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Simplicity, clarity and effectiveness: A European and political perspective on exercising fluency in Eugenio Balbi's *Primi Elementi della Lingua Inglese* (1840)

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Introduction

- ¹ This article examines Eugenio Balbi's *Primi Elementi della Lingua Inglese* (Milan: 1840). The text is an Italian adaptation of Theodore Robertson's *Cours pratique, analytique, théorique et synthétique de langue anglaise* (Paris: 1837-39) which attests to the popularity of the method¹ and the influence of Jacotot's ideas about teaching, and in particular of his treatise *Enseignement universel, Langue maternelle* (1823). More generally, the text confirms the centrality and the innovative force of French pedagogy. The French *Anglomania* of the late nineteenth century facilitated the understanding of English culture on the continent, reinforcing the role of French as cultural mediator. French and English had the potential to broaden the understanding of the bourgeois and upper classes in countries like Italy which were building their national independence. Balbi's grammar fits into a stream of nineteenth-century teaching methods focused on 'practice' and aimed at developing 'fluency'. The idea of a practical approach to language learning was a response to the needs of a bourgeois public willing to be more open to modernity as represented by Britain and the US which, by means of their economic power and constitutions, could realize the philosophical idea of Progress (Grieder 1985; Anderson 2006: 69-85; Moyal 2016). We argue the importance of evaluating the circulation of teaching methodologies from a European perspective

rather than a national one, as proved by the intellectual curiosity of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy in a period of great change.

Eugenio Balbi

- 2 Eugenio Balbi (Fermo 1812 - Pavia 1884)² was a geographer, a member of the Royal Geographical Society and Full Professor of Geography at the Università di Pavia. His father, Adriano Balbi, also a geographer, mathematician and proto-ethnolinguist, provided him with a truly international and cosmopolitan education that started at the Preparatory College for the Merchant Navy in Southampton (1822) and continued in France at the College of Louis-le-Grand and the University of Paris, where he became Docteur-ès-Sciences in 1831. He also followed courses at the universities of Vienna, Munich and Berlin as a disciple of Karl Ritter (De Gubernatis 1879: 87; Ercole 1946: 84).
- 3 In the preface to the grammar, Balbi states that he studied English in Paris with Robertson and that he learned Italian with Biagioli, the eminent lexicographer and commentator of Dante's *Commedia*. The author of the *Primi Elementi* lived in Portugal with his father, and we may assume that out of interest and necessity became a polyglot. This suggests that he would probably speak the Venetian dialect, French, some Portuguese, and that he perfected both his English and Italian in Paris³.
- 4 In 1848 he returned to Italy to participate in the uprising of Venice against the Austro-Hungarian domain. According to De Gubernatis,

[...] Prese parte, negli anni 1848-49, alle campagne nazionali, combattendo col grado di capitano per la difesa di Venezia, e nel tempo stesso insegnando gratuitamente la lingua inglese ai giovani allievi del Collegio di marina. Terminata con molta gloria, ma con poca fortuna, la guerra nazionale, Eugenio Balbi con l'amarezza nel cuore si riduceva a vita solitaria, o meglio desolata, e più che modesta [...] (1979: 89)⁴
- 5 Balbi finally decided to withdraw from the political scene and to devote himself to the study and teaching of geography, history and languages at the *Scuola Superiore di Nautica di Venezia*. Yet, in 1859, in the wake of a renewed hope of national unity, he wrote a work about the 'real' geography of Italy, discussing its natural boundaries and geographical status as one cohesive territory in support of the country's political union. Wanted by Austrian authorities, he fled to Turin, and, later, after the annexation of Lombardy and the Venetian territory to the newly formed Italian Kingdom, he managed to be appointed Professor of geography in Pavia where he lived for the rest of his life (Ercole 1946: 84).
- 6 Balbi published two English grammars, the first in German, *Studien der Englische sprache nach Hamilton methode, mittelst deutscher, italienischer, französischer Übersetzübungen, in fortshreitender Ausbildung*, (Güns, Carl Reichard's Verlag 1837)⁵. The other is the grammar examined here which was published in 1840 by Antonio Fortunato Stella e Figli⁶, one of the most important publishers in Milan, who had a rich catalogue of language and technical books.
- 7 Both grammars were written when Balbi was in his late twenties, probably to make a living as a teacher and to be recognised as such by the authority of a published book: the publication of a modern method along with his background and education would provide sufficient credit⁷. In 1841, he also started the publication of the collected papers of his father⁸ as a means to establish himself as a geographer. Therefore, the grammars may be considered juvenile works, yet they testify to his education:

geography was a subject combining science and the humanities, whereas linguistics, mineralogy, hydraulics, cosmology, statistics and history would all contribute to the understanding of human beings⁹. In other words, rather than being an academic involved in the *studia humanitatis* with a classical education based on Latin and Greek, Balbi was a man of science, a patriot, and a geographer. From a broader perspective, his works construe the connexion of land/territory/ nationhood. His notes about ethnicity and linguistics testify to an understanding of the political function of language as well¹⁰. His background may also explain his choice of a 'practical approach' to teaching, and in particular to teaching a language like English, the language of Progress, i.e., of intellectual, economic and scientific advancement.

