

A trumpet blast for applied linguistics?

The nature, origins and impact of Wilhelm Viëtor's (1882) *Der Sprachunterricht muss umkehren!*

Richard Smith, University of Warwick

**The nature, origins and impact of
Wilhelm Viëtor's (1882) *Der
Sprachunterricht muss umkehren!*
(A trumpet blast for applied linguistics?)**

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Der Sprachunterricht – only a 32-page pamphlet – but clearly important

‘[*Der Sprachunterricht*] set the Reform Movement alight in Germany in 1882’ (Howatt 1984: 333).

‘[It] acted like a trumpet-blast, excellent for the awakening of sleepers’ (Münch, cited by Bahlsen 1903: 18)

‘the most widely read and most famous of all the writings of the reform movement’ (Bahlsen 1903: 18)

The 'Reform Movement' in modern language teaching

Reform Movement 'three basic principles' (Howatt 1984: 171):

- the primacy of speech [spoken vs written]
- the centrality of the connected text [connected text; inductive grammar]
- the priority of an oral methodology [use L2]

Questions

Henry Sweet (e.g. 1899) is widely seen as a precursor of applied linguistics – e.g. ‘Sweet’s work established an applied linguistic tradition in language teaching which has continued uninterruptedly to the present day’ (Howatt 1984: 189)

Was the Reform Movement *overall* an applied linguistic movement?

If so, given his importance in the Reform Movement, what is Viëtor’s place in the (pre-)history of Applied Linguistics?
[HoAL]

Nature – Origins – Impact of *Der Sprachunterricht* [HoLLT, and perhaps HoAL]

1. Nature

DER
SPRACHUNTERRICHT
MUSS UMKEHREN!

EIN BEITRAG
ZUR
ÜBERBÜRDUNGSFRAGE
VON
QUOUSQUE TANDEM
(WILHELM VIËTOR).

DRITTE, DURCH ANMERKUNGEN ERWEITERTE
AUFLAGE.



LEIPZIG.
O. R. REISLAND.
1905.

Title and sub-title

Title: *Der Sprachunterricht muss umkehren!*

(‘Language teaching must start afresh’: Sweet 1884; Howatt & Abercrombie 1984); but ‘umkehren’ = ‘do a U-turn’?)

Sub-title: *Ein Beitrag zur Überbürdungsfrage*

(‘A contribution to the question of stress and overwork in schools’: Howatt & Abercrombie 1984)

Dedication

DEM VERFASSER DER SCHRIFT:

DIE ÜBERBÜRDUNG DER SCHULJUGEND“

FRIEDRICH WILHELM FRICKE

ALS ZEICHEN

GLEICHER GESINNUNG

UND

AUFRICHTIGER HOCHSCHÄTZUNG.

Q. T.

Editions and authorship

1st (1882) edition published by Henninger (Heilbronn)
Author: 'Quousque Tandem' ['How much longer?']

From a speech by Cicero vs. Catiline to the Roman Senate in 63 BCE – 'Quousque tandem abutere, Catilina, patientia nostra' ('How much longer, Catiline, are you going to abuse our patience?')



Editions and authorship

2nd (1886) edition published by Henninger (Heilbronn),
'expanded with a foreword'

Author: 'Quousque Tandem (Wilhelm Viëtor)'

3rd (1905) edition published by Reisland (Leipzig),
'[further] expanded with notes' [and an additional
foreword]

Author: 'Quousque Tandem (Wilhelm Viëtor)'

Contents

[Preface (2nd ed.)]

[Preface (3rd ed.)]

Introductory matter – 1 page (3%)

I. Sprachliches ('Linguistic aspects') – 17 pages (53%)

II. Unterrichtliches ('Pedagogical aspects') – 14 pages (44%)

[Notes (3rd ed.)]

[Introductory matter] (1 page – 3%)

Para. 1: “Überbürdung der Schuljugend! Das Thema steht ja jetzt freilich auf der Tagesordnung. Gut gemeint; aber das Publikum kümmert sich da um Dinge, die es nicht versteht’

[...]

