

THE HISTORY OF LANGUAGE TEACHING IN FRANCE

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ABSTRACT

In language education, having background knowledge about the history of a particular language is beneficial in broadening the knowledge of both teachers and students. As Francophiles, it is of great interest to us to pay particular attention to the origin of the French language, how it evolved from Latin and how it was taught from antiquity to modern times. Therefore, this work seeks to discuss the origin of the French language, how it evolved from Latin, the role of Jesuits in language teaching, the methodologies of language teaching, the Professionalism of teaching personnel, and the language policy of education.

Keywords: Antiquity, Medieval Period, Ancient Languages, Modern Languages, Teaching Methodologies

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The French language is one of the most important languages spoken across all most continents of the world. It is spoken by about 300 million people in Europe, Africa, North America, Asia and Oceania. It is used in trade, diplomacy, entertainment, international relations and especially in education. In education, French is the second most studied language in the world. It is studied in 77 countries of the 194 countries of the world. It is taught in many universities and colleges as well as in many language centers such as Alliance Française, Institut Français and so on. According to Koop French is the official language spoken in the 56 countries that make up the International Organization of Francophone Countries (OIF). It is also the official language of the United Nations, UNESCO, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the International Olympic Committee, the European Union, the Red Cross, the European Court of Justice and so on. (912).

Despite the advantages of the French language, many Francophiles and educators do not know much about the historical context of its origin, how it evolved into standard French spoken today and the historical context of its teaching. Today, most educational policies, practices and philosophies trace their roots to the ancient period. Again, most modern methodologies of language teaching also trace their roots to ancient teaching methodologies. The old teaching methodologies which were used in teaching ancient languages were studied in detail and gradually modified to create more effective methodologies that are used today in schools and language centers. It is therefore of great interest to us to study the historical background of the french language including the historical context of teaching and learning from Antiquity. We shall discuss the origin of the French language, the history of teaching of Greek and Latin, the role of Jesuits in teaching languages, methodologies of language teaching in the 16th century to the 18th century, the Professionalization of teaching personels and the language policy of the 16th century to the 18th century.

The Origin of the French Language

According to a study conducted by Duménil and Edmiston on the history and origin of France and the French language, they noted that France was once called La Gaule. Gaul was inhabited by Celtic tribes who were great warriors and farmers. Gaul became part of the Roman empire following the conquest of Gaul by the Romans in the year 121 BC. Gaul was assimilated to Roman civilization after the conquest. They were forced to abandon their own language to adopt the language of the Romans which was Latin. After the imposition of Latin, it was influenced by the local language of the Gauls and became mixed with Celtic words. In the fifth century, Gaul was again invaded by the Franks, a Germanic tribe. After invading Gaul, the Franks established a monarchy and renamed the country France. The Franks imposed their military power but they did not impose their language on France. The Franks eventually ended up adopting Latin which was imposed by the Romans in Gaul. This phenomenon explains why modern French is a Romance language and not a Germanic language. However, some words of Frankish origin penetrated the French language. Later, the Latin spoken in Gaul evolved in different parts of the country and led to the creation of many dialects. There were dialects like Francian, Champagne, Gascon, Languedocien, Provençal etc which were spoken across France. It was Francian, the dialect of Ile-de-France region which evolved into standard French spoken in France today.

After conquering Gaul and imposing their language on the Gauls, the Romans wanted to introduce Christianity to Gaul. To do this, they established churches as well as schools to teach children to read and write the language of the empire. ¹The creation of these schools marks the beginning of language teaching in France.

Teaching Ancient Languages from the Middle Ages to the 16th Century

Historically, research shows that some form of druidic education existed long before the Roman invasion of Gaul. The druids were very important figures in the Celtic community. The druids functioned as ministers of religion, theologians, philosophers, guardians of knowledge and wisdom, historians and advisors to the king. They taught astronomy, history, medicine and divination. In the practice of divination, students observed sacrifices and also practice magic. Glatigny adds that: "One hundred years after the conquest of Gaul by the Romans, there was no trace of druidic teaching." (5) This period marks the end of druidic education in Gaul. The abolition of druidic education gave way to the introduction of formal education and made Gaul Romanized than before. This means the Gauls did everything according to the customs of the Romans. Latin became a major language taught in schools that were established. Due to the recognition of Latin as the language of instruction, the teaching methodology developed for language teaching was that used for the teaching Latin. Latin was taught with the aim of helping students develop literacy and speaking skills. The content of teaching focused on grammar, conjugation, explanation of texts, translation and reading of texts written by experienced writers. In the early schools, teachers practiced a method where the teacher had to read a text in front of the students to make them repeat the reading without any analysis. It was up to the student to analyze the text for himself to create his own

¹ Duménil, Annie, and Edmiston, William. *Contemporary France*. 2009.

