors. For instance, mothers quite instinctively say “give Mummy the ball” instead of “give me the ball”. “Gimmetheball” or “Mama kommt gleich” (‘Mummy will come presently’) is one big chunk of language where words blend together in a continuous sound stream which must be carved up. Mothers help when they say: “Give-Mummy-theball”. Here “Mummy” stands out clearly so that, in that phrase, it becomes an open slot to be filled in with other persons. “Give Mummy theball” can be turned into “give Daddy theball”, “give doggy theball” etc... Likewise, “theball” is soon understood as “the ball” and also becomes variable: “give doggy the biscuit”, and so on. Finally an abstract pattern emerges: *give* + person + object. Parents help children identify new words by putting them in familiar frames such as *Give ...* ... or *Look at...* or *There’s a ...* Children can separate out the individual meaning components. Parents further the children’s pattern-finding processes so that a phrase can become a productive construction. This is basically how language acquisition functions.

So, while involving them in characteristic communicative give-and-take situations, parents give them what looks like mapping lessons and help them overcome segmentation problems in their efforts to make themselves understood. Notice that “utterances, not words, are the primary reality of language from a communicative point of view” (Tomasello 2003: 326). That is why all learners have segmentation problems, i.e. problems with extracting and separating the meaningful constituents of the utterances they hear. A French mother says: *Je vais t’aider* ‘I will help you’. This is what the child hears. For him/her, the verb for “help” could be *\*taider* instead of *aider*. So the child produces utterances such as: *\*Tu peux me \*taider?* instead of *Tu peux m’aider?* ‘Can you help me?’

The German child has heard phrases such as “wenn’s regnet” ‘if it rains’, “wenn’s fertig ist” ‘if it’s ready’, “wenn’s zu heiß ist” ‘if it’s too hot’, and so she says (for ‘if you come’): *\*Wenns du kommst* rather than *wenn du kommst*, putting in an *s* for ‘it’ where it doesn’t belong. Next example: *\*Zerlaubst du’s?* (instead of *Erlaubst du’s?* ‘do you give me permission?’) is a real puzzle. How does it come about? The correct verb is *erlauben*, not *\*zerlauben*. Clara & William Stern, who noted this down, suggest that the phrase comes from a faulty analysis of *Papa hat’s erlaubt* / *Mama hat’s erlaubt*. Fathma, whose first language is Turkish, asks me “\*Du ichheiße?” instead of *Wie heißt du?*, and she says: “\*Ich wieheiße du Fathma” instead of *Ich heiße Fathma*. In classroom English we also come across segmentation errors: *\*I’m want some bread*. *\*Its looks like a bus*.

So, once more: What is the prime requirement, what is the essential condition for language learning to take place? This is my answer: We learn languages when we are talked to and understand messages in two ways. When we understand both what is meant (functional level) as well as how the meaning-components are organised to express the message (structural level). This is what I have called double comprehension or *Doppelverstehen* (Butzkamm 1989; 2002). „Sprachen lernt man, wenn sie uns - dem Sinn und der Bauform nach – verständlich zugesprochen werden.“ It is not

enough for learners just to understand messages. Segmentation errors indicate that comprehension at the structural level is incomplete.

Here are some examples of incomplete understanding. In a German-English bilingual kindergarden a break was always announced with: *Get your cups*. It was found that some children understood the phrase as ‘Drink something’ (in German *Trink was*). The communication had worked. But it’s a linguistic dead-end, unless *get your cups* can be turned into *get your anoraks* or *get your Mummies* etc.

Here is an episodes from a grammar school. Vanessa reports:

“Our teacher very often demanded silence with the expression: [pikwait], i.e. I heard a [p] at the beginning. To me this was one word and I was absolutely proud when some day I learned the word *quiet* and when I discovered its meaning. Although I had sensed what Herr X meant to say I could then correct the pronunciation in my mind because I had identified the isolated words.”