The purpose

- 8 When dealing with nineteenth-century grammars, the risk of underestimating or overestimating the importance of a method regarding its circulation and impact is clear and has to be considered. The historical evaluation of the decades in which the grammar book is to be placed provides insight into the social context and the linguistic background of the learners who would buy the text itself¹¹. Although there are no specific indications of the audience of the grammar, we can safely assume that the *Primi Elementi* addressed adult learners, males and possibly educated females, belonging to the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie (Pireddu 2010: 9-16).
- 9 Writing in the 30s and the 40s for the educated classes in Milan would satisfy the intellectual curiosity of an audience that looked at the political constitutions of Britain and the US as examples of cultural and political transformation. Periodicals celebrated the Empire, its growth and prosperity, but most of all they would present Europe with a positive image of English power (Shattock 2017). During these two decades, the English aristocracy was able to preserve its role despite the social turmoil, and for this reason, it became an example on the continent. By the 1830s, the English Parliament had begun to regulate factory conditions and had faced pressures to bring forward political reform due to anti-slavery campaigns. In England and Wales, the Reform Act of 1832 increased the electorate to about 18% of the total adult male population. The vast majority of the working classes, as well as women, were still excluded from voting, of course, but mild social reform and a discussion of the role and function of the institutions had begun without bloodshed (Evans 2018; Mehta 2018; Pitts 2009).
- 10 For this reason, Britain was paired with ideas such as moderation and mediation in politics and the peaceful management of social issues. Innovation in society could be accepted within a frame of sound and practical intervention that would keep society on the right track. The smoothing of conflict by carefully controlled social progress could also be grasped and understood by learning the English language and its culture, specifically, by reading first-hand what the best authors had written and would write. English denoted Progress (Bury 1987; Koselleck 2004; Wagner 2016).
- 11 As Balbi states in the preface to his grammar, English was an idiom spoken in every civilized country and the *emporiums of commerce* all over the world, along with being the language of Spenser and Shakespeare, Pope and Addison, Walter Scott and Byron.
- 12 Robertson in the preface to *Cours pratique, analytique, théorique et synthétique de langue anglaise*, observes that:

[...] Nous vivons dans un temps essentiellement progressif. Tous les esprits fermentent, stimulés par le besoin d'améliorations, en politique, en industrie, en sciences, en tout. Cette communauté intellectuelle établie par la lecture entre tous les individus d'un même pays, sera ensuite étendue à toutes les nations par la connaissance des langues étrangères [...] (Robertson 1839: 5).

- 13 Not only did British culture become fashionable throughout Europe, but it also appealed to politicians and philosophers alike, even when they held radical views (Belchem 1988: 247-259). In linguistic terms, the idea of moderate political action in society was construed as language effectiveness: translation also played a vital function. More generally, learning with simplicity and clarity became the aim of most grammatographers; the same qualities were attributed to English as they represented the *génie de la langue* and of its nation (Siouffi 2010).

The pedagogical context

- 14 The early nineteenth century saw what we now call the Grammar-Translation Method as the standard approach. Its restrictive nature was not seen as an impediment to learning. On the contrary, it would build on the established knowledge and expertise in Classical languages to enhance reading skills and develop a style¹². In other words, practical objectives such as accessing texts about science and technology coexisted with the fundamental role played by literature and the understanding of the *best authors*, i.e., the most representative of the literary canon. Even if the canon stood apart as the authoritative source of style, a more ample and comprehensive idea of writing was infused with national values and beliefs; a world view or *Weltanschauung*, that would bring social progress to life (Freeborn 1992: 190).
- 15 Yet, the cultural trend was running in favour of a more liberal and contemporary approach to education, and to a widespread use of the national vernacular languages as the bases of most school systems. By 1800, the new approach had drowned the last surviving utilitarian uses of Latin as the medium of instruction and communication in universities across the continent¹³. The logical consequence of the departure of Latin was the adoption of the mother-tongue as the leading subject in formal education. Latin had to be substituted and, in some disciplines, supported by the use of other languages such as French and, less commonly, German and English. Hence the need to 'downsize' and adapt previous methods to the new context (Carvajal 2013; Kirk 2018).
- 16 As for the Italian context, until the national unity and the Legge Casati (1859) and subsequently the Legge Coppino (1877), which organised the new school system, such methods were not meant for use in schools. Grammars published in the first half of the century addressed the adult educated audience who would study individually, privately, and mainly with the aid of a teacher. During the 1820s and 1830s in particular, there were attempts to improve and ameliorate teaching that stressed the need to provide quick fluency (Pireddu 2010: 9-16; 101-144). Usually grammarians 'advertised' accessibility as the most important characteristics of their method, and they hinted at the relevance of learning about English culture¹⁴. There existed recurrent themes such as 'correct' standard pronunciation (*ortoepia*) and the improvements that the new methods made, or the constant reference to French models; French being a language of mediation among the educated, studied by a female audience, and much better fitting rather than Latin. Emphasis was placed on the

