

LANGUAGE ARTS AND EDUCATION THROUGH THE XXI CENTURY, NEAR THE END (?) OF THE GRECO-ROMAN EMPIRE

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ABSTRACT

Our western educational institutions are undergoing an evolution-- or maybe a revolution— everywhere. This is widely known and discussed, specifically its economic aspects (especially in the US), subject contents and choices, and value to the career paths. But the character of education has changed in aspects less talked about that affect academia in deeper and subtler ways. We try to modestly contribute another aspect to a general perspective on the background and nature of the change.

This is an attempt to present some facets of this vast subject in a schematic manner, and let the myriad empty spaces between these to be filled by the interested and curious readers, as the scope of this essay would suffice to fill at least a book.

Keywords: Education, language, Spanish, English, schooling.

1 Historical development

“There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, “Morning, boys. How’s the water?” And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, “What the hell is water?”

David Foster Wallace (In Krajcski, 2008)

We would like to look at our origins undergoing three large evolutionary steps, which influence our language and our thinking today as members of a society. This is certainly a personal point of view of historical currents, which we find relevant.

1.1 First Globalization: 776 BCE to 1453 CE. Two millennia with the Greco-Romans, from Athens to Constantinople

Historically, what we call the Western Civilization is a direct child of the Greco-Roman empires and cultures. Let us briefly remember in a paragraph this inherited evolution.

Over 2500 years ago, the Greeks developed a view of the world which included medicine, philosophy, mathematics, religion, sports, honor... and crystallized this knowledge in a

language to which we own terms – and most significantly the concepts themselves – such as philosophy, mathematics, democracy, cosmos, metropolis, olympiad or geography. (Eratosthenes gave us the correct measurement of earth's size and its axial tilt 2200 years ago). The Romans, who were versed in Greek, inherited their knowledge and their concept of the cosmos. Also, they developed their own alphabet to write in Latin, and also developed or borrowed new technology to implement amazing engineering feats such as the aqueducts that provided Rome with unlimited water for a million people, or the sewer systems, and further implemented these constructions to the limits of their world. Thus, roads were built, communicating all places throughout the empire (roads that still exist today in many places). They created a sort of stone-made internet, and opened the way for knowledge, merchandise, and certainly the military troops to travel back and forth. But most importantly they provided the unifying glue, Latin language and a new way to understand the world for the people within their network (as Greek was spoken in the lands that Alexander the Great conquered earlier). Not only roads were built, but the metropolis was cloned in significant ways in many places of the assimilated provinces: aqueducts, theaters, temples, baths, sewers, etc. were built throughout the empire, creating a global way of living for the new roman lands, and eventually declaring the inhabitants of these lands Roman citizens.

Romans were inclusive of the other groups and cultures conquered, which is apparent in their temples, literature and even in their emperors, who at times came from different corners of the empire. They were also tolerant of other religions and sexually free to an extent our societies seem squeamish, as we can see in their fresco paintings and in their literature – read Petronius' Satyricon, where a male teacher and his male friend scramble to keep the favors of a young boy.

Maybe the last product of the Romans' cultural world, albeit of large significance and weight in the western civilization culture and thought, is the expansion of Christianity, with a monotheistic god that substituted 1700 years of previously polytheistic cultures. Incidentally, two examples of Greek being widely known to the Romans come to mind: that it was used by Paul to write the epistle to the Romans, and that Christos is Greek for Savior.

Constantine, the Christian emperor, moved the empire's site away from the barbarians to Greece (in today's Turkey), to a city that stood first, Roman and then, head of the Byzantine empire for a thousand more years. From it, Slavs in the east were eventually permeated with written language, the Cyrillic Greek alphabet exported by Cyril the saint in his biblical teachings. The Czar (Cesar), is another institution that survived until a century ago. Meanwhile, the Roman western territories kept the Latin alphabet and the Emperor (Imperator).