This is the joy of recognition. Why? Because Vanessa can now play around with language like children do and risk new, analogous utterances of her own such as *be good, be nice, be careful, be smart...*

Now listen to Martin, also from grammar school:

“Our teacher used to go through the aisles checking our homework. Sometimes he crossed it out, saying ‘once more’. I knew I had to do it again, but only much later in the school year I discovered that ‘once more’ consisted of the two parts ‘once’ and ‘more’, which literally was ‘einmal mehr’.”

So, in the beginning, Martin only got the message, in idiomatic German: *Noch mal!* But understanding the message is only half the battle. Later, he was able to break the expression down to its parts and free the words. And only then could he say things like *once a day, once a week, once a month*, etc. The language-acquisition game begins, and learners are ready to go.

Take the French phrase *s’il vous plaît*. It’s easy to pick up and use correctly. Sounds like a three-syllable word. That may be enough for tourists, but not for learners. Only after we’ve recognised the component parts for what they are, we might be tempted to say *si le vin vous plaît* ‘if the wine pleases you’, *si l’hotel vous plaît* ‘if the hotel pleases you’, *si cette conférence vous plaît* ‘if this conference pleases you’.

s’	il	vous	plaît
*if	it	to-you	pleases
wenn	es	Ihnen	gefällt
wenn	das Hotel	Ihnen	gefällt
wenn	der Vortrag	Ihnen	gefällt

Another example, from my work with migrants from Syria

Ayna al-metro?

\*Where the underground?

Ayna al-mahatta?

\* Where the station?

Uridu            an        akulu   shay'an.  
 \*I'd like        that    I-eat   something.  
 = I'd like to eat something.

I think you can bet your bottom dollar that a lot of Arabic *where*-questions and *I'd-like*-sentences go exactly the same way.

We must understand both the message and how the meaning components combine to produce the message. With this kind of double understanding, functional as well as analytical, little children can produce utterances they've never heard before. **This kind of risk-taking is a vital part of language acquisition**, the crux of the matter. Language learning is not an exercise in fearful error avoidance. Learners venture out to say new things they've never heard before. Language acquisition is imitative or reproductive but to a much greater extent it is creative and inventive.

If double comprehension is indeed the essential factor in language acquisition, this ought to be evident in the history of FLT. And, lo and behold, I did find what I was looking for. There was a bilingual teaching tradition from antiquity to the present day that implemented the principle of double comprehension in practice, but without naming it so.

I had not noticed this before because the materials were often quite differently organised. But the arrangements all provided the learner with input of the proper sort. I saw the unifying principle in the diversity of the materials offered. That was my joy of recognition, the thrill of discovery.

I'll give you two examples, one from the fifteenth century, and another one from the nineteenth century. William Caxton's *Dialogues in French and English* (1483) are broken up in short lines and presented in line by line parallel translations so that both a functional and an analytic comprehension is possible:

<i>Quand vous alles par les rues</i>	<i>whan ye goo by the streetes,</i>
<i>Et vous encountres aulcuns</i>	<i>And ye mete ony</i>
<i>Que vous cognossies,</i>	<i>That ye knowe</i>

Robertson (1842) gives us the original French text with some literal translations in between the lines, plus a separate good translation called "The same in good English". (See Butzkamm [2012: 99ff.] for these and more historical examples).

Modern textbooks that consistently apply double comprehension are the *Assimil* self-study courses and the *Reise Know-How* language guides, for instance *Tigrinya Wort für Wort* (a language spoken in Eritrea). We should free ourselves of a fundamental misconception and re-establish the more than 2000-year-old productive alliance between MT and foreign languages.

To sum up: Double comprehension is the single most important factor in language acquisition. It's both necessary and sufficient. All the learner needs is input comprehended at two levels. Input that becomes intake.

### 3. Mother-Tongue Mirroring

How does this analysis translate into teaching practice? I recommend mother-tongue mirroring to clarify foreign constructions. Mirroring is a kind of literal translation adapted for teaching purposes,

a way of unpacking opaque phrases and unravelling the puzzle of FL expressions. This is a bilingual technique which can be extremely helpful but is never used in English-only teaching contexts. Here is an example: In textbooks sold around the globe to teach the world the grammar of English you can find explanations like: “If there is no question word in the direct question, we use *if* or *whether* in the indirect question.” Do learners really need such a rule, do they need this kind of language analysis?