rejection of the complexities of traditional grammatical taxonomies. Most grammars remained prescriptive, based on the grammar-translation method but the aim was to communicate rather than perfecting style and understanding the beauty of the language and its rationale. A best-selling text like Millhouse's *Corso Graduato e Completo di lingua Inglese* (Milan 1837-1914)¹⁵, for example, shows the increasing criticism of the inability of the profession and its publishers to come up with anything more relevant than arcane lists of rules, silly sentences for translation, and lengthy and wearisome lists of exceptions for memorisation. For this reason, Millhouse developed an adult self-instructional course, which was designed to be used independently without a *maestro* (Pireddu 2010: 59-69).

- 17 Balbi fit into this context as he adapted Roberston's innovative approach to the Italian market and built on his expertise and holistic view of learning to create a handy book to learn English and achieve fluency.

Robertson's model

- 18 Theodore Lafforgue's father was a civil servant who died in 1805 or 1806, and his mother remarried in 1811. Her second husband François Robertson fostered Theodore's education and taught him English. However, his step-father was unable to meet the needs of the family and Theodore started giving English lessons from the age of 15, adopting Robertson's name with its English consonance, thus strengthening his professional credit. This early teaching experience inspired him to publish a periodical, *Robertson's Magazine, Journal grammatical et littéraire de la langue anglaise*, from 1827 to 1836. The text described in nascent terms the method that he subsequently published in 1837 as *Cours pratique, analytique, théorique et synthétique de langue anglaise* which itself underwent several editions during the century, proving its success and popularity.
- 19 The term *Magazine* in the title was meant to appeal to the public by placing the method into the stream of periodical publications which provided readers with information about English culture, excerpts from authors, often in translation, and whose arrangement was meant to be simple and accessible. In other words, it offered a 'digest' of both grammatical and literary material in English. Besides the advertising for his courses, and exercises in pronunciation, grammar and translation, the reader found texts adapted from the press and literary sources (Desmars 2015).
- 20 Robertson believed that the methods of his predecessors focused exclusively on syntax. The learning of the grammar, that is, the theory, had superseded the practice. His method foregrounded the knowledge of vocabulary and idioms which he placed at the heart of the method as being the building blocks of phrases. Any language consists of words, and it is the study of the words that should establish the base of the method. Thus the first phase would be the learning of words, combining them into phrases and then sentences. Only after "scaffolding" vocabulary, i.e., learning a set of words, the learner could move to develop the same vocabulary into more complex structures (phrases and clauses) that could be used effectively. Grammatical patterns or rules would be deduced afterwards to improve and organise more systematically the learning process. The "flipped" approach¹⁶ would avoid the boredom of using a dictionary where words are relegated "as in a common grave" and the student had to "dig them up with incredible efforts and an enormous waste of time" (Robertson 1875: 2).

- 21 Previous textbooks all began with grammatical taxonomies that would likely be repulsive for students. In this respect, Robertson showed a preference for student-oriented methods, and making students independent was also an important aspect of his method. In the *Précis de la méthode Robertson* (1844) he clarifies the role assigned to translation, to be followed by parsing, a technique which ‘empowers’ the student, allowing for a deeper comprehension of the language:

[...] Je commence tout d’abord par faire pratiquer, c’est-à-dire que dès la première leçon je mets l’étudiant à même de lire et de traduire, soit de l’anglais en français, soit du français en anglais; à même de comprendre aussi facilement à l’audition qu’à la lecture, et de répondre en anglais aux questions que je lui adresse. Vient ensuite l’analyse, ou la décomposition : l’examen minutieux de toutes les pièces dont se compose la langue, de leur origine connue ou probable, de leur formation, de leurs combinaisons, de leurs rapports entre elles, des lois qui les régissent, et que le raisonnement, ou, plus souvent encore, que l’usage a établies. La connaissance de ces lois constitue la théorie, ou, si l’on veut, les principes, qui, selon moi, ne doivent pas être le commencement, mais le résultat de l’étude. Je termine par où d’autres commencent souvent, par un thème ; mais ce thème, composé entièrement de mots que l’on sait déjà, a sur les thèmes ordinaires l’inappréciable avantage de dispenser de l’emploi du dictionnaire, et de l’énorme perte de temps qui en résulte [...]