Para. 2: ‘Entschuldigen Sie, Herr Oberlehrer! Nicht um eine abgewendete Gefahr handelt es sich, sondern um eine traurige Thatsache.. Die Überbürdung ist da. Und noch mehr: wenn nicht allein, so doch nicht zum mindesten trägt die Schule und ihr System die Schuld’

[Introductory matter] (1 page)

Para. 1: “Children at school are overworked [overburdened]! This issue seems to turn up virtually every day, but for all its good intentions, the public is worrying about things it doesn’t really understand [...]”

Para. 2: ‘I’m sorry, sir [Headteacher], but we are not talking about an averted threat, but a melancholy fact. Overwork [Overburdening] exists, and though not alone, the school system has to bear some share of responsibility for it’

(transl. Howatt & Abercrombie 1984)

I. Sprachliches (17 pages)

Critical descriptions of existing classroom practice

L1 instruction

- not proceeding from sounds but letters
- grammar instruction: technical nomenclature without understanding
- inappropriate prescriptivism / dominance of historical linguistics

- L2 instruction – many examples of poor practice
- memorization of long lists of disconnected words
 - need for basic instruction in speech physiology
 - at first focus on pronunciation not orthography
 - criticisms e.g. of ‘declension’ of French and English by teachers in Germany
 - need to focus on understanding/meaning before memorization of rules, exceptions, verb lists etc.

II. Unterrichtliches (14 pages)

- Continued criticism of customary method, especially memorizing words and drill in rules
- Favours discovery learning – an inductive approach to grammar
- Attack on translation of disconnected sentences / lack of reading texts / cultural content
- Desire for priority for ML over classical languages
- Need for preparatory work in speech physiology, thus teachers should study phonetics
- Textbooks should contain interesting texts, incl. rhymes and stories, riddles and songs; the seasons; home; nature, etc. – Ss. should learn to converse about these in L2

Proposed classroom procedure: understanding and reproduction

- No home preparation
- T reads aloud; Ss. have books closed
- T. explains meaning of words; Ss. compete to translate orally
- T. / S. reads aloud; Ss. have books open
- Ss. translate orally
- Q & A re. content in L2 (sometimes, first in L1); Ss. answer in complete sentences

- Ss. reproduce the story in L2; books closed
- Ss. write answers to T's questions

Homework: *no* preparation; no memorizing of words; memorization for recitation only when above classwork is complete, i.e. when Ss. already 'know' the text

No L1 -> L2 translation

Grammar instruction only on basis of previously mastered texts

‘[A]fterwards, as a reward, take the children out into the woods and onto the sports field. You will find a sure welcome [...] Perhaps you may then discover that it has been worthwhile to sacrifice a couple of ancient and harmful prejudices in return for the gratitude of the children for even the smallest acts of affection and kindness that they so richly deserve’.
(transl. Howatt & Abercrombie 1984)

The 'Reform Movement' in modern language teaching

Reform Movement 'three basic principles' (Howatt 1984: 171):

- the primacy of speech [spoken vs written]
- the centrality of the connected text [connected text; inductive grammar]
- the priority of an oral methodology [use L2]

Additionally (in Viëtor), [ML vs. classical languages], [No L1 -> L2 translation]

But not [phonetic transcript]

2. Origins

Wilhelm Viëtor (1850–1918)



CV highlights

1884–1918: Chair of English Philology, University of Marburg

1884 – *Elemente der Phonetik* (enlarged and revised, 1893) [‘one of the founding classics of scientific phonetics’ (Howatt 1984: 333)]

1886 – reveals his identity as author of *Der Sprachunterricht*

1888 – founds *Phonetische studien*

1888–1918 President of the IPA (as it was to become)

Back to 1882 ...



Earlier years

1850 – born in Nassau; son of a pastor; attends Gymnasien in Wiesbaden and Weilburg

1869 – began studies in theology and philosophy [also, music and Sanskrit] – Universities of Leipzig, Berlin and Marburg

1872 – decides to pursue career as teacher; teaches German, Latin and music in different schools in England

1874 – resumes studies in Marburg (modern languages) and qualifies as a teacher

1876 – becomes Realschule teacher in Düsseldorf

1878 – becomes Realschule teacher in Wiesbaden (until 1882)

1879 – *Englische Schulgrammatik*, I. Leipzig: Teubner.