1.2 Second globalization: 1498 – 1812. From Lisbon and Madrid to Mexico and the World.

While Constantinople and Byzantium kept the light of Rome in the east Mediterranean, the lights went off in the west. The dark set on it with the northern invasions, until the Islam brought the old knowledge from Damascus and Alexandria to Europe via Hispania (the roman Iberia) and Sicily. (Damascus, the oriental Umayyad caliphate was the first Islamic caliphate and sat upon an urban plan deriving from the Greco-Roman grid). Arabic and Greek sciences flourished

under Islam in Spain by the hands of scientists, poets, philosophers and wise men arriving to the Iberian Peninsula with knowledge from as far as India. All this scientific knowledge was assembled and translated in Toledo in 1212, when the king Alphonse X, The Wise, himself a Galician speaking poet, funded the school of Translations of Toledo, and this way Castilian language was created at the same time that the new and recovered knowledge expanded through Europe and set the basis for the second globalization.

This globalization wave fared by sea. Both Iberian countries, armed with the latest knowledge, were responsible for it, in different ways. The Portuguese devised a route to the East for the spices to be brought to Europe. They carefully planted fortresses throughout Africa and India (as in Goa) and secretly mapped the route to reach the spice Islands, so as to hide the route from invaders and newcomers (specially the Dutch and the Spaniards). The maps, secret under oath of death, kept the route proprietary and filled the king with riches.

Columbus, who lived in Portugal for a decade, ended in Spain with his plan of sailing for the spices through the West, unknown seas. And for the kingdom of Castile he opened the route to the Indies. As soon as the Spanish explorers had the realization that this was a new land, America, the Spanish kingdom doubled her efforts trying to find a way around the continent so as to reach the spice islands. It took them only 30 years to explore all the coast from Canada until the tip of South America, to then cross the Pacific and finally to cross the uncharted South seas, avoiding the Portuguese in their return to Spain. And the world became round, as the Greeks had taught us.

From the Philippines they devised two return routes, one through the south seas to Europe, and one back through Mexico, aided by what centuries later was called the Humboldt current (even though it was discovered by José de Acosta 250 years earlier). This route became part of the silver route to China that minted money with it.

While Portugal dedicated herself only to trade enterprises, much as the Greek had done in the Mediterranean (with the brief exception of Alexander), Spain dedicated herself to building an empire in the Roman style: bringing the institutions from the metropolis and mixing the bloods of the conquerors and the locals. As a result, 9 universities existed in Latin America for all Spanish speaking people before Harvard opened for the (white only) Europeans. Or let us mention that an amerindian contemporary of Cervantes, el Inca Garcilaso, became a respected author in Madrid. This melting pot is patent today in the color, language and religious habits of the different countries throughout the American continent. And, to a lesser extent in the Philippines.

Spain lost political importance gradually, and it certainly waned after the Napoleonic invasion of 1812. In spite of it, the second globalization of Spain has survived longer than its military power because of the cultural imprimatur that it had in all the territories, as the Romans had done before in Hispania and the other provinces. When the seven million strong English, French and Dutch colonies advanced west and south in the north of America, erasing earlier traces of the Spanish settlements (Spain had less than two million settlers in total in both North and South America), they discovered that the culture stubbornly remained among Amerindians (the Apache leader Geronimo spoke Spanish) and mestizos. The results after four centuries have proven quite elusive – Spanish is widely spoken after the takeover period from 1812 – 1898

and a subsequent century of difficulties for the “Hispanics” who are tabulated (including Spaniards, Europeans, but not the Portuguese) as a separate group in the US Census¹ since 1970.

1.3 Third Globalization: from sea (1812 – 1898) to air and space (1945 – 2011). The United States of America.

As a preamble, let us mention again the first occasional, then steady stream of English who populated the northern coasts of the American continent. Slowly and steadily traveling west, from 1600 to 1812, then acquiring the western lands of New Spain and finally fully displacing the dying Spanish empire remnants in North and Central Americas and the Pacific by 1898.

The English pilgrims, followed by Irish, German and other Europeans, kept arriving in larger numbers by the year (the US population was 12 million in 1830, 18 million in 1840) and brought a new era of individualism and can-do attitude inherent with Protestantism, and a disinterest of the established European social classes. Also, they brought with them the expansion of information from the printing press, the translated Bible, and an inundation of news that had never been known before the press invention and popularization.

However, issues arose with the non European populations: the free Amerindians; the Spanish, Amerindians and mestizo folks from the annexed territories; the Chinese that built the railroads; and, especially, with the people of African descent under slavery, whose freedom triggered subsequent civil war. As a result, the mixes of population we find in other places like Brazil, Mexico or Cuba have been either illegal until quite recently, nor popular, nor tolerated in many places² (Sánchez, 2013). In California, for instance, interracial matrimony was not legalized until 1967.

