

Teaching the Latinate Element of L2 English to L1 Spanish Learners: Some Strategies

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper I shall be using the term *Latinate* to include: English words whose ultimate and immediate origin coincides and is Latin (*testament* < L. *testamētum*, *confederate* < L. *confoederātus*); English words having Greek as their ultimate origin and Latin as their immediate origin (*paradigm* < late L. *paradigma* < Gr. *parádeigma*, *synod* < late L. *synodus* < Gr. *sínodos*); English words of which their ultimate origin is Greco-Latin or Latin and their immediate origin is French (*cinnamon* < (OF *cinnamome* < L. *cinnamōmum* < Gr. *kínnamon*, *envious* < AN *envious* < OF *envieus* < L. *invidiōsus*); English words whose ultimate origin is Greco-Latin or Latin and their immediate origin is English (*fibroma* < Neo L. *fibr-* plus Neo Gr. *-oma*), and English blends, shortenings, compounds, and derivations in which one or several Greco-Latin forms are present (*camcorder* [*camera* plus *recorder*], *Aids* [acquired *immune deficiency syndrome*], *electronic mail*, *deregulate*). (See Pratt 1980: 36-58 for the distinction ultimate vs immediate origin).

LATINATE ELEMENTS IN PDE VOCABULARY

There are some facts, well known to the historical linguist or to the lexicographer, that more often than not tend to pass unnoticed by the applied linguist or by the teacher of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Namely,

a) That the classical vocabulary of English today is greater than the *total* known vocabularies of classical Greek and Latin, because Present Day English (PDE) has composed so many 'new' Greek and Latin words (Millward 1988: 281).

b) That in PDE there are six times more new items containing combining forms (formations which combine only bound forms) than prefixes, and that the most frequent of them are of Greek and/or Latin origin. Namely, *micro-* (68), *bio-* (65), *immuno-* (31), *multi-* and *photo-* (26), and *neuro-* (25) (Cannon 1987: 224; Gramley-Pätzold 1992: 29).

c) That in PDE prefixation, the few remaining native prefixes show low productivity (*un-* (18), and *mis-* (9)), because most have been ousted by affixes of Latinate origin, of

which the most frequent are *anti-* (117), *non-* (71), *de-* (67), *pre-* (50), *super-* (40) and *sub-* (26) (Cannon 1987: 239; Gramley-Pätzold 1992: 30).

d) That it has been computed that, of the 10,000 most frequent English words, only a relatively modest 31.8 per cent go back to Old English (OE) (Gramley-Pätzold 1992: 18).

e) That in the register of English for Science and Technology (EST), elements of Latin and Greek origin are ubiquitous, the proportion of technical words in EST texts having been estimated at approximately 25 per cent (Beier 1980: 40).

All this shows that Latinate lexemes form a substantial part of PDE vocabulary and an essential part of the EST lexicon, and that their numbers are on the increase. This combines with another consideration: the fact that these words are *different* from the Germanic lexemes which, undoubtedly, still form the core vocabulary of PDE. Allowing for those very early Latin borrowings, such as *cheese*, *wine*, *mile* or *street*, which show a complete degree of formal, semantic and pragmatic integration into the core system of English (Baugh 1981: 91), it is a fact that in most cases Latinate and Germanic words in PDE display a whole series of mutual differences: in number of syllables, in spelling and pronouncing patterns, in semantic content, in stylistic level, and in patterns of use. From the point of view of the applied linguist, this situation has two complementary consequences: Firstly, that Latinate forms in PDE are not a peripheral but an essential aspect of the language. As a consequence, their learning/teaching should be *integrated* within the general longitudinal learning/teaching process of EFL. And secondly, that Latinate forms in PDE display a high degree of distinctiveness with respect to Germanic forms. As a consequence, the strategies employed in promoting their learning/teaching are likewise bound to be distinctive.

APPLICATION: GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

I shall now put forward a number of proposals in order to familiarize the EFL learner with the Latinate element of PDE (by no means these proposals exhaust the topic!). Our overall target will be to make the learners aware of the presence of Latinate elements in PDE and of the importance of such presence.

An overwhelming majority of the Spanish learners of EFL respond to this profile: they are classroom learners aged between 10 and 18 years of age who have English as an academic subject in their school curriculum. This is the model-learner that I will have in mind when developing the considerations which follow. More specifically, the lower-intermediate and intermediate L1 Spanish learner of EFL attending secondary education schools in Spain. The application of this template to other situations (upper-intermediate learners, vocational or adult learners, etc.) or other Latinate mother tongues (French, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, Catalan) is possible and not too difficult to put into practice, and is therefore left to the discretion of the reader.

EFL teachers to L1 Spanish learners should bear in mind that the presence of Latinate elements in PDE, far from being an added difficulty in learning the language, is something which works (or can be made to work) to their and their students' advantage. Spanish is

derived from Latin, and English is not. As a consequence, a good many words, affixes, spellings and even syntactic structures of a Latinate origin which may be troublesome for the English native speaker, are on the contrary quite easy to assimilate on the part of the L1 Spanish learner of EFL.