For Germans, a simple translation will do the job:

He wanted to know if...	Er wollte wissen, ob ...	Il voulait savoir si...
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Fig. 1

But what about the Chinese construction? Here, for English oder German learners of Mandarin, it's L1 mirroring that will do the job:

He wants to know if she is at home.	tā xiǎng zhīdào, ...shìfǒu ... □□□□, ...□□...	*He wants to know, she yes-no is at home.
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Fig. 2

The Chinese phrase, mirrored in English, x-rayed as it were, provides the clearest possible understanding, and it makes the foreign construction legitimate in the eyes of the learner. It reduces the feeling of arbitrariness we have when something remains obscure. Mirroring is an easy and elegant way of making foreign constructions plausible. You can risk other phrases such as “Can you tell me she yes-no wrote this letter?”, “Do you know he yes-no will come and join us?” etc. Rather a cute way of putting it.

A FL often confronts us with what – from our point of view – are bizarre, unthought-of ways of organizing thoughts. Here we need the clearest possible understanding not only of what is meant, but must also identify the meaning components and know where they appear in the foreign phrase. Mirroring is a time-efficient way of making some foreign constructions immediately transparent, thus providing us with the expressive means and mechanisms of getting our own new messages across.

Mirrored constructions are foreign grammar in native words. The single best teaching technique ever is the combination of idiomatic and literal translation. It was successfully used in the past, and can certainly not be used to the same extent for every language pair. It has been banished from the classroom ever since the mainstream adopted a FL only policy. That's a scandal. The mother-tongue taboo is a patent absurdity.

Incidentally, mirroring comes naturally. Here are two examples. I overheard a French boy explaining German word order to his friends: “En allemand on dit le petit bleu poisson”. It's the same in English. But the French say it differently: *\*the little fish blue*. The colour adjective comes after the noun.- A Korean student of mine wrote: “A strategy I had chosen to learn a difficult structure was to compare it to Korean and then memorise a very simple sentence for illustration, for instance, *what a good boy you are*, where English word order is quite different from Korean.” Incidentally, for Anglophone learners of German, mirroring the corresponding German construction could be helpful, but is probably not needed:

\**What for a good boy you are.*

\**What for a silly question.*

\**What for a grand spectacle.*

#### 4. The Generative Principle: Making Infinite Use of Finite Means

This, then, is the core of language acquisition: understanding a phrase in such a way that we detect a pattern in what we hear and make it a model for many more phrases built along the same lines. This is what I've called the **generative principle**. It refers to our capacity to generate an infinite number of utterances from a finite grammatical competence. As far as I know, Humboldt was the first to point this out clearly ("von endlichen Mitteln unendlichen Gebrauch machen"). Chomsky and Pinker took it up. For them the essence of language consists in making infinite use of finite means. Generalising, analogising, taking a phrase or a construction as a prototype, as a syntactical germ cell from which to construct or compose many more phrases at will. Generating new expressions from known ones.

So language acquisition is a creative construction process. My prime example of this outstanding feature of human language is provided by three-year-old Peter's creative constructions. He uses precisely this combinatory or generative principle in a way that is unmistakably his own. Where he lacks the exact terms, he helps himself as follows ((Butzkamm/Butzkamm 2019: 290):

*das Zu-Drehen* (= *drehbare Pappscheibe*) "the to-turn" (= rotary cardboard disc),

*das Zu-Dranmachen* (= *Häkchen*) "the to-hang-up" (= crotchet),

*das Zu-Bouillon-Reintun* (= *Suppenkelle*) "the to-add-bouillon" (= ladle),

*das Zu-Eier-Rausnehmen* (= *Schaumlöffel*) "the to-take-out-eggs" (= skimmer),

It's unlikely that Peter merely imitated someone else. In this way, we all make infinite use of finite means and expand our language. Children do that, for instance, in pre-sleep monologues. This is verbal play of a kind that looks very much like pattern practice for which there is definitely a place in FLT.

