

Heinrich Schliemann, the linguist¹

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The story of Schliemann's language learning activities is related in *Ilios* (1881). The account reveals dual motives, one being the recognition of their importance for economic advancement, and the other the remedying of deficiencies in his early education. The aptitude he discovered he had for languages brought him not only material advancement, but intellectual pleasure as well, as he declared to his first wife Katharina, in a letter dated 10 July, 1867: "Si j'ai eu la bosse des langues ... je m'en félicite parce que la connaissance des idiomes m'ouvre de vastes ressources pour l'esprit" (BBB27.147).

Schliemann's first period of language learning occurred during his schooldays. The final report he received from the Realschule in Neustrelitz scarcely marks him out as a future polyglot. His French was commended as 'zufrieden', but his English provoked the comment 'geht an', and his Latin, 'befriedigte nicht; die Übersetzung fluchtig und schwulstig' (Meyer 1953). Schliemann's later recollection makes his Latin achievements as a schoolboy appear more favourable. Writing from Paris, 6 April, 1868, he tells his son Serge, "Moi, j'ai lu Cicéron à l'âge de 11 et Cornelius Nepos à l'âge de 9 ans..." (BBB27.373).

With this information he was attempting, as he did regularly, to encourage his son to greater linguistic endeavour.

The second period of language learning took place in Amsterdam in Schliemann's early twenties. He acquired in this period some knowledge of Dutch, English, Spanish, Italian, and Russian. Written examples of his competence in all these languages exist in the Schliemann Archives. His success has to be attributed to the methodology he devised for language learning.

It was essentially a method of self-instruction based on reading and writing of the target language, and memorization. The onus to achieve was placed on the learner, and an instructor had only a minor correctional role in the activity. In time Schliemann believed he could dispense with an instructor altogether. He wrote as follows, in 1863, to his brother Ernst: "Man endowed with energy can easily learn a language merely from books and without any assistance from a teacher. Talent means energy and perseverance and nothing more" (BBB22.471).

Schliemann's views on language pedagogy can be seen most clearly in the address he prepared for the convention of American Philologists held in July, 1869 (BBB28.105-110). His lengthy speech reiterates three points found elsewhere in his writings:

a) the value of language acquisition – "every new language one acquires is a new life..."

b) the desirability of learning a number of languages, but only one at a time – "man's head which is continually constrained by the study of too many languages at once falls into an incurable chronic confusion..."

c) the right method of study – "to read much aloud, never to make translations, to write always dissertations on subjects that interest us, to correct them under the eye of the teacher, to commit them to memory and to repeat them word by word in the lesson of the following day".

Schliemann proposed for the College (High School) curriculum the study of, in turn, German, French, Greek and Latin, and, in advance of the thinking of his time, suggested the learning at University of an American Indian language "to preserve from destruction the languages of the aboriginal Indians of Ame-

1. I wish to thank the Director of the Gennadius Library, American School of Classical Studies, Athens, for the permission to make use of unpublished material in the Schliemann Archives. In this paper I refer to the following: (1) Copies of Schliemann's letters (BBB files); (2) Letters

addressed to Schliemann (B files); (3) Diaries A5 (1864-5), A6 (1865), A7.2 (1865); (4) Language documents and exercises (G Varia); (5) Sophia Schliemann Archive (B Varia File 1.2).

rica". He includes advice on motivating students, on the time to be spent on the task and on ways of making it easier. Clearly these remarks arise from personal experience of what worked for him.

Schliemann was something of a crusader for his method. He commended it to his brother (BBB22.471), and imposed it on his second wife Sophia.² Her language exercises in French, German, English and Italian, which are preserved in the Gennadius Library (B Varia File 1.2), show that it was a method that could succeed with other determined individuals.

The 1850s, when Schliemann was established as a businessman and as a family man in St. Petersburg, was another period of language learning. Pursuing this activity can be seen more as a hobby than as something dictated by economic or social need at the time. A possible exception could be made for Arabic, since Schliemann had business interests in Egypt and Tunisia, and he visited both places. The language study which he seems to have enjoyed most, and which, fortuitously, proved useful in later life, was that of Modern and Ancient Greek and Latin. His enthusiasm for Greek in particular finds expression in his correspondence, as can be seen in an extract of a letter, dated 27 March, 1868, to his cousin Adolphe: "La manière dont tu lisais les hexamètres d'Homère a produit sur moi - alors enfant de 10 ans - un tel enthousiasme, que 24 ans plus tard je me mis moi-même à l'œuvre pour apprendre la langue des Dieux et des héros, laquelle est toujours restée depuis mon idiome favorite" (BBB27.354).

