

## Book Review

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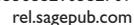
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Wolfgang Butzkamm and John A.W. Caldwell,  
*The Bilingual Reform: A Paradigm Shift in Foreign Language Teaching*  
(Tübingen: Narr Studienbücher, 2009), 260 pp. ISBN 978-3-8233-6492-4, Pbk).

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This is an extremely thought-provoking book, as its authors analyse and critique the mentality of the mother tongue taboo that has dominated in foreign language teaching for over a century now, from the time of the development of the natural method at the end of the nineteenth century and into today's early twenty-first century era of communicative and task-oriented approaches. Confronting the all too common assumption that the history of foreign language teaching consists only of the dark ages of grammar-translation followed by the direct method enlightenment, this book opens with a convincing sketch of more than 2,000 years of documented history of foreign language teaching, which shows that, in most times and places, judicious use of the mother tongue for provision of information and as a bilingual frame of reference has been the effective norm, and that the current situation where the mother tongue is eschewed and avoided under all circumstances is tantamount to madness and professional neurosis. Throughout the text the authors acknowledge that foreign language use should certainly and emphatically always be maximized in foreign language classrooms, and they likewise acknowledge that mother tongue use has drawbacks as well as benefits and can be counterproductive when used to talk about the language rather than to practice it by teachers without a solid command of the foreign language.

One of the main arguments of the book is that the blanket prohibition against the use of the mother tongue is a classic instance of throwing the baby out with the bath water. [Readers intrigued by the topic of the history of language teaching should know that this text makes repeated reference to a good score of previous, mainly German-language, publications by author Butzkamm, a professor emeritus at Aachen University, in which he gives more copious examples from the historical record.

This is also an eminently practical work as it is well-researched and well-referenced, and it is organized by means of meticulously numbered sections. The book contains many examples and exercises throughout the text illustrating the methodology it advocates, and each chapter concludes with hints for student teachers and a set of study questions and tasks. Drawing both on the authors' long experience of teaching foreign

language's and researching the role of the mother tongue in foreign language learning, and on their involved observation of the functioning of natural bilingualism and childhood language development, a distinguishing feature of this book is the large number of testimonial statements about foreign language learning made by a great variety of language learners. More of these are made by German learners of English than by any other group, but there are also large numbers by German learners of French, English learners of German, and indeed by learners of a spectrum of languages ranging past Italian and Spanish through Greek, Arabic, and Turkish into Korean, Japanese, and Chinese. The most tellingly poignant of these are made by language teachers themselves who, when they found themselves in the position of being language students, were forced to revise and rethink the positions they had held on the value and use of the mother tongue, and in so doing this book raises the important but all too often neglected tenet that language teachers and researchers should also be language learners themselves if they hope to really know what they are doing and talking about.

In the introduction, the authors suggest that one of the main reasons for theories counseling rigid avoidance of the mother tongue is the fact that in the latter twentieth century foreign language teaching became increasingly synonymous with English as a foreign language teaching in many parts of the world. Consequently, many young native Anglophone speakers now make their living as English teachers abroad, teaching in English-only without reference to their pupils' language and culture simply because they do not know the learners' mother tongue's. Thus, 'English-only' policy becomes a monolingual dogma that provides absolution for these teachers who cannot understand or use the language of their students, and this, combined with the cheaper mass production of purely English textbooks, constitutes one of the chief reasons behind the sanctification of, and the demand for, monolingual use of English in the classroom. Contrasted with this situation is the paradox that the mother tongue is quite effectively exploited in many autodidactic language methods, such as the bilingual textual presentation of the *Assimil* series of language manuals.

In chapter one, *Teaching English through English – With the Help of the Mother Tongue*, the authors present a five-point programme for creating a foreign language cultural island in a linguistically homogeneous environment, exploiting both L1 and L2 to the full:

1. Teachers use the sandwich technique [sandwiching a mother tongue translation between two repetitions of the foreign language] for most unknown expressions.
2. Students may insert mother tongue expressions when needed; teacher springs in with the appropriate equivalent or tries to reformulate the student's contribution in the foreign language.
3. Teacher and student retain and keep track of expressions introduced.
4. Teachers and students alike exercise self-discipline and consistently use the foreign language expressions that have been made available.
5. All foreign language teachers agree on functional foreign language use in all classes, i.e., the foreign language is and remains the primary vehicle of communication. The main idea is that, over and against the official guidelines in many countries mandating English (or foreign language) only, the way to increase message-orientation in the foreign language is to mobilize targeted mother tongue support.