But watch out! Learners don't know how far they can ride a pattern. So they must go beyond what they've been given in order to find out how far they can go. This risk-taking is a must if you want to say new things that fit new situations. As a result, overgeneralisations, i.e. errors, abound in first language acquisition. Yet, these errors are necessary errors. Parents suspect this and most of the time don't interfere.

Take the acquisition of the German plural as an example. My brother and I dedicated a whole chapter to this topic. Here it is in a nutshell: Children identify one of several plural endings, let's say the German *-en* plural, as in *die Hosen*, *die Hemden*, and start using it. They use it for all it's worth, going well beyond what they have heard and typically overshoot the target. The technical term for this is: They overgeneralise, producing lots of wrong forms such as *omnibussen* and *anoraken*, which they have to unlearn as they discover other plural endings. So they revise their grammar.

To sum up: The learnability of language: Children have

- intention-reading skills, so they get the messages, e.g. Mandarin *nǐ hao* 'hello, good morning', standard greeting

- pattern-recognition skills, so they understand constructions and recognise the slots where certain words can be plugged in, e.g. Mandarin *nǐ hao* = *\*you good*.

Words are no longer buried in a frozen formula but are available for innumerable other phrases. In this, parents assist them intuitively.

## 5. The Mother-Tongue—Mother of Languages

### 5.1. Making Sense of the World

We learn how to communicate in a FL by actually communicating in that language. Learning by doing. This is as fundamental as it is banal. Teach English through English. No one in his right mind will deny that. But in an effort to make teachers conduct classrooms in the foreign language, mainstream philosophy has thrown out the baby with the bathwater.

I claim that, paradoxically, systematic, controlled mother tongue support of the right kind (for instance, through mirroring) does not hinder but help to establish an authentic foreign language atmosphere. It is certainly not a necessary evil.

In a deep sense, **we only learn language once** (Butzkamm 2003). It's the language—or, in some cases, the languages – that we have breathed and lived and grown up in, which lay the foundation for all other languages we might want to learn. It is vitally important that we absorb the implications of this fact. Rather than a liability, L1 is the most valuable resource, indeed the critical one, that a talking child brings to the classroom. If we acknowledge that, the mother tongue taboo, the cardinal error that has crippled foreign language teaching all too long, is rectified. Effective bilingual techniques will be re-introduced in the classroom.

Years of MT input and interactions in real life situations have shaped our minds in ways that are overwhelmingly helpful for the acquisition of new languages. For reasons of space and time, let us look only at one specific way in which the mother-tongue supports the learning of foreign languages.

Children have learnt to conceptualize their world and have fully grasped the symbolic function of language. You know how fundamental this is. Mere vibrations of the air can represent persons, things and actions. That's almost magic! In other words, it's our genetic endowment. So, no child starts a second language with a clean slate. It's already been written on. By the time they come into our classrooms, they have concepts and words for whole arenas of experience: food, clothing, family and playmates, plants and animals, television, hobbies and pastimes, and, last but not least, number.

Number is a case in point. Understanding numbers is fundamental; by comparison, differences between how languages count and compose numbers are negligible, for instance the reverse order “twenty-one” vs. “one-twenty” in German. That's peanuts.

Rather than re-conceptualise the world, we need to extend our concepts and existing communicative resources, with any necessary cultural adjustments. This is also what brain research tells us. We've got to use established neural pathways and then extend and modify them.

So the direct principle is a delusion. The very term is somewhat misleading because mother-tongue associations are equally direct. Avoiding the mother-tongue is an intrinsic, neurological

impossibility. Teachers were aware of the irrepressibility (“Ununterdrückbarkeit”, Butzkamm 1973) of the mother-tongue. Even when there is no native word heard, comprehension is, initially, bilingual, as brain research, i.e. word recognition experiments and association experiments have shown. MT words intrude automatically, if we want it or not: “I discovered that even though dragging an elephant into the classroom would undoubtedly make the lesson more lively, the students would still associate the word elephant with their own name for the animal.”(Robert L. Allen, quoted in Butzkamm/Caldwell 2009: 75).