interpretation. It was a method used for learning to read and write Latin. Root learning or learning by heart was also introduced in schools for teaching Latin. This type of learning is referred to as the traditional method of teaching. In formal education, the traditional method is considered to be the first official methodology used in language teaching. It is from this methodology that other teaching methodologies used for the teaching of modern languages evolved. According to Puren, lists of words that were intended to be learnt by heart were used [...] (24) The lists of words that teachers gave to students helped them to acquire the vocabularies of Latin. We believe that students were expected to be able to use these vocabularies to construct simple sentences in Latin. Students learned by heart poems and dialogues that described various life situations in life. Students had to be able to remember everything they had learned, and they had to be able to apply it in real circumstances. In our opinion, this teaching methodology leans on memorization and prevents understanding and deep reflection. This is because it is possible to memorize and reproduce structures accurately without understanding the meaning of the structures. In this learning situation, a student's ability to succeed in learning depends on their mental ability to reproduce everything they learn. At the same time, a student's inability to reproduce what he has learnt implies his failure in learning.

Puren further emphasizes the significant change that was made to the teaching of Latin in the sixteenth century. The theoretical way of teaching Latin through memorization gradually gave way to the introduction of Latin as a medium of communication.

Lopez notes that outside the classroom, direct contact with native tutors was ensured by the noble families for their children. (110) These preceptors spoke only in the target language and the students had to imitate by using the target language. Teachers also introduced rhetoric into teaching. Rhetoric comes from the Latin word (*rhetorica*) which translates as the technique of public speaking. This technique is the implementation of written expression. The emphasis was on the composition of essays in Latin, which was the major activity in the classroom. Learners spent a lot of time composing poems and speeches in Latin.

In the 16th century as remarked by Lantoiné, people's minds went back to the study of ancient authors, to the practice of language. (48) The texts of ancient writers such as Cicero, Horace, Homer, Plato etc were studied in the classroom. We assume that the interest in the study of ancient texts was motivated by the humanist movement that was formed in the sixteenth century. Etymologically, the word humanist comes from the Latin word (*humanitas*). This Latin word refers to a literate person who has knowledge of human values, knowledge of Greek, Latin and literatures.

As experts in Greek and Latin, they had the skills to read the ancient texts in its original form so an ancient text of antiquity was of great interest to them.

Due to their experience with languages, most of these humanists worked as language teachers in the sixteenth century. Chervel and Compère point out that in traditional French education, humanists define themselves first and foremost by an aesthetic, rhetorical but also moral and civic education. (6) Religion was also at the center of humanist culture since the Christian religion was largely associated with the ancient languages of the church. Since the majority of Catholic priests had knowledge of Greek and Latin and were interested in morality, they were somehow considered humanists and were mostly referred to as the Jesuits. The Jesuits

represented an order of elite and intellectual priests of the Catholic Church founded by a Spanish nobleman, Ignatius Loyola. The name of the order relates with the name of Jesus, the creator of the Christian religion. The Jesuits dedicated their lives to the service of the Catholic Church. Every work they did to improve education was in the service of the Church and to the glory of God. Damour explains that the Jesuits were regular clerics who blended two ways of life as secular priests and religious monks established by the ecclesiastical tradition to serve the church. (666) They devoted themselves to teaching students in schools as part of their religious duties. Since the formation of this order, the Jesuits were particularly interested in the education of young people. They offered free education to students in order to prepare them to become functional within the society. First, they made the Christian faith the center of education. They trained students to adopt Christian doctrines and to adopt the moral norms of the Christian faith. Prayers were recited in the classrooms and the chapel was an important part of the school facilities. In the classroom, the Jesuits taught morality, philosophy, conjugation, composition, the rules of grammar, poetry and literature (reading of literary texts). Most of the texts studied in the literature class and the subjects of composition proposed to students depended on the observation, analysis, and the study of man in his relations with others or with himself. In addition, some ancient texts considered pagan were adopted by the Jesuits and Christianized for use in the classroom. Glatigny goes on to state that when it comes to the teaching of Latin, the Jesuits insisted on its usefulness as the universal language of the church. However, Greek was maintained by the Jesuits against all odds. (49) The Jesuits maintained the teaching of Greek since knowledge of Greek and Latin was part of the humanist culture. In the schools, there was an opposition to the teaching of Greek from families who no longer saw the usefulness of Greek in the 16th century. For the French language, the Jesuits paid very little attention to its teaching because French was not useful in the French society at the beginning of 16th century. The teaching of French began to gain importance towards the end of the 16th century. During this period, the teaching of Latin and Greek in schools and the interest in the ancient knowledge of antiquity became less important. Schools began to shift their focus from teaching Latin and Greek to teaching French which was beginning to become important in France and Europe. Since every society evolves, the French society became conscious of its own language as an important language. French gradually became a language of communication and teaching in schools. Few hours were therefore devoted to the teaching of Latin, which became a dead language and a subject of study in schools. New teaching methodologies were therefore introduced into language teaching.²

The History and Methodologies of Teaching French from 16th Century to the 18th Century

We have seen that in the late sixteenth century, Latin began to lose its usefulness as an important language to the teaching of French and the other European languages such as

² Damour, Franck. "The Jesuit Myth." *La Société D'Édition de Revues*, no.5. 2013, pp. 665–673.