It is fortunate that a language exercise book of the 1850s survives in the Gennadius Library (G Varia G 5). Its unwieldy size might have led to its being thrown out in the course of time. This exercise book shows the practical application of Schliemann's language acquisition theory, expounded in *Ilios* and elsewhere. Learning strategies include (a) compiling of vocabulary lists, (b) making notes on regular and irregular morphology, (c) writing out the principal parts of Greek verbs and the declension of Greek nouns - all these serving to train and test the memory. But the bulk of the exercise book is filled with a

series of practice letters addressed to family and friends in which Schliemann puts down his thoughts on any and every subject that comes into his head. No distinction is made between an ancient and a modern language, and letters written in Latin, for example, could broach such diverse topics as buying railroad stock, behaviour of Californian prostitutes, incidents in his private life and family matters. All these efforts contain corrections either by Schliemann himself or by a second hand, and illustrate the important place Schliemann gave in his language learning to the writing of 'historiettes'.

Schliemann's travels in 1864-5 brought him to Asia, a region where he did not know the local languages. He made an effort on the sea voyage from the Red Sea to Madras to learn one of the languages of India, but was handicapped by having to work from a 'hindostanu grammar' described as 'very miserable' (A5.63), and by what was, even for him, rather too short a time.³ The Asian diaries (A5, 6 & 7) do, however, reveal an interest in the languages he encountered.

While in India he notes the local greeting 'Ram Ram' (A5.82), the local name of objects unknown to him, e.g. 'palki' the type of rickshaw found in Calcutta (A5.86), and he declares "it is evident by the affinity all European languages have to the Sanscrit that all European nations are descendents (sic) from the races which at a remote period occupied the Indies..." (A5.88). He takes pains to copy some 14 unintelligible characters he saw on the Ashoka pillar in Delhi (A5.97), and provides an English version of the Persian inscription in the throne room of Delhi's Red Fort (A5.96). In China he twice mentions problems of communication (A5.221; A6.53). In the latter case, which occurred after his descent from the Great Wall of China, in addition to calling for water with his Chinese 'shuai', he had to resort to gestures, in familiar tourist fashion, to make his meaning clear. He knew that Chinese was a tone language, and reports that Mongolian, a language with a stress accent, was the language used to give orders to the Chinese army so as to avoid misunderstanding (A6.58). In Japan his

2. Schliemann wrote to his son about Sophia just one month after his marriage: "son seul défaut est qu'elle ne parle que le grec mais elle se mit à présent à l'étude du français qu'elle apprendra en peu de mois, car elle est très instruite..." (BBB28.263).

3. Schliemann tends to vary the time he claimed he needed for learning a language. In his *Ilios, Stadt und Land der Trojaner* (1881), Schliemann claimed it was six months, but in a letter to his son it was six weeks (BBB27.246). The trip from Egypt to Madras took only 10 days.

inability to converse spoilt a visit to a Japanese school (A7.2.43), and prevented him from making a purchase of silk in Tokyo (A.6.144). Nevertheless he carefully records Japanese greetings: ‘ohio’ (good day), ‘sainara’ (goodbye), words he heard addressed to him: ‘todsinn’ (stranger), ‘hai hai abonai’ (attention, take care), the names of various officials whom he encountered on his visit: yacounin (mounted police), ometzky (literally ‘seeing eye’), and the daily password at the residence of the American Chargé d’Affaires in Tokyo. On day two of his stay, the answer to the question ‘qui dare’ (who goes there?) was ‘musme’ (woman) (A7.2.43).⁴ He speculates that the Japanese practice of mixed public bathing had some causal connection with the lack of gender distinctions in the Japanese language (A7.2.15). He takes pleasure in explaining the etymology of Typhoon, from ‘tai’ (big) and ‘phoon’ (wind) (A7.2.39). So he added to his store of knowledge about languages while in Asia.

The final language he studied was Turkish when he started his search in Turkey for the Homeric Troy. The Gennadius Library has some documents in Turkish, including vocabulary lists (G Varia File 4.3).

Language learning was a part of Schliemann’s life from his early twenties into his late forties. He was no dabbler in languages. Languages were for him a tool to use. His import business, with interests in Europe, Asia, North Africa and the Americas, was managed by him with what in modern terms would be described as a ‘hands on approach’. This meant frequent correspondence with suppliers, sellers, investment advisers and bankers, and Schliemann was able to maintain both control of his affairs and cordial relations with his business associates by using a language appropriate to the circumstances. On a personal level a knowledge of languages was just as important. He married twice, his first wife being Russian and his second, Greek, and he had children by both marriages, the eldest of whom he encouraged to emulate himself in language acquisition. His places of residence in adult life included Amsterdam, St. Petersburg, Paris and Athens, and there were brief stays in America. His numerous travels which took him around the globe provided a further incentive for his linguistic efforts.