¹ → Please answer BOTH Question 8 about Hispanic origin and Question 9 about race.

(NOTE: For this census, Hispanic origins are not races.)

8. Is Person 1 of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin

Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano

Yes, Puerto Rican

Yes, Cuban

Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin – Print, for example, Salvadoran, Dominican, Colombian, Guatemalan, Spaniard, Ecuadorian, etc.

² According to Sánchez (2013, p. i), „*The Bill of Rights (1791) was the first step in clarifying our rights as citizens. Ironically, when it was promulgated, citizenship had yet to be defined constitutionally. In 1868, when the Fourteenth Amendment defined citizenship, its original draft excluded Indians "not taxed." The American Indian would have to wait until the first decades of the twentieth century to gain citizenship status. Women as well had to wait; they did not receive the franchise until 1920, when the Nineteenth Amendment was passed. At the same time, Hispanics in the southwestern U.S. (Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California) were frequently in the courts defending their citizenship and property rights, which throughout the nineteenth century and early twentieth century were constantly being questioned, particularly in New Mexico and Arizona territories, by Anglo-Americans. The perception that Hispanics should not be considered citizens, especially after being incorporated into the United States under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), was erroneous. Indeed, numerous court cases point to a historical heritage in which Hispanics have been denied full acceptance in U.S. society.*”

Industrialization, that developed in Britain before the time of the loss of the American colonies, made Britain a world power in the nineteenth century. It would soon be declining in favor of the US after this country's civil war, when the US industrialized quickly and in her next expansion took over the leftovers of the Spanish empire in North America, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

The irruption of the two World Wars among the European powers brought the US to the forefront of world history and evaporated European preeminence.

And the resulting technological disruption, caused transport to climb from sea to air, fuel from vapor to oil, and (later) information from paper to electronics. With these, the US has brought a combined worldwide massification of production and distribution with instant universal electronic communications networks. Let us not forget that the WWW, the internet, is a child of the military network ARPANET, created in 1969 to serve the cold war. Similarly, we could say about the airplane's rapid development: born in 1902, acquired its jet engines during WWII and made the tourism revolution possible.

As a result of European requests for the US intervention in the wars and the subsequent victories, today Europe (and a large chunk of the world) lives a re-colonized era characterized by all the US artifacts and realities developed in the last century, in communications the ones derived from the internet revolution, but also artifacts from cars and airplanes to daily items such as food (Coca-Cola, Mac Donald's), clothes (jeans, t-shirts, sneakers, baseball caps), music (jazz, rock, hip-hop), political systems (reorganization of republics and kingdoms into political-party run, voter-elected systems in the US manner of state vs. federal authorities). This is also reflected in the organization of universities and colleges in the west (4-year BS – Bachelor programs³, followed by 2-year MS – Master programs, before the PhD.) and a myriad of daily aspects of education.

Next, let us review some implications of these globalization waves.

2 Culture and Language development

2.1 During the first globalization

Characteristics of the first wave are the inclusion of all citizens into Romans, regardless of color (also race) or creed. Romans created a liberal society, polytheistic and open sexually. It was powered by slave labor, such as the Greek, the Egyptian or the Hittite had done.

Latin was widely adopted throughout the Empire and, with time, it broke up into simplified versions of Latin in different geographical areas due to the relative isolation of people in these historical times. While Italian, French, Portuguese and, to a slightly lesser extent Spanish stayed close to the mother language, it is a less spread truth that English, German, Swedish are also profoundly affected to different degrees by Latin (and, in the northern languages, also through French).

³ In different countries in Central Europe, the Bachelor degree lasts 6 semesters, for a total of 3 years.

2.2 Latin and Greek until 1750

While the Latin language is considered to have died in the 7th century⁴, there are important aspects to this worthy of consideration, some listed below (in notes, and in 2.3).

In Europe, Latin was the one language to publish all scientific knowledge until around the 1750's. For instance, in 1687, Sir Isaac Newton wrote in Latin his book *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, which explained his laws of motion and gravity.

The medical profession then (and today) is built around Latin and Greek: *“But Medical Latin is in reality two languages: the words naming body parts and organs (Anatomy) is in Latin, those naming diseases (Pathology) are in origin Greek words that have been given a Latin spelling.”* (Aili, n.d.).