The monitors' task would then be to try and capitalize on this advantage. In other words, teachers should help learners to transfer their previous linguistic knowledge, i.e., Latinate words, affixes, spellings and syntactic structures which have passed on to Spanish with little or no change, to the new learning situation, i.e. the learning of English as an L2. Fostering and monitoring students' learning strategies (and 'positive transfer' is one of them) is one of the EFL teacher's essential tasks (Ellis 1986: 19-41).

The first step in order to reach the goal specified above, is to make the learners *aware* of the situation, which is one they can easily take advantage of. The classroom teacher's attitude will be to focus metalinguistically on the language, that is, to use the language to talk about the code itself and know more about it (Cook 1989: 26).

APPLICATION I: AN INTRODUCTORY TASK

A very simple strategy to get this plan working is this. Take any text in a non-marked, neutral register of English, with basic vocabulary and plain style. This text should not be previously known to the students. Tell them that the text is going to be translated in class. Ask the students to go through the text and produce a list of the words and expressions they find most difficult. Finally, write out a 'common denominator' list on the blackboard. In all probability, most of the words listed will be Germanic (i.e., non-Latin) ones. If you do the previous exercise using my own paragraph above, for instance, you will find that the learner (obviously!) will not experience difficulty in interpreting words such as 'capitalize', 'transfer', 'previous', 'structures' or 'situations', simply because their Spanish counterparts ('capitalizar', 'transferir', 'previo', 'estructuras', 'situaciones'), having the same Latin or Latinate origin, are very similar both in form and in contents (For the problems of 'false friends', which is a very important side aspect of the question, see Hill 1982 and Cuenca Villarejo 1990).

The previous application may serve as an initial familiarization with the issue and can thus be administered, with the normal adjustments in each case, to many different group levels. Other exercises should be administered taking into account the different year and group levels and, very crucially, the other subjects present in the group curriculum. I will provide three examples in the paragraphs below.

APPLICATION II: ROMAN BRITAIN AND THE LATIN LANGUAGE

This activity is addressed to pre-intermediate learners who have or have had courses in geography and/or history in their school curriculum. Its main target is to make the learner aware of the Latinate element in English by using Roman Britain as a medium.

Given the appropriate academic context, the monitor might like to consider it as a secondary aim to minimally familiarize the students with Roman Britain itself.

The following steps are suggested in order to implement this task:

- a) Using the overhead projector, display a map of Britain.
- b) Add on a transparency showing the name and location of the main Roman British towns: Winchester, Doncaster, Manchester, Gloucester, Worcester, Lancaster etc.
- c) Ask the students whether they notice anything in common in those toponyms. The answer will obviously be that most words have a *-caster*, *-cester* or *-chester* ending.
- d) Explain the origin and meaning of the said suffix (<Lat. 'castra', military camp).
- e) From then on, capitalize on the implications of your finding:
 - Remind the students of the existence of similar toponyms in Spain: Castro Urdiales, Castrogeniz, Reicastro, etc.
 - Ask the students about the type of Roman colonization which manifests itself through place-names (military and urban in character, Baugh 1981: 93). Explain the basic characteristics of the Romano-Celtic society.
 - Bring to their notice the geographical distribution of the network of Roman towns (and if possible of Roman ports, roads and defensive works such as Hadrian's Wall and the Antonine Wall. This you may do by using a third transparency): Romanization concentrated on the South and the South Midlands, while barely affecting the other parts of the Midlands and Northern areas and being practically non-existent in far-off or semi-isolated areas such as Wales, the Scottish Highlands or Cornwall. Remind them of the fact that something similar happened in Iberia (i.e., romanization concentrated on the South and along the Mediterranean coast, being slighter in inland areas and barely implicating the mountain areas of the Atlantic coast), or, if you wish to give a lighter tone to the session, in Fance, as is made clear in Asterix's comics!
 - Finally, re-introduce the linguistic side. Give some clear examples of the Germanic-vs-Latinate-words issue in English and, lastly, explain that even such familiar and English-looking words as 'wine' or 'street' are of a Latin origin.
 - Remember also that, if you have managed to get the right atmosphere, all sorts of projects, both individual and in teams, can be made using this topic area. It would be advisable to work in conjunction with the Geography and History departments, thus promoting an interdisciplinary approach which is always profitable to the students.

APPLICATION III: LATIN LANGUAGE AND THE PRESS IN ENGLISH

This activity is addressed to intermediate-level learners, especially those having philological subjects (Spanish Language and Literature, etc.) in their curriculum.