This, too, is glaringly obvious, and not just the fact that in order to learn a language, you must use it as much as possible. However, teachers who deal with closely related languages such as German and English which have many words and cultural concepts in common are seldom aware of the enormous extent to which the mother tongue contributes to learning.

## 5.2. Grammatical Concepts

For most concepts we just have words, words for the weather, for instance. Other concepts such as number, however, are also expressed by grammatical devices. Both in terms of the lexicon and grammar, the best window on the logic of a foreign language is a naturally acquired language, one for which we have developed a real intuitive feel by actually living it. MT grammars have paved the way to foreign grammars. Let me give you a few examples.

What could teachers do with learners who didn't have the concepts of space and time? Toddlers need quite a lot of language input before they start understanding time and use time words correctly such as *before*, *after*, *tomorrow*, *yesterday* etc.. The mother tongue has paved the way for expressions of time in a foreign language. How can one expect students to understand the essence of the continuous aspect if they didn't have the notion of incompleteness, or duration, on one hand and habitual actions and general truths on the other hand? And it's so easy to explain the difference between present simple and the present progressive by means of translation:

<i>What are you reading?</i>	<i>Was liest du denn da?</i>
<i>What do you read?</i>	<i>Was liest du denn so?</i>
<i>What are you eating?</i>	<i>Was isst du denn da?</i>
<i>What do you eat?</i>	<i>Was isst du denn so?</i>

Preschool children have problems with handling time sequences when the second event precedes the one mentioned first in sentences such as: “Before he left, he had another beer”. This is misconstrued as “he left and then had a beer”. But their growing knowledge of the world helps the children to re-interpret the sentence. They have already solved this problem before they learn a foreign language at school.

Or take the verb *give*. A German child learns that English *give* or French *donner* equals German *geben*. This is new. In what ways does the mother tongue assist the child in using *give* in English or *donner* in a French sentence? Well, the child expects that there is a giver and a person whom something is given to, as well as an object that is handed over. This object may be immaterial such as words (*give advice*; probably not in all languages). Furthermore, the act of giving implies that it could be in the past etc. In other words the grammar of *give* is there already, as if served on a silver tray. Of course, there are differences such as *I was given a warm welcome*, which can be dealt with effectively through mirroring. As children we have accumulated a huge cognitive capital for the rest of our lives, usually via the mother tongue.

Now let's see what's better, grammar rules or translations? Well, in some cases, you need both. But how about this rule: "Together with the perfect infinitive, *needn't* assumes past meaning, thus negating, or questioning, the necessity of an already-completed action."

That's as clear as mud to a great many learners, even if it was explained in the learners' native language. Of course, it all starts to make sense with an example plus translation, making the rule superfluous:

You needn't have said anything.	Du hättest nichts sagen brauchen	Tu n'aurais dû rien dire.
You needn't have come.	Du hättest nicht kommen brauchen.	Tu n'aurais pas dû venir.

Translations can provide a spontaneous intuitive understanding without recourse to language analysis. Here **the translation is the grammar**.

Another example: "We use the imagined past conditional when we want to talk about something which might have happened but didn't happen, and the imagined consequences." Correct as it is, it is gobbledegook to many learners. To some, it will remain opaque as stone. However, an idiomatic equivalent is likely to clarify things, as in the following:

If it had rained, we would have stayed at home.	Wenn es geregnet hätte, wären wir zuhause geblieben.	S'il avait plu, on serait resté à la maison.
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Here, idiomatic translation is the difference between slinging around technical jargon which only adds to the students' learning task, and offering immediately accessible insight. People can learn foreign languages even if they are out of their depth when it comes to language analysis. Well, our minds were specially designed to learn languages, but not to do the mental acrobatics of linguistic analyses.