(Robertson 1844: I-II).

- 22 The idea of “practice” is different from what we now conceive of as ‘student-oriented’ and ‘student friendly’, and the role which is assigned to translation and parsing in language teaching collides with contemporary approaches to ELT. Nevertheless, well before the full development of the natural approach, one can see a new sensibility towards a more applied idea of language instruction, which, in the case of Robertson and consequently of his followers, develops Jacotot’s approach.
- 23 Robertson recognizes the originality of Jacotot’s approach but he also admits the difficulty of a method based on memorizing a text such as *Télémaque*. In the 1848 edition of the *Théorie de l’enseignement des langues et plan d’organisation basée sur l’association du capital, du travail & du talent*, he identifies three essential characteristics of a good method:

[...] 1° L’enseignement d’une langue doit réunir tous les faits qui constituent la langue usuelle, savoir: les mots et leurs désinences; les lois qui président à la mise en œuvre des mots, ou la construction.

2° L’unité de système et l’économie de ressorts veulent que tous ces faits soient condensés en un texte suivi, concis, et intéressant s’il est possible.

3° L’expérience nous autorise à affirmer qu’un pareil texte peut se réduire à soixante, quatre-vingts ou cent pages, suivant les complications de la langue à enseigner, et suivant l’habileté de l’auteur.[...] (Robertson 1848: 16).

- 24 Teaching has to describe both vocabulary and syntax and more generally be comprehensive. A method needs to be self-contained, consistent, compact and stimulating. One hundred pages will suffice to teach how to read, write, translate and speak – translation indicating listening and mediating the understanding of a foreign language:

[...] Si nous avons été assez heureux pour nous faire comprendre clairement, personne ne pourra nier que ce ne soit là évidemment et incontestablement la seule base sur laquelle on doit appuyer l’étude d’une langue. Toute méthode fondée sur d’autres principes est nécessairement plus longue et moins sûre. [...] (Robertson 1848: 16).

- 25 Jacotot's reliance on memory is both seen as its strength and weakness: it may well guarantee the development of speaking, which is indeed an aspect that Robertson aims at when he states the importance of practice, but at the same time it requires great effort. The practical approach, i.e. a proto-communicative understanding of language teaching, is foregrounded by underlining the relevance of correct pronunciation (clarity to achieve understanding). The correct articulation of core vocabulary, especially of inflexion, hence grammatical function, is essential.

[...] Examinons à quelles conditions on peut avoir la certitude que l'on possède une langue, particulièrement une langue vivante.

Il faut:

Prononcer correctement;

Comprendre tous les mots usuels, avec leurs désinences, non seulement à la lecture, mais encore et surtout à l'audition; Connaître la grammaire;

S'exprimer avec facilité. (Robertson 1848: 17).

- 26 Moreover, a good method is effective if it stimulates the learner with variety. Thus, memorizing is useful if it is a starting point to practice the language and gradually consolidate learning:

[...] en soulageant ainsi la tension de l'esprit, par l'exercice alternatif de la mémoire et du jugement, de l'œil, de l'oreille et de la voix, appliqués tour-à-tour et dans une même séance à la pratique, à l'analyse, à la théorie et à la synthèse [...] (Robertson 1848: 18).

- 27 The method is based on short lessons, gradually becoming more extended, as a gradual approach to learning is essential to avoid overloading. Each lesson presents exercises which start with reading (aiming at pronunciation as well), then turn reading into translation which then rely on memory to consolidate understanding and usage. In practice, he suggests "la traduction sans voir le texte ou à la simple audition tantôt de la langue étrangère en langue maternelle, tantôt de la langue maternelle en langue étrangère" (Robertson 1848: 18; Besse 1999). Once a small set of words is grasped, the learner can move to speaking. A further stage is represented by phraseology and grammar to be applied to writing. This 'functional approach' is described as essential to learning. Theory is something to be developed from the observation language: "les règles ne sont jamais présentées qu'à la suite des faits, dont elles sont la déduction" and one has then to move into a description of the rules to improve writing "application de ces règles à la composition en langue étrangère" (Robertson 1848:18).