Glatigny, Michel. *History of Education in France*, Presse Universitaire de France, 1949.

Lantoine, Henri. *History of Secondary Education in France in the XVII and Early XVIII Century*.

Bookseller of the Collège de France and the École Normale Supérieure, 1874.

Puren, Christiana. *History of Language Teaching Methodologies*. CLE International, 1988.

English and German. Lopez identifies three models of foreign language teaching and learning that appeared towards the end of the 16th century: the practical model, the regular model and the eclectic model. (110) Under the practical model, teaching was done through the use of the target language in the classroom. Teachers had to create opportunities for learners to practice the target language during lessons. The regular model was similar to the traditional method of teaching Latin. Teaching was mainly based on mastering the grammatical rules of the target language. With this method, the ability to master the grammatical rules implied mastery of the target language and the ability to use it correctly. By eclectic model, the teacher taught without using a specific method. It was an open way of teaching where the teacher decided how he wanted to teach. From the 17th century, language teaching further changed its nature and purpose. Puren confirms in his book that a new evolution in the teaching of Latin occurred in the 17th century, a new social status of Latin supplanted by French and the other national languages of Europe as the usual language of communication. (27) French was no longer considered a vulgar language but a literary language and a language of the elites. When the teaching of modern languages such as French became popular in schools, some teachers still taught it using the traditional method. By realizing the challenges posed by this teaching method, some changes were made to the traditional method and it became known as the grammar/translation method. With this method, teaching became bilingual in nature. Course content was switched from one language to another during lessons. With this methodology, students studied the rules of a language and applied them by translating sentences between languages (the target language and the mother tongue). Since French evolved from Latin, the grammatical rules of Latin were studied. Learning these rules helped students to know the grammatical equivalents of Latin and French at the same time. The main purpose of this was to help students understand the grammatical structure of the French language and be able to read French. It was also a major objective of this methodology to help students acquire the necessary skills to translate texts from Latin to French.

Again in the 17th century, the natural method of teaching was widely introduced in the teaching of French in schools. This method is similar to how parents teach children to talk naturally at home. At home, a child is able to acquire his or her mother's tongue without any formal instruction. The child is also able to use the language correctly by applying all grammatical rules without being aware of them. In the classroom, teachers interact with students only in the target language without using the mother tongue or another second language in the learning process. Some fundamental elements of the acquisition process include the frequent repetition of oral patterns. By repeating oral models, students are able to retain the models repeated naturally to master the target language. In addition, another fundamental process of this method is the unconscious assimilation of the grammatical rules of the language that students acquire through practice. The teacher expects students to apply these rules in their speech without being aware of them. With this methodology, teachers did not use textbooks or other teaching materials. Teachers also did not teach explicit grammar that help students learn the rules of a language.³

³ SUSO LOPEZ, Javier. "Conception de la langue et l'enseignement/apprentissage des langues au XVIe Siècle : De l'histoire de l'enseignement d'une langue à celle des plurilinguismes." *Le Langage et l'homme*, no. 44.1, 2009, pp. 111–121.

Puren, Christiana. *History of Language Teaching Methodologies*. CLE International, 1988.

Professionalization of Teachers from antiquity to the 18th century

Historically, the first schools established in France were established by the Catholic church so all forms of teaching was in the hands of the church. The church was responsible for the management of the schools as well as the recruitment of teachers. Since religion and moral education were at the center of the Catholic education, most of the teachers who taught in the schools were priests. During the 11th century, the Catholic Church became aware of the level of liberal education provided in some schools and insisted on the right to issue licenses to teachers teaching in Catholic schools. To be able to teach, the teacher had to obtain permission from the bishop who would issue a license to the teachers. According to Anthiaume, we can trace the professionalization of language teachers in the 15th century to the profession of writers in ancient Rome. In ancient Rome, these writers were responsible for transcribing documents and copying them. In the 15th century in France, more than six thousand writers lived in Paris. The invention of the printing press at the time eliminated the employment of these writers. Because of their language skills, most of the people who lost their jobs began to teach languages especially how to write Latin. The king of France at the time, Charles IX established a community of master writers to officially monitor the activities of these professionals. These master - writers who in one way or the other considered themselves qualified teachers were completely in charge of language teaching.