One more example. What about possession and possessive adjectives? We all take it for granted that we can say "my head" and "my father" as well as "my garden". But we are also mentally prepared for languages that use a different possessive for "my garden", because it makes sense to distinguish between alienable possessions, which may have a new owner, and 'inalienable possession'. Here, a brief explanation / rule in the mother-tongue would be helpful.

## 6. All languages Dance the Same Dance

By the time the child comes to learn a FL, most of these basic cognitive concepts have been acquired. We need not go the same long way to grammar a second time. It is because all languages have evolved means of expressing abstract ideas such as possession, number, condition, agent or doer, instrument, negation, possibility, obligation and a host of others. No matter how they do this in detail, one natural language is enough to open the door for the grammars of other languages. Children can't define pronouns, but they can handle them. They can't define adjectives, but they can recognise and use them. This is because, in Steven Pinker's words, "all languages are cut from the same cloth" (Pinker 2002: 37). Or take Humboldt (1836: 4f.): It's a beautiful idea

“dass die Sprache eigentlich nur Eine, und es nur diese eine menschliche Sprache ist, die sich in den zahllosen des Erdbodens verschieden offenbart.” (‘Language is actually only one, and it is only this one human language that manifests itself differently in the countless ones on the face of the earth’).

This is the reason why the MT is the greatest asset any human being brings to the task of FL learning. It is the sharpest tool to cut into the FL and reveal its anatomy. The mother tongue should be made use of accordingly, at the right time, in the right context, in carefully crafted bilingual techniques. Certainly not in a haphazard, indiscriminate and counterproductive way, as is, unfortunately, so often the case. Overuse of L1 by tired teachers is misuse.

To sum up. It’s all there already. It has taken children years to obtain the cognitive, communicative and grammatical competencies which make instruction possible in the first place. It makes excellent biological sense for a new language to piggyback on this open channel of communication. If learners didn’t make most of these connections by themselves, foreign language teachers could pack it in straight away. Teachers should assist students in making the right connections rather than leave them to their own devices. They should exploit these cognitive resources rather than ignore them, and prevent their students from picking up the wrong clues.

All this amounts to a true paradigm shift because the monolingual approach was the perceived didactical correctness for so many years and in so many countries. It was hailed as the natural method, which it isn’t.

MT support touches upon all the major domains of foreign language teaching: vocabulary, grammar, texts, communication, emotional aspects of learning, even pronunciation. I claim that a well-targeted, unobtrusive, but systematic exploitation of the explanatory and diagnostic potential of learners’ own language(s) will not hinder but help to establish *the foreign language as the working language of the classroom*. And we all know how important that is.

Unlike many others I’m not just pleading for a more flexible, less rigid attitude towards own-language use, but I’m arguing for a radical departure from what I believe is just a face-saving compromise, with small concessions to some MT support. Way back, in 1976, I advocated nothing less than a paradigm shift (cf. Butzkamm 1976, reprinted in Butzkamm 1978).

Today I am not the only one. In a state-of-the-art article Hall and Cook (2012: 299) write: “The way is open for a major ‘paradigm shift’ in language teaching and learning”. There is one well-known teacher trainer and author, Mario Rinvoluceri, who openly professed a change of mind. This is what he writes:

“Thirty years ago I was so much part of the Direct Method orthodoxy of the day that I frowned on bilingual dictionaries and one day found myself miming the word ‘although’ in an elementary class! When I learnt Spanish academically at secondary school, I wore out a couple of bilingual dictionaries in my keenness to launch from the mother tongue into the unclear waters of the target language. In my teenage foreign language work, mother tongue was the semantic bedrock that all my explorations built up from. How had I managed to exclude my real experience as a language learner from my practice as a language teacher for so many years?” (Deller/Rinvoluceri 2002: 21).