- 28 By consolidating the learning of a sufficient set of vocabulary with a sufficient knowledge of morphology (cinq mille mots; vingt-cinq racines), the learner can be independent from a dictionary and the teacher can immerse the class in the foreign language:

[...] l'un des effets brillants de notre système est de mettre le professeur à même, au bout d'une vingtaine de leçons, de se faire comprendre de ses auditeurs, sans l'intermédiaire de leur langue maternelle, et dans la langue même qu'il leur enseigne; expliquant l'inconnu à l'aide du connu, leur donnant la conscience de ce qu'ils ont acquis, et stimulant puissamment leur attention. On ne saurait se figurer la satisfaction d'un auditoire qui, pour la première fois, et au bout de si peu de temps d'étude, reçoit cette révélation de ses forces et de ses ressources [...] (Robertson 1848: 19).

- 29 Robertson's innovations include highlighting the centrality of the learner, emphasizing the importance of stimulating the deep processing of the information and of student awareness of the learning process. In this perspective, he underlines the importance of

listening to natives (to understand dialect variation, for example) and he also invites teachers to use drama to stimulate practice pleasantly and entertainingly¹⁷.

Balbi in practice

- 30 In the preface to the grammar, Balbi recognises the importance and the relevance of other grammarians such as Murray, Cobbet, Davenport, Horne, Took, Jump, and Samuel Johnson. Moreover, he also refers to Italian grammarians such as Vergani, Siret, Rossi and Biagioli who were authoritative and fostered the grammar-translation method. The acknowledgement does not testify for direct knowledge, nor for the usage of these texts. It proves, instead, the necessity to support his work with well-known works, i.e., a marketing strategy. Interestingly, he does not mention the relevance of German authors (Ahn, Ollendorf). Robertson is accredited as being renowned for the effectiveness and liveliness of his lesson and for having an established market (Howatt & Widdowson 2004: 161-166).
- 31 The introduction also contains a short discussion and illustration of issues related to pronunciation, here given the peripheral status of orthoepy, contrary to most grammars that would prioritise “sounds” as the first approach to language learning and understanding (Balbi x-xviii)¹⁸. Vocabulary, instead, is the core of the book, hence the different organisation of the chapters into practical lessons.
- 32 Parts of speech, word class, grammatical function, and lists of exceptions to the rule, are not a prerequisite or a necessary aspect of language learning. On the contrary, the logical representation of language provided by Latin-based grammars of English is considered an advanced investigation into something that must be learned through exercise, which means that it is considered a form of advanced practice. Most students are beginners, and beginners will profit by starting from words, the building blocks of language, as suggested by Robertson. Learning words will enable students to speak in the first place, thus reinforcing their confidence. For this reason, he separates the grammar from the practical lesson – which is ‘practical’ because it consists of a sequence of exercises.
- 33 The method is based on reading. In most nineteenth-century grammars, the “theme” is a short, self-contained excerpt written by a famous novelist. Usually, the excerpt has a moral significance. Sometimes, it evokes a practical situation (e.g., travelling, paying a visit) and occasionally, it merely aims at being entertaining, using the popularity of the source, with the explicit intention of overcoming boredom¹⁹. In Balbi, short excerpts are taken from Addison, Goldsmith and Walter Scott²⁰, and divided into their components (words/phrases) presupposing an exact semantic and syntactic equivalence of English and Italian. In practice, the text in English is columned along with the same text in Italian, and the learner is asked to read/compare both on a visual basis. Words are isolated and used as monoreferential items that find an exact correspondent in the other language also in functional terms.
- 34 After ten lessons, consisting of three exercises, the learner is asked to work on word class and morphology (fig.1).

Fig.1 : Primi Elementi della Lingua Inglese, p. 19

- 35 Only after having worked on two texts, i.e., after reading and translating the excerpt, the learner begins to elaborate on observations about grammar.
- 36 A proper discussion of the rules is given at the end of the four chapters as they are meant to complete and upgrade what has been acquired by reading the short texts and by doing the exercises (fig. 2).

Fig. 2 : Primi Elementi della Lingua Inglese, p. 18

- 37 The text is followed by a question and answer session that re-contextualises some of the words and consolidates the understanding of meaning. Finally, the learner is asked to translate more complex sentences by elaborating on the texts themselves.
- 38 In sum, the method can be described as consisting of:
- **Lettura:** Reading the text with the aid of a teacher who will provide the model (also for pronunciation).
 - **Versione letterale:** single words listed/Italian equivalent next (vocabulary). Word for word reading deconstructs the text into its single components (focus on words) with vocabulary first.
 - **Versione libera:** a reading of a translation in Italian of an excerpt from the given text. The front text provides a word for word translation that presupposes exact semantic equivalence with the focus on meaning. A free translation places the words in context in order to clarify meaning and also usage, so that the semantic value and the grammatical function of the words can be seen by reusing the word in a new text.
 - **Interrogazione:** question/answer (6 questions in English/answer with 1 Italian word). The questions are meant to practice usage: to reuse the words learned by reading anew. The aim is to make the learner confident (empowering the learner).
 - **Esercizio di traduzione:** translation (set of 10 sentences to be answered in English). Translating directly into English with no examples and no dictionary.