1880a – ‘Die wissenschaftliche grammatik und der englische unterricht’ [*sic*]. *Englische Studien* 3: 106–24.

1880b – ‘Schriftlehre oder Sprachlehre? Zur Behandlung der neufranzösischen Laut- und Formenlehre in der Schule’. *Zeitschrift für neufranzösische Sprache und Litteratur* 2: 43-62.

1882 – briefly becomes head of a private institute in Friedrichsdorf but then takes up role as ‘Lecturer on German’ at newly founded University College, Liverpool (1882–83).

Prospectus of Day Classes

IN

ARTS AND SCIENCE,

AND OF THE

EVENING LECTURES,

FOR THE YEAR 1882-3.

[use L2] *and* [L1 -> L2 translation]

INTERMEDIATE CLASS B.

Tuesday and Thursday, 2.0–3.0 p.m.

In this Class Exercises in German Composition will be given in the form of abstracts of pieces read, and of original letters, as well as consecutive pieces of English Prose, and it will thus be suited to Candidates for the London University Intermediate in Arts and B.A., and for the Cambridge Higher Local Examinations. The Class will as far as possible and agreeable to the Students be conducted in German. An additional hour on Saturday morning will be arranged for the Class to meet, if a sufficient number of those attending desire it, and will be specially devoted to the rendering of English into German.

TEXT-BOOKS.—Aue, *German Grammar* (as a book of reference)—Gruner, *Deutsche Musterstücke*, Part I in the Autumn Term—in the subsequent Term, Gruner, *Musterstücke*, Part II, and some selected work or works of Modern German Literature.

Fee.—For One Term, £1 7s. 6d. ; for Two Terms, £2 2s. ; for the Course, £3 (or in case of three days a week being taken, £2, £3, and £4 respectively).

[use L2] *and* [L1 -> L2 translation]

ADVANCED CLASS.

Tuesday and Thursday, 3.0–4.0 p.m.

This Class is for Students who have attained proficiency enough to be able to read rapidly. The Text-Books selected will depend upon the composition of the Class, which will be conducted entirely in German. The matter read will regularly be made the subject both of conversation and of exercises in Composition. Translating into German prepared or unprepared passages of English will also form a regular part of the instruction.

Fee.—For One Term, £1 7s. 6d. ; for two Terms, £2 2s. ; for the Course, £3.

It was his prior 6 years' teaching experience, and parallel experience writing *Elemente* – plus sources – that were at the origin of *Der Sprachunterricht*, not experience or influences in higher education at Liverpool.

1882 – wrote *Der Sprachunterricht* during a holiday visit to Llangollen, North Wales. His recent confirmation in post at UC Liverpool offered him the opportunity to look back over 6 years' teaching in German schools (Realanstalten) [preface to 2nd edition]

Experience-based orientation towards improvement of school teaching

1879 – *Englische Schulgrammatik*, I. Leipzig: Teubner.

1880a – ‘Die wissenschaftliche grammatik und der englische **unterricht**’ [sic]. *Englische Studien* 3: 106–24.

1880b – ‘Schriftlehre oder Sprachlehre? Zur Behandlung der neufranzösischen Laut- und Formen**lehre in der Schule**’. *Zeitschrift für neufranzösische Sprache und Litteratur* 2: 43-62.

1882 –*Der Sprach**unterricht** muss umkehren! Ein Beitrag zur **Überbürdungsfrage***

—— 1884. *Elemente der Phonetik und Orthoepie des Deutschen, Englischen und Französischen mit **Rücksicht auf die Bedürfnisse der Lehrpraxis***. Heilbronn: Henninger.

1888 – founded *Phonetische studien: Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche und praktische phonetik mit **besonderer rücksicht auf den unterricht in der aussprache***

[became *Die neueren Sprachen: Zeitschrift für den **neusprachlichen Unterricht*** in 1894]

1888 – the IPA was still primarily an association for teachers – the ‘Association fonétique **des professeurs de langues vivantes**’ – when he became its President

A kind of applied linguistics?