## 7. The Joy of Recognition

Rebecca, a neighbour’s daughter, had had her first French lesson and was back from school, rather unhappy. Could I come over and help, asked her mother. Rebecca explained what worried her. She could present herself with *Je m’appelle Rebecca*, but in French it was four words instead of the three German words *Ich heiÙe Rebecca*. And she showed me the book. To her it just didn’t make

sense. I told her that what the French literally say is “I me call Rebecca”. She could now see the logic of the French phrase, and her world was back to normal. The joy of recognition. Shining eyes. To be sure, perhaps only a lesson later, the penny would have dropped, without my intervention—Rebecca being the the conscientious and intelligent girl she was.

Afterthought: In the digital future it will become unthinkable not to use L1 as a wonderful toolbox to unlock the door to foreign languages—with teachers as guides.

## 8. Practice Report: Children for the Future, Children for Peace

After my retirement I ran an English club at the local primary school. Once a week I met with a group of 7-10 fourth graders, i.e. ten-year-olds, just for one lesson of 45 minutes. Two form-teachers sent me their best pupils all of whom, after year 4, changed to the local grammar school. What follows is largely based on this work which I enjoyed hugely. Unfortunately, I had to stop teaching when Corona came, and, as if that wasn't enough, then the great flood came and destroyed the school buildings.

### 8.1. Content Vacuum – An Undesired Side-Effect of the Monolingual Dogma

When teaching beginners, an undesired side-effect of a monolingual approach is a content vacuum. In an effort to make a monolingual presentation possible, textbook authors not only use more pictures and graphs, but also carefully select words and their order of appearance and reduce word density by spreading new words out over more text. Great care is taken to introduce new constructions with familiar vocabulary, and new vocabulary in well-known constructions. Not surprisingly “The vocabulary sizes of learners reported in research studies typically fall well short of the size requirements”, says Schmitt (2008: 332), reviewing the research to date. The result often is banal texts without educational value, especially for beginners. The stories, stripped of powerful words and colourful expressions, tend to become indifferent and educationally stultifying.

As far as English in German primary schools is concerned the teaching focuses far too much on individual words, words for colours, words for animals, words for parts of the body and things to eat etc., because they can be easily taught with pictures. Modern coursebooks, on all accounts, are colourful. Oh, yes, they are colourful indeed, no doubt about that. But does it make them better for language learning?

### 8.2. Making Language Learning Relevant: Songs and Dialogues.

The thin language soup served up to beginners is the price paid for the MT taboo. Bilingual techniques, in contrast, give teachers and textbook authors much more freedom in the choice of words and thus allow them to use richer, more authentic texts sooner and to transmit larger vocabularies. They also enable teachers partially to bypass the grammatical progression of textbooks. The postponement of, let's say, do-negation or the past tenses is not necessary.

Accordingly, I did songs such as *We are the world* (Michael Jackson)/ *Don't know much about history* (Sam Cooke) / *Look for the bare necessities* (Jungle Book), and, of course, *Let it be* and even *Yesterday* (The Beatles) with my primary school children. It is simply because I liked these songs and I was sure they would like them too. Sam Cooke's *Wonderful World* is especially useful because one can teach the names for all school subjects. So, without the L1 taboo, we can have authentic and evocative texts even for beginners. This alone is tangible evidence of the benefits of a bilingual approach. The cognitive and intellectual demands can be stepped up a cog.

I also composed my own texts for my ten-year-olds, usually short, actable and sophisticated dialogues on topical themes. Language needs company. With dialogues learners can enjoy team work and create moments of excellence for themselves and their audiences. They can learn something about themselves and at the same time about our modern world. The dialogues can be intellectually challenging and can be very different from the food usually served to children. In a way it means killing two birds with one stone, thus making language learning enjoyable as well as relevant.

Climate change and peace are central problems of our world today. It is important to raise awareness of them as early as possible. Here is the dialogue on climate change I used with my primary school children, along with slogans from the internet, and another dialogue on war and peace I wrote for secondary schools, with quotations for discussions.

### 8.3.1. A Better World: A Dialogue and Slogans for Young Learners of English

Lina: How can you make the world a better place?