- 39 As Balbi explains in the preface:

[...] Lo studente comincerà dal leggere il periodo che a carte 19 forma il tema della 1a lezione, ripetendo la lettura ad alta voce se è assistito da un buon maestro; egli passerà, nel caso diverso, alla versione letterale che gli offre il senso di ogni parola, e questa egli rileggerà alternando l'inglese coll'italiano dapprima, poscia l'italiano con l'inglese, sino a che gli paia di avere bene imparato ogni vocabolo. La versione libera gli darà poi un'idea più chiara di quelle [...] (Balbi 1840: VI-VIII)²¹

- 40 This quote underlines the centrality of reading with the assistance of a 'good' teacher, but it also suggests the opportunity of reading the word for word version to better grasp the meaning, even without the assistance of the teacher (as the method can be used for self-instruction) and it aims at beginners who need to build their initial portfolio of words.
- 41 The literal translation and the free version contextualise usage suggesting a clearer understanding of the semantics. The question and answer sequence also consolidates the use of vocabulary because "lo scolare potrà rispondere in inglese con le parole stesse del testo" (Balbi 1840: v)²². Translation without the use of a dictionary also serves to fix meaning and word context. The organisation of each lesson is repeated to consolidate the learning praxis. The complexity of the lesson/exercise gradually

increases as it made clear by the questions that compel the reader to workout textual coherence along with an understanding of implicatures.

- 42 Only after ten lessons does the student develop his/her knowledge of grammar rules and syntax: a traditional, yet compact, layout of the materials on the page is presented as a key feature of the method.

- 43 In fact, as Balbi states:

[...] Divisi le lezioni pratiche dalle loro rispettive analisi, venendo così a formare due distinte parti, una pratica, teorica l'altra, per cui al discepolo ne viene offerta nella prima la serie progressiva delle lezioni coi loro vari esercizi e nella seconda tutte le osservazioni grammaticali [...] (Balbi 1840: v)²³

- 44 In the same way, Robertson also believes that:

[...] Mettre une grammaire entre les mains de celui qui n'a jamais prononcé un mot d'anglais, me semble aussi raisonnable que d'expliquer les principes de la natation à un homme qui se noie. Les règles sont le résultat des observations, et ne sont intelligibles que pour ceux qui ont déjà fait ces observations [...] (Robertson 1839: 9)

Observations and conclusions

- 45 The difference between Balbi and Robertson consists in a more 'direct' and concise idea of the lesson itself. Balbi deconstructs and reorganises the work of Theodore Robertson to write a work *puramente elementare*, i.e., essential, plain, and simple.

- 46 A comparison of Balbi's and Robertson's methods shows the debt but also the independence of Balbi's grammar, which is more compact and essential in the layout on the page, so that vocabulary, reading and translating are forefronted.

- 47 Robertson retains the "right", traditional sequence in presenting the grammar – grammar being a rational organisation of meaning. As with many other methods of the age, the familiar taxonomical organisation of the book would have fostered its authoritativeness and the value of its contents²⁴.

- 48 As for the role played by translation, both keep it at the heart of the method, but the aim is the one that Jacotot has envisaged, i.e., a basic set of vocabulary to be developed into more complex knowledge. The guided practice provided by the teacher and the book consisting of questions, answers, repetitions, narratives, observations, and reflections, is the same as children use to learn their native tongue. Even in Jacotot's view, memorisation and translation could stimulate understanding, thus consolidating learning (Suso López 2012).

- 49 As for Balbi, reference to Robertson and the Parisian cultural milieu, increased his credibility and justified the 'modernity' of the text itself. This method bypasses the complexity of traditional grammar-based approach, as suggested by Jacotot:

[...] Faites apprendre un livre à votre élève, lisez-le vous-même souvent, et vérifiez si l'élève comprend tout ce qu'il sait; assurez-vous qu'il ne peut plus l'oublier; montrez-lui enfin à rapporter à son livre tout ce qu'il apprendra par la suite: et vous ferez de l'Enseignement universel. [...] Sachez un livre, rapportez-y tous les autres: voilà ma méthode. Du reste, variez les exercices dont je parlerai, changez leur ordre: peu importe. Si vous apprenez un livre, et si vous y rattachez tous les autres, vous suivrez la méthode de l'Enseignement universel [...] (Jacotot 1823: x-xj)

- 50 The centrality of orality in the learning process and the visualisation of what has been learned by reading foster an understanding of grammar by inference. Thus the learner

has the power to learn. Jacotot also advocated the constant and progressive checking of what is learned to consolidate knowledge as a form of “deep learning”. He also claimed the importance of connecting what has been learned with real-life experience, i.e., connecting knowledge into a network of readings and experience.