Its main goal is to make the learners aware of the existence of stylistic levels in the English lexicon, and of the fact that these levels are very much related to the Latinate or Germanic origin of the English word stock, thus widening their vocabulary and their level of linguistic awareness. This can be done by using the press (two of today's or yester-

day's English newspapers) as a learning tool. An added target –if the monitor so wishes– would in consequence be to familiarize the learners with the English press and its characteristics– in this way the students would be encouraged to read it more frequently!

a) Get hold of two very recent but very different English newspapers, one 'serious' one 'popular': say, for instance, a copy of *The Times* and a copy of *The Sun* corresponding to the same date.

b) Select carefully one article (including headlines) from each paper; both articles should reflect the same piece of news, and should deal with a topic of some potential interest for the students. Cut out, photocopy and distribute them among the students. Then ask your pupils to go through the articles at home.

c) Next, work with the articles in class. Make your students aware of the elements that the two articles have in common (probably no more than the same basic contents, and the actual names of the people involved!) and, especially, of the ways in which they differ: the *Times* article will probably show more complex and more varied syntactic structures, which include subordination and rhetorical patterns, the words will likewise be longer and more erudite, and so on; the *Sun* article, on the contrary, will probably use shorter sentences, fewer subordinate clauses and more coordinate ones, lots of clichés and idioms, and shorter words. Make them notice that, all in all, the *Sun* text is more difficult for them to understand than the *Times* text.

d) Then capitalize on this finding. Explain that, while *The Times* uses lots of Latinate words and constructions, *The Sun* avoids them, using good old racy Anglo-Saxon words and patterns instead (give examples!). Explain that the Latinate element in English is stylistically and culturally (and therefore socially!) marked, and explain why. Give a few instances: say that 'ask' is more naturally used and easily understood by an English native than 'question' –not to mention 'interrogate'–, and emphasize the fact that for them –for your students– the situation is exactly the opposite (explain why).

e) Again, if you have achieved a good working atmosphere, make the most of it and deal with the topic of the press in Britain: popular vs serious newspapers etc. Stress the fact that this situation does not occur in Spain because, apart from other cultural and social factors, it would not be *linguistically* possible.

f) Team work, joint projects, etc., are possible. For example, we can compare different newspapers, introducing Spanish newspapers into the comparative framework. Also, we can then produce a 'wall-newspaper' imitating *The Times* style and a parallel one imitating *The Sun* style. It will always be a good idea to work in conjunction with other modern philology departments (Spanish, French...), especially if there is a course on Journalism in the school curriculum.

APPLICATION IV. LATIN/GREEK AND THE SCIENTIFIC REGISTER IN ENGLISH AND IN SPANISH

This activity is addressed to EFL upper intermediate learners who are used to working with scientific registers in Spanish, at least in an elementary way (finalists having Biology in their curriculum, for instance). Its main aim is to introduce the learners to the

importance of the Latino-Greek word stock in present-day scientific registers of English (that is, in EST). In order to achieve interest and motivation on their part, use a text with comprehension questions, simply following the standard practice for exercising the skills demanded in the English Test for 'Selectividad' or University Entry Examination (see LOGSE or new basic law on primary and secondary education [1990], Art. 29, par. 2). Our secondary target will be to link this linguistic awareness to the Spanish language as well.

a) Working in conjunction with the appropriate science Department, select a scientific text, say Biology, which is considered adequate on the English level (and the Biology level!) for the students. Write out several comprehension questions. Hand out the exercise, and correct it at home and/or in class, with your students. As far as the students are concerned, *pretend* that this is just one more Selectivity practice exercise. But apart from the fact that this has an intrinsic value in itself, your real intentions are to get the students familiar with a scientific English text, by having read it carefully, having understood it, and having written down answers to the questions asked on the text.

b) Once this has been done, you and your students will be in an excellent position to delve deeper into the text. Make the students aware of the fact that some syntactic characteristics of scientific English (such as the very long noun groups or the extensive use of the passive voice) may make this register a bit difficult when you are not used to it; but, above all, make them look hard at the words that are present in the text, in the questions and, very importantly, in their answers: in all probability, words like 'biology', 'experiment', 'reproduction', 'anaerobic', 'oxygen', 'nucleus', 'molecule', and so on. Make them realize several things. First, that most of these words have almost the same form—and always the same meaning—as in Spanish ('biología', 'experimento', 'reproducción', 'anaeróbico', 'oxígeno', 'núcleo', 'molécula'...). Second, that this is so because they have been formed from Latin and Greek elements. Third, that these words are lexicalizations of new concepts and inventions, and thus, they are being *created* every day. Fourth, that they are *international* in nature, and more or less the same in all western languages, including Spanish. Fifth, that this is a good example of how Latin and Greek are *alive* in present-day English: in fact, scientific neologisms (such as 'scientific', or 'neologism'!) formed from Greek and Latin elements surpass by far the older Latinate or Greek-origin words used in English, and indeed their numbers are increasing every day (as seen above).

c) Extensions of this activity are possible. Different texts can be distributed according to the different scientific interests or needs of the students (Biology, Medicine, Chemistry, Physics, Linguistics, and so on). Working in conjunction with the appropriate departments will be essential.

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