Mia: How can you make the world better?  
Do you really mean it?

Lina: Of course I mean it.

Mia: Begin with yourself.  
Study hard and learn English well.

Lina: Why?

Mia: Well, you know, with English,  
you can talk to the world.

Lina: So what?

Mia: Think of Greta from Sweden.  
She speaks to the whole world.  
She demonstrates for our future.

Lina: What does she say?

Mia: She says:  
Our house is on fire.  
Save our future. Save our planet.

Lina: Oh yes. Save mother earth.  
Earth first!

Here are some of the slogans I collected from posters on the internet:

*Save our planet! Save mother earth. Earth first! There is no planet B. There is only one earth. Defend the planet! Protect your planet! Love your beautiful planet. Your planet needs you. Stop deforestation. Stop pollution. Stop soil erosion. Stop the climate crisis! Recycle plastic bags. Keep our planet clean. Help end poverty! Help end hunger! Clean water for all! Water is life. Save our precious water...*

### 8.3.2. Children for Peace: A Dialogue and Quotations for Learners of English

Seek peace and pursue it, the Bible says.

Pursue it?

What does it mean?

Follow it, chase after it actively.

You mean, *dem Frieden nachjagen*?

Yes, that's it.

Do everything you can to keep peace.

Yes, in war people suffer.

People get killed.

Men, women, children...

Why is it so difficult to get peace?

Because to keep peace you must be ready to make compromises.

Really? Are you sure?

What does this mean for the Ukraine?

I'm not sure.

All I know is that the Ukrainians must decide themselves on their own way of life.

Yes, and not the Russians and not the Americans.

### 8.3.3. Quotations for Discussion

If you want peace, then prepare for war.

Better a bad peace than a good war.

Better an insincere peace than a sincere quarrel.

Quarantine the aggressors. (Franklin D. Roosevelt 1937)

When you quarrel, do it in such a way that you can make up.

A peace which comes from fear and not from the heart is the opposite of peace.

Peace is expensive, but war is infinitely more expensive.

In the arts of peace man is a bungler (= ein Stümper). (George Bernard Shaw)

Mankind must put an end to war, or war will put an end to mankind. (John F. Kennedy 1961)

As among fish, so among men: the larger swallow the smaller.

War is the continuation of politics by other means. (Carl von Clausewitz)

The way to win an atomic war is to make certain it never starts. (General Omar Bradley)

The war is being deliberately prolonged by those who have the power to end it. (Siegfried Sassoon, World War I)

Right is more precious than peace. (Woodrow Wilson)

Speak softly and carry a big stick; you will go far.

When it's a question of peace one must talk to the devil himself. (Édouard Herriot 1953)

Dictators ride to and fro upon tigers which they dare not dismount. And the tigers are getting hungry. (Winston Churchill)

The key to peace: Stop blaming each other. Do better next time. (Signe Knutson)

It was of course impossible to discuss the climate change with my primary school children, but I said a few words in German by way of explanation, mentioning the *Children for Future* demonstrations in Aachen. They learned how to act out the dialogue and say the slogans. This needs practise and is indeed hard work. To articulate a word such as “deforestation” and “soil erosion” is a challenge for beginners and can be fun if they finally succeed and get it right. Motor skills are involved, as they are when you learn to do a somersault. And when acting out a dialogue you don't want your learners to end up with a rotten accent and a rotten intonation. The smooth rehearsal will not work optimally overnight. So the teacher should have some expertise in using the sandwich technique properly as well as using the printed text effectively as a support right from the beginning, in a way that minimises interference errors. There is a lot of repetition and learning by heart involved, and the teacher must know how to turn this work into a pleasurable activity. All this has been described in detail in Butzkamm/Caldwell (2009: 142ff.), in the context of mastery learning and skill theory. In addition, there are some videos on my youtube channel and more teaching material on my website.

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More items can be found in Butzkamm/Caldwell (2009). Readers may also have a look at my website: [fremdsprachendidaktik.de](http://fremdsprachendidaktik.de)

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