- 51 All these revolutionary ideas would slowly find their way into contemporary pedagogy. Nineteenth-century language teachers such as Robertson and Balbi were just beginning to consider such an approach, at first empirically, moved by basic simple pedagogical needs, but they were probably also influenced by a new attitude towards language learning: the need to learn to communicate fluently and effectively. Communication, despite or paradoxically thanks to the nineteenth-century strengthening of nationhood, was just about to become a key issue in modern society and a key element in the development of historical progress.

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NOTES

1. Robertson's works were adapted to teach French, English, German, Spanish and Italian, and continued to be published throughout the century.
2. His private papers are now collected at the Museo Correr in Venice. The papers consist of reading notes, newspaper articles, drafts of his publications and preparatory notes for his university courses on geography. Online: [http://correr.visitmuve.it/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Archivi_Biblioteca-del-Museo-Correr_Balbi_-Adriano-Eugenio.pdf].
3. Perfecting one's own language meant to develop style by developing the understanding of the language in a rational frame, i.e., by learning the grammar.
4. [...] In the years 1848-49 he fought at the rank of captain in defense of Venice and taught English to the young students of the Collegio di Marina. When the war ended, Balbi accepted with bitterness a solitary life, rather desolate, and more than modest [...] (my translation).
5. The book is unavailable but advertised in *Bibliografia italiana: ossia elenco generale delle opere d'ogni specie e d'ogni lingua stampate in Italia e delle italiane pubblicate all'estero* (vol. 6), Milan: Stella, 1940.
6. Stella was a typographer and publisher (Venice 1757 – Milan 1833). At first he was active in Venice (1793-97) then he moved to Milan in 1810. He published the most important magazines of the time and Leopardi's works and played a crucial role in popularizing foreign books (Berengo 1980).

7. For the most part, grammars were written by expats who would become teachers after travelling abroad (Paris and London) often as a makeshift solution, to earn a living (Pireddu 2010: 21-32).

8. *Scritti geografici, statistici e vari/ pubblicati in diversi giornali d'Italia, di Francia e di Germania da Adriano Balbi; raccolti ed ordinati per la prima volta da Eugenio Balbi*, Vol. 1-5, Torino, Stab. tip. di A. Fontana; Milano, Eustachio Piana, 1841-1842. The volume is considered a seminal example of the use of statistics in geography.

9. The papers, held at the Museo Correr in Venice, provide no indication of his reading Roberston, except for the presence of the catalogue of the French publisher Derache with the lists of works, methods and grammars, based on Roberston. The catalogue is kept in a folder labelled as *varia*, which is dated 1876. Balbi collected his notes along with his father's papers to prepare the publication of his major works about geography, and he did so systematically only when he became full professor.

10. See for example Fondo Balbi, Museo Correr, PB256 XX and PB256 18.

11. Publishing a grammar in Naples, Turin or Milan would be different, and publishing it in the 30s or 60s would also be very different: the Bourbon dynasty on the one hand and the Augsburg on the other, and also with the Piedmont managing the insurrections that will lead to war and to national unity (Lupo 2005; Trombetta 2011; Rugiu and Santamaita 2014; De Franceschi 2013; De Fort 2017).

12. If the lessons were developed by an experienced teacher, there might be practical outcomes as well, such as conversational fluency which would be useful to welcome foreigners in the aristocratic *salons*. With time though, the need for practical skills became clearer: improved travel and communication stimulated the publication of manuals also addressing the tourist and the needs of people in business (Pireddu 2010: 59-67; Del Lungo Camiciotti 2002).

13. The hegemony of classical languages still pressed modern language teachers to emulate the classics in the design of their teaching materials. However, the attitude supporting a practical, liberal education brought the provision of materials in the form of exercises designed to stimulate speaking as well. Jacotot pedagogy, among others, set the scene for this new approach (Suso Lopez 2003).

14. Information about the pedagogical ideas of teachers can be retrieved in the long prefaces and notes that appear in the manuals addressing either the learner or, at times, colleagues who would use the book. Prefaces to grammars may not entirely be trusted, as they would often claim the originality of the method for marketing reasons. Nevertheless they set the editorial context of the grammar by describing the source, indicating the authoritativeness and the experience of the teacher and hence the bounty of the method itself.

15. The method was first published in 1937 in Turin and then Milan independently by the same Millhouse and underwent several editions until 1914, co-edited by Ferdinando Bracciforti (Pireddu 2010: 59-69).

16. In our context, the 'flipped' approach reverses the common method because the grammatical rule is inferred from the example and not the opposite, and the student plays a more active role in the learning process. The term 'flipped' refers to a pioneer work by Alison King (1993: 30-35) in which she focused on the use of class time for the construction of meaning rather than for the transmission of information. This methodology has been developed in many teaching environments (Lebrun & Lecoq 2016).