Since Carl Linnaeus set out to establish a botanical taxonomy in Latin around the 1750's, he *“laid out the parameters for scientific description and notation that established Latin as the universal language of science”* (Wood, 2019).

Increasingly, the Catholic and Protestant churches put an end to free thinking and sexual openness in the Christian worlds. Dissidents could be deemed witches, burned and maimed mainly in Central Europe: Germany, France, Switzerland⁵ (Gibbons, n.d.), but also in Spain, Italy and the US. Also, thinkers as Galileo Galilei could be tortured, if they would not recant of affirming scientific truths, such as that the earth turns around the Sun.

2.3 Latin and Greek in the third Globalization wave

Latin and Greek were widely taught in the higher learning institutions until after WWII, and still are to some extent and in some colleges even today; both languages are also offered in secondary institutions in many places in Europe and the US. However its importance has greatly diminished everywhere, and this practice has been replaced by modern language acquisition. Einstein is sadly aware of this Latin language loss and, with intelligent irony points at the effect of it on us: *“As late as the seventeenth century, savants and artists...were so closely united by the bond of a common ideal...further strengthened by the general use of the Latin language”* (Einstein, 1990). As nationalism appears and scientists revert to national languages, this international bond breaks, so *“Nowadays we are faced with the curious fact that the politicians,*

⁴ Classical Latin stopped being spoken by the general population, although it is taught even today in high schools and Universities even today. It is alive as a language in the Catholic church.

⁵ Current estimates suggest perhaps 100,000 trials between 1450 and 1750, with something between 40,000 and 50,000 executions, of which 20 to 25 per cent were men.

According to Gibbons, n.d.:

“The rate of witch hunting varied dramatically throughout Europe, ranging from a high of 26,000 deaths in Germany to a low of 4 in Ireland. “

“Second, the trials were concentrated in central Europe, in Germany, Switzerland, and eastern France. The further you got away from that area, the lower the persecution generally got.”

“In countries like Italy and Spain, where the Catholic Church and its Inquisition reigned virtually unquestioned, witch hunting was uncommon. The worst panics took place in areas like Switzerland and Germany, where rival Christians sects fought to impose their religious views on each other.”

the practical men of affairs, have become the exponents of international ideas” (Einstein, 1990).

Administrators who are not educated in the intellectual or scientific world, but in accounting and money. How can they debate international ideas? The question posed by Einstein last century has to be answered yet, especially now that global problems threaten our welfare.

Apart from the English Commonwealth, and after WWII, many countries in western Europe and other parts of the world have turned into English as a second language with also different degrees of success. Latin has been dropped from a compulsory to an elective subject in secondary education everywhere in Europe, and it is not offered in most schools in the US. While Latin as a second or a third foreign language is offered in many places in Europe, teaching of Latin or foreign language programs have overall steadily underperformed in the US, in spite of her long history of immigrant population.

3 Language education in the Universities for a thousand years. From the Universum to the specialization

Shortly after knowledge re-arrived in Europe, universities were established in Europe a thousand years ago: Baden Baden, Oxford, Salamanca... with the idea of communicating the idea of the universe to the new students. Universum, one word: all the things, the whole works. How do we explain it all at once? How did the Middle Ages teachers present it to their students? Just as the Greeks did before them, universities imparted knowledge organized in two separate ways: the trivium and the quadrivium.

The trivium delves into the word: rhetoric (public discourse) and its helpers: grammar (language structures and norms) and dialectic (logic and reasoning). The Pythagorean quadrivium studies the number: algebra (the number by itself), geometry (the number in space), music (the number in time), and astronomy (the number in time and space). At medieval universities, *“the educational content consisted of seven liberal arts”* – Septem artes liberales (Strenáčiková, 2017, p. 14).

Once the student graduated, understanding how to speak to others with proper reasoning and how to organize and measure things in the world, (s)he then would enter as an apprentice under a professional mentor and learn a professional trade. This is a top-down educational process, going from the general to the particular.