In the 16th century, the state and the church united their efforts to raise the standards of education. The state passed in its edicts the laws that the church had formulated in its councils. The state intervened to monitor instruction and the appointment of instructors.

In the 18th century, changes were made in the educational system and in the professionalization of teachers. A law was established to separate the church from education. Artz, in his article gives the reason for the separation of schools from the church. He noted that it was dangerous for the state to leave education to the clergy to train the youth. Rousseau, La Chalotais, Roland, Diderot and Helvétius who were French education theorists all proclaimed that education should be the business of the government. (362) We estimate that by leaving education in the hands of the church, the students would have been trained to serve first and foremost the interest of the church. The philosophers of education and the government of France in the 18th century wanted an education that served the interests of the various functions of the state. In order to succeed in separating the church from education and at the same time improving the quality of education, the French government created teacher training colleges in every department of France to provide training for teachers. The first teacher training college was established in 1810 in Strasbourg. At the time, they thought that it was appropriate for women to have different form of education than men, so they created teacher training colleges for men and women. However, Prost notes that there was opposition to the establishment of teacher training colleges. First, those who were against secularism imagined that the trained teachers would be too learned to remain docile to the authorities. Again, they did not want to see the majority of teachers subjected to the established authorities such as inspectors, mayors etc. They wanted the church to remain in charge of the formation of the moral and religious part of the student throughout his formal education. After establishing the teacher training colleges, the professionalization of teachers leaving teacher training colleges was attested by a diploma. The government established a law requiring all primary school teachers to have teacher training.

The Language Policy of Education in France

During the medieval period, Latin was a language used in the church, public affairs, international relations and in literary publications. In education, Latin was used at all levels as the language of instruction. John states that in all schools, in secondary and in higher institutions except in grandes écoles, instruction was provided in Latin. (47) The language policy favoured the use of Latin in schools to the detriment of French and other regional languages. At that time, French was not considered an elite language. It had no major place in society and was considered less important. In addition, many people did not speak French. Jean continues to explain that the French tradition wanted children to learn to read and write first in Latin and not their mother tongue. (50) This statement by John confirms the subordination of the other languages to Latin during the medieval period. Prost gives the reasons for the interest of Latin in teaching: "A motive that has always been invoked to justify the study of Latin in our classes was that French derives from Latin and that it would be impossible for us to understand the laws of our language if we do not know the structure of the mother tongue." (65) Prost mean to say that Latin was taught primarily with a motive to prepare students to better understand the structure of the French language. Prost cited another reason for the interest in teaching Latin in schools: "Children never think, imagine, smell, write more vigorously than in Latin. " (65). Children seemed weaker in French because less effort was made by teachers to develop the language to its full capacity and less attention was paid to French as an important language. For a very long time, Latin was recognized as the official language used in education, church and administration. A modification to the use of Latin began during the reign of King François 1st of France. In 1539, François 1st signed the Ordinance of Villiers-Cotterêt. This law aimed to impose French as an administrative language and the official language of France in place of Latin. At the time this law was passed, many people did not speak French, but the ordinance was written in French and not in Latin. This law therefore became a challenge for the majority of people who did not speak French as a regional language. This law was also a challenge to the church because it was against the use Latin which was the main language of the church. In education, Latin gradually lost its importance. In the 17th century during the reign of Louis XIV, French was still considered the official language of France. It was Louis XIV who put in place the necessary measures to develop the French language to become the standard French spoken by millions of people today. Cardinal Richelieu, a priest and statesman under the authority of Louis XIV signed an ordinance to form the Académie Française. The Académie Française was composed of a group of intellectuals in charge of the French language. They were responsible for establishing the grammatical rules of the French language and ennobling the French language as a literary language. The first version of the French dictionary was published by the Académie Française in 1694. French became the language of communication, the language used in administration and in the affairs of the State, the language used in literature and, above all, the language used in education. After the French Revolution of 1789, the destruction that took place affected education in France. In an attempt to unify the country with a common language, French was imposed in all levels of education as the language of instruction. Many people did not speak French but opposition to this policy was considered dangerous by the government. Opposition to the French language was seen as opposition to the government and that could be seen as an act of treason. In implementing this language policy, a major challenge faced by the schools was the shortage of qualified teachers.

In conclusion, we have seen that French is a Romance language that evolved from Latin. The origin of the French language dates back to the ancient Celtic tribe that settled in Gaul during the period of antiquity. This period marks the origin of many pedagogical methodologies used for language teaching in schools today. In France, formal language teaching therefore began with the teaching of Greek and Latin in schools. Over time, these ancient languages have lost their values in French society and paved the way for the teaching of French. We have seen that the development of languages was the collective role of teachers, the Catholic Church, priests and kings who ruled France. ⁴

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⁴ John Caravolas. History of language didactics in the Enlightenment: précis and thematic anthology. Vol. 2. PUM, 2000.

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