17. The final part of Robertson's *Théorie de l'enseignement* (1848) is dedicated to the proposal of a sort of 'utopian' language school/theatre, where teachers and students would mutually contribute to the learning of modern languages and to the improvement of the role and function of the teacher of modern languages.

18. Along with Walker's he especially praises Worcester's dictionary along with his geographical writings. WORCESTER, Joseph Emerson (1831) *A Comprehensive Pronouncing and Explanatory Dictionary*

of the English Language: With Pronouncing Vocabularies of Classical and Scripture Proper Names. Burlington VT: Goodrich.

19. A well-known Italian case is the work of John Millhouse who published a complex set of works under the title *Corso Graduato e Completo di Lingua Inglese* between 1840 and 1845 which continued to be published until the first decade of the 20th century and which is particularly significant for the polemics of his prefaces where he criticizes previous grammars and methods (Pireddu 2010).

20. The texts include two by Joseph Addison taken from the *Spectator* and two texts that support the view of sound empirical ideals associated with English philosophical thinking. The first one *On giving Advice*, is often published in anthologies, and collections of the most representative English authors of the time (i.e., clichéd text). It is used for the first chapter. The second article is *Spectator* Nr 535 (13 November 1712) where Addison takes a story from Galland's *Arabian Nights Entertainments* to discuss the dangers of overlooking nearby good in favour of distant ambition and this is used for chapter three at a more advanced stage. Chapter two and chapter four, present two narratives; one from Oliver Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield* (incipit chapter four) and the other, consisting in the opening of Sir Walter Scott *Waverly Novels*, *Kenilworth* chapter six.

21. [...] The student will read the text that forms the theme of the first lesson on page 19. He will read aloud assisted by a good teacher; he will then move on to the literal version that provides the meaning of each word, and he will alternate English with Italian at first, then Italian with English, until he has learned each word well. The free version will then give him a clearer idea of the same [...] (my translation).

22. The learner will answer in English with the same words provided by the text (my translation).

23. [...] I divided the practical lessons from their analyses, thus forming two distinct parts, one practical, the other theoretical, so that the disciple is offered in the first a progressive sequence of lessons with their various exercises and in the second all the grammatical observations [...] (my translation).

24. Robertson, instead, explains aspects of pronunciation (Robertson 1837: 13-23). The English text is given with the number-based method, indicating difficult aspects of pronunciation, e.g., vowels (Beal 2013).

ABSTRACTS

The article examines Eugenio Balbi's *Primi Elementi della Lingua Inglese* (Milan: 1840). The text is an Italian adaptation of Robertson's *Cours pratique, analytique, théorique et synthétique de langue anglaise* (Paris: 1837-39) and it confirms the centrality and the innovative force of French pedagogy in Europe. The analysis of Balbi's career, his writings as a geographer, and his view of language are followed by an examination of Robertson's approach. Both works illustrate how grammars met the existing book market demands for texts that not only focused on English language learning but also allowed readers to be fluent and conversant in English literature, science and politics. The relevance of Jacotot's ideas about teaching discussed in his treatise *Enseignement universel, Langue maternelle* (1823) is the starting point of Robertson's work. The article points out how grammarians addressed the bourgeois need to learn to communicate effectively in the political and cultural context of the time.

L'article examine *Primi Elementi della Lingua Inglese* d'Eugenio Balbi (Milan : 1840). Le texte est une adaptation italienne du *Cours pratique, analytique, théorique et synthétique de langue anglaise* de Robertson (Paris : 1837-39) et confirme le primat de la pédagogie française en Europe et sa force novatrice. L'analyse de la carrière de Balbi, ses écrits en tant que géographe et sa vision du langage sont suivis par l'examen de l'approche de Robertson. Les deux ouvrages montrent que les grammaires pourraient répondre au besoin du marché d'avoir des textes pratiques pour apprendre l'anglais, le parler couramment et maîtriser la littérature anglaise, ainsi que les sciences et la politique britanniques. La pertinence des idées de Jacotot sur l'enseignement est également discutée puisque son traité *Enseignement universel, Langue maternelle* (1823) est le point de départ du travail de Robertson. L'article montre comment les grammairiens s'adressent au besoin bourgeois d'apprendre à communiquer efficacement dans le contexte politique et culturel de l'époque.

INDEX

Keywords: English grammar, teaching, Theodore Robertson, Eugenio Balbi, nineteenth Century grammars, students focused method, autonomy

Mots-clés: grammaire anglaise, enseignement, Theodore Robertson, Eugenio Balbi, grammaire XIXe siècle, centration sur l'apprenant, autonomie

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