“The medieval universities had four faculties: artistic (...the studies lasted 3-4 years and it was a preparation for studies at the other three faculties...), theological (the studies lasted 9-11 years), law (... duration of 7 years), medicine (...studies lasted 4 years)” (Strenáčiková, 2016, p. 70). While Law and Medical schools are a tradition from the first Universities, technical and research colleges were added since before the 1800 for education and research, many grew apart from liberal arts schools, and focused into solving problems inherent to industrialization, true cadres of specialists. What difference does this education make?

Ortega y Gasset defines precisely the effects of the new educational paradigm: *“Here we have a precise example of this strange new man, whom I have attempted to define, from both of his two opposite aspects. I have said that he was a human product unparalleled in history. The*

specialist serves as a striking concrete example of the species, making clear to us the radical nature of the novelty. For, previously, men could be divided simply into the learned and the ignorant, those more or less the one, and those more or less the other. But your specialist cannot be brought in under either of these two categories. He is not learned, for he is formally ignorant of all that does not enter into his specialty; but neither is he ignorant, because he is “a scientist,” and “knows” very well his own tiny portion of the universe. We shall have to say that he is a learned ignoramus, which is a very serious matter, as it implies that he is a person who is ignorant, not in the fashion of the ignorant man, but with all the petulance of one who is learned in his own special line.” (Ortega y Gasset, 1932).

The new paradigm is still here a hundred years later, its results growing at an accelerating speed, and creating artifacts that were unthinkable even when man had reached the moon, in 1970. Current cell phones have 1000 times larger memories than the IBM 360 that helped put the man on the moon.

This is the paradigm where we are today, with global warming burning throughout most places in the western civilization, hoping that our educated will be able to ameliorate it as much as possible before food stops growing and we give room for the next animal evolutionary era on Earth.

How is our education preparing the youth to save us all? Do we have enough intellectuals, of the kind that Ortega and Einstein imply? Are they even necessary? Can administrators effectively solve it?

Conclusion

I am a speaker of three languages, and also a language teacher in these languages, so this is my personal observation on English and foreign language teaching in the US.

While German and Latin follow the grammatical structure of Latin, English tends to follow Swedish, not German. This is slightly less flexible than the structure of modern Latin-derived languages, mainly because gender – gender is by definition a grammatical accident, not a sexual aspect – permits chaining longer sentences without losing the thread of meaning in Swedish (that possesses utrum and neutrum) and Latin languages (with masculine, feminine and neutrum), a feature which English lacks except for differentiating biological sex. But otherwise, the organization of subject-verb-object is commonly used in Latin languages as well as English and German (other than in German subordinate clauses), and complements are recognized by their preposition.

Let me add that English vocabulary is still 26 percent Germanic and 58 to 65 percent Latin or French. Add to it some Italian and Spanish. As you have seen in this essay, it is clear that the word carries its meaning into the language it joins, as it possesses the concept.

Let us see a few examples: the inuit people in the polar circle have dozens of names for ice and snow, which we cannot comprehend unless we live among them and learn to differentiate which these kinds are. Japanese use the word pan (from Portuguese) because they learned what bread is from them. Also, we use umami from Japanese, who taught us to identify that flavor.

It is clear, then, that all Latin countries understand quite a few things that the Greco-Romans thought and defined, and use their concepts. Can anyone identify as anglo-saxon: president, senate, liberty, democracy, Christian, sex, libido, calendar, intelligent? Maybe every other concept we use in English was developed by the cultures in the Mediterranean basin. Does it not affect the way we think? Can we think like Inuit without learning their set of meanings? Therefore, it seems an impossible task to understand English by only learning the 'short' Germanic words and not knowing the meanings of the 'long' Latin words. And therefore, teaching the Latin prefixes and suffixes is as necessary as teaching the English ones, if a student is going to learn English properly, one's own language. Plus, learning them comes with an added bonus: it will open the door to all languages in the family for these students.

Without an understanding of their native vocabulary as children, and arming specialized teachers with an erroneous way of teaching foreign languages to young adults 'like a native, without boring repetitions', the foreign language learning system is doomed, and the proof is on the pie in the US secondary education. There is an immediate effort needed to address foreign language teaching, to foment the understanding of other mentalities that carry inherently different concepts (think of Chinese, Turkic languages, Arabic), as well as putting attention in how we pass our own language forward. We can take the advantage of implementing new ICT technologies into education to get closer to current learners' interests and habits. However, understanding the depth of meaning is not part of the digital world yet.

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