Schliemann’s surviving writings consist of business and personal letters, diaries, articles and books (not to mention the language exercises). A sociolinguistic study of this material could be useful. Here I make some preliminary remarks.

The business letters mostly follow predictable lines in that e.g. Schliemann wrote to the London branch of the Schroder firm in English and to the Hamburg branch in German. Only one correspondent, to my knowledge, objected to the language in which he was addressed. Mr Forssmann, stationed in Cairo, wrote, March 1864: “Your two letters addressed to me in Arabic indicate a great improvement on your part and a great degree of energy and labour which I can’t help giving you great credit for, but not being able myself to read that language I have had your letters translated and hope that if you do me the pleasure of keeping up our correspondence you will choose one of the few languages I do know” (B File 59.3.III).

The personal letters are even more interesting from a sociolinguistic point of view. It would appear that when business relations resulted in personal friendship, as in the case of J. Henry Schroder, French not English was used when other than business matters were discussed. In relation to his families, Schliemann used language as a means of control and as a sign of pleasure and displeasure. This is most marked in the case of his Russian wife to whom, after their separation in 1866, he seems never to have written in Russian. He informed her of their divorce in English (BBB28.139-41), and when their elder daughter, Natalia, died in 1869 he tried to console her with letters written in French and German (BBB28.328&329).

Diaries are written in a number of languages. Only partly true is the observation that Schliemann tended to write in the language of the country where he found himself (provided he knew the relevant language). In the Asian diaries there is surprising switching between languages for no apparent reason. Examples are two sentences of Italian in an account of Delhi that is otherwise in English (A5.95), and two sentences of English come into a description of Amoy given in French (A5.230). It is as though, in these cases, Schliemann hardly was aware of what he was doing. Unconscious language switching of this kind

4. I thank M. Doi, of the British School of Athens, for the information about the Japanese quoted by Schliemann in

his diaries.

would be likely to accentuate problems of language interference and errors due to this reason are fairly common in the diaries.

How good was Schliemann as a linguist? We have only written material to judge him by; however a study of good adult learners of languages suggests that if written competence is high, we may suppose that reading and spoken competence (though not necessarily with the pronunciation of a native speaker) was even higher.⁵ In an appendix I give three short samples of Schliemann's use of English, in a business letter, a personal letter and in an extract from a diary.

They show a very high degree of communicative competence, and divergences from any norm are trivial, and mostly are influenced by his German and French. Schliemann was clearly a successful language learner, and this accomplishment deserves due recognition at the time of the one hundredth anniversary of his death when credit was understandably given to him for his archaeological achievements.

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5. I refer to a paper presented at the 9th International Congress of Applied Linguistics, held in Greece, 1990, by Ingrid

Hudabiunigg, University of Hamburg, entitled 'What can good learners tell us about second language acquisition?'

REFERENCES

Schliemann, H., 1881. *Ilios, Stadt und Land der Trojaner*, Leipzig.

Meyer, E., 1953. *Heinrich Schliemann. Briefwechsel I*, Berlin: G. Mann.

APPENDIX

1. Letter to J. Henry Schroder and Co., London, dated Paris, 1 December, 1869.

Dear Sirs! In reply to your esteemed favour of yesterday I feel very grateful to you indeed for your kind attention in offering me to subscribe for the Dutch-Indian RR loan. But to my regret I cannot avail myself this time of your obliging offer, for I have no money free for the present.

I remain, Dear Sirs, Yours faithfully, Hy. Schliemann.

2. Letter to his daughter, Andromache, dated Cairo, 8 December, 1886.

My dearest daughter, I had the very great pleasure in receiving your charming letter of 3 inst., the more so as it is written in good English and shows

that you have made great progress of late under the wise direction of your excellent professor, Miss Areti, to whom please present my kindest regards.

Wishing you tip-top health and good progress on the field of science, I am your affectionate father. Hy. Schliemann.

3. Extract from diary A6.43. Peking, 1865.

The Emperor has 6 mandarins as ministers. The rang (sic) is marked here by buttons on their cap. There are here 9 degrees of rang and thus 9 different buttons. Peking's circumference is 25 miles with 1 1/2 millions of inhabitants. Gold and silver is not coined here because the people won't have confidence in the coin. There is a good post here but it forwards letters only to the provinces. The army may contain about 600,000 men.