In the second chapter on breaking the speech code, after several sections on childhood language acquisition, in section 2.6: *Taking a Fresh Look at Past Solutions*, the authors provide a thumbnail sketch of how effective language teaching and learning over the ages has proceeded primarily by means of use of translations and bilingual texts in various formats, namely the use of two translations, a free one and a literal one; the use of line-by-line parallel translations; the use of a mixed form of free and literal translations that take into account the progress made by the learners; and the selection of texts for study that the students already know thoroughly in their mother tongue.

In chapter three, *We Only Learn Language Once*, the authors offer 11 maxims that favour mother tongue use and probe the soundness and relevance of objections to it, some of the most intriguing of which are:

1. The direct principle is a delusion. The foreign language learner must build upon existing skills and knowledge acquired in and through the mother tongue.
2. Limited, incomplete understanding and blank incomprehension are a frequent source of frustration in foreign language classes because monolingual ersatz-techniques of meaning-conveyance function less well than the mother tongue.
3. Pouring over the meaning is likely to be less effective for meaning retention than putting the new expression to use right away.
4. Mother tongue translations and explanations are more accurate than most monolingual ersatz-techniques that can be understood by the learners.
5. Mother tongue techniques allow teachers to use richer, more authentic texts sooner and to transmit larger vocabularies. The thin language soup served up to modern learners is the price paid for the mother tongue taboo.

In chapter five, *The Mother Tongue as the Magic-key to Foreign Grammars*, the authors argue that idiomatic and literal translations combined make the foreign language less alienating and more easily accessible because they provide the learner with a firm foothold in his own world experience and already formed concepts as mother tongue and foreign language enter into a powerful alliance to help him begin to understand the new language.

Then, in chapter six, *How to Teach Structures the Bilingual Way*, the authors present the innovation of semi-communicative drills to exploit the generative power of language and bridge the gap between manipulation and communication, to help learners do what they would do quite naturally by themselves if they had more classroom time, and to lay the foundations for activities that involve students in natural communication situations.

In the seventh chapter on dialogues, drama, and declamation, the authors discuss and explain in detail a great many techniques for pronunciation, role play, and other speaking exercises, favouring a number of methods for reviewing, recycling, and reinforcing. One example among a host of techniques described here is the 'Read-and-Look-up' technique by which you read from a book, then look up and say what you have read, proceeding from small bits to larger ones, paraphrasing more and more as you become more proficient, eventually expressing yourself in your own words.

In the eighth chapter on language learning as skill learning, the authors discuss the importance of 'mastery learning,' which is contingent upon imitating a master who both has skill in doing something and who understands what he is doing, and in the ninth

chapter on maximizing high-quality input via the mother tongue, they consider the importance of reading as many, as lengthy, and as complex foreign language texts as soon as possible with the assistance of either bilingual readers or 'angauge mix' readers such as the O'Sullivan & Rössler German-English readers.

In chapter ten, *Translation as a Fifth Skill – A Forgotten Art*, the authors discuss many benefits of translating not only for developing foreign language skills, but also for developing writing abilities in the mother tongue, which is particularly important in countries with smaller languages where instruction is increasing all English and where the local languages will be endangered if educated people do not commit themselves to cultivating them.

The eleventh chapter provides more means of bilingual practice, focusing on dictionary work and vocabulary, while the twelfth chapter on the 'natural' method provides an in-depth consideration of lessons that can be learned and analogies that can be drawn from children developing multilingually under natural circumstances, and the thirteenth chapter provides many practical ideas for materials development for use in multilingual classrooms.

In the fourteenth and final chapter, the authors exhort us to both heed the lessons of history in looking at what has worked so well for so many over the millennia, and to head in new directions for future work. They insist that the bilingual reform they are advocating is in no sense a counter reform, but rather only an attempt to bring the explicit and targeted use of the mother tongue back into the foreign language classroom precisely so as to more efficiently make the foreign language the working language of the classroom. With the help of the mother tongue, foreign language lessons should be able to head in new directions, as there will be less need for grammatical grading or prescribed vocabulary, and authentic materials can replace textbooks all the sooner. Thus, students should be able to read materials that will give them a larger vision of life than merely learning functional tasks that used to be consigned to phrasebooks but that now constitute the stuff of language manuals and, as a result, they should be able to develop into more independent and more autonomous self-directed learners.

In sum, this is an extremely important book that anyone interested in or involved with foreign language learning should read, as it challenges many commonly held values and assumptions. The book is an invaluable resource for a plethora of diverse teaching techniques that, if widely implemented, could very well actually bring about a general paradigm shift in foreign language teaching.