Not 'linguistics applied' but experience-based and broader, being oriented towards educational not just linguistic concerns (in this sense, both Viëtor and Jespersen were different from – less dogmatic re. phonetics being the 'indispensable foundation' than – Sweet)

Continuing interest in practice

———— 1893. *Deutsche, englische und französische Lauttafel*. Marburg: Elwert.

———— and F. Dörr. 1895 *Englisches Lesebuch*. Leipzig: Teubner.

———— 1895. *Die Aussprache des Schriftdeutschen*. Leipzig: Reisland.

———— 1902. *Die Methodik des neusprachlichen Unterrichts: Ein geschichtlicher Überblick in vier Vorträgen*. Leipzig: Teubner.

[lectures at Marburg summer schools for teachers]

3. Impact

Some assessments, re. 'influence'

Der Sprachunterricht = 'the most widely read and most famous of all the writings of the reform movement' (Bahlsen 1903: 18)

There were reviews of Viëtor 1882 in many journals and newspapers, swelling the 'Reform literature' (cf. Breymann's bibliographies)

'Seldom has a bulky folio made so great a sensation, produced so large a literature of praise and bitter attack, as this small pamphlet' (Bahlsen 1903: 18)

Early RM routes to impact 1 – relatively ‘scholarly’ influence

1. Correspondence and conference meetings among leading reformers

Jespersen – Franke – Passy

Jespersen – Lundell – Western – Passy

Viëtor – Passy – Jespersen

2. Acknowledgment (citing) by reformers of one another’s work, e.g.

Viëtor 1882 and Franke 1884 cite Sweet 1877

Viëtor 1882 and Kühn 1883 cite one another

Sweet 1884 cites Viëtor 1882 and Franke 1884

etc.

3. Publication, reviews and correspondence in existing journals, bulletins and newspapers

Vietor, Dr. W.: [unter d. Pseudonym *Quousque tandem.*]:
Der Sprachunterricht muß umkehren. Ein Beitrag zur
Überbürdungsfrage. Heilbronn. 1882. 38 S. 8".

I.: Sprachliches 8. — Unterrichtliches 25—38.

Ur. Die aufgestellten Forderungen sind in ihrer Allgemeinheit verkehrt, viele Behauptungen sind schief u. übertrieben (*Stein.*); schneidig, aufswärmste zu empf. (*Ste.*); zu empf. (*Wol.*); z. T. bedenkliche, z. T. oberflächliche Urteile (*Deu.*); klar, einleuchtend, tumultuarischer Stil (*Klg.*); zu empf. (*Hau.*); trotz mancher ernster Bedenken sehr zu empf. (*Kos.*); enthält wenig Förderndes; der 2. Teil ist eine Anthologie von Sätzen aus Günther, Sayce, Fricke u. s. f.; angenehm berührt der frische, lebhafte Ton (*An.*); statt dieser Klagelieder Jeremiä wäre eine eigne, schulmässige Leistung erwünscht gewesen (*A.*); brochure écrite avec vivacité, contient quelques vues judicieuses (—); frisch aber nicht frei von Übertreibungen (*Fuss*).

A. 1. Vietors Verdienst ist es, die nspr. Reformbewegung, wenn auch nicht veranlasst, so doch ganz wesentlich gefördert zu haben. Seine Schrift, so sagte einmal Münch, wirkte wie ein Trompetenstoss, zum Aufrütteln von Schläfern sehr gut geeignet.

A. 2. Vietors u. Kühns Forderung, dass auch die Formenlehre auf den Lautstand gegründet werden müsse, wird u. a. bekämpft von Ohlert, *Reform* (1886) S. 39f.; Hornemann, *Zur Ref.* (1886) S. 5f., 20f.; Rambeau in *ZfrS.* 1884, VI, R. 149; Eidam, *Phon.* (1887) S. 21f.; Tanger, *Muss etc.* (1888) S. 29; Weitzenböck, *Ref.* (1888) S. 63f.; Roden, *In wiefern*, (1890) S. 29f. etc., vor allem aber von Koschitz (1890). Kühn selber ist von jener Ansicht seitdem zurückgekommen.

Viëtor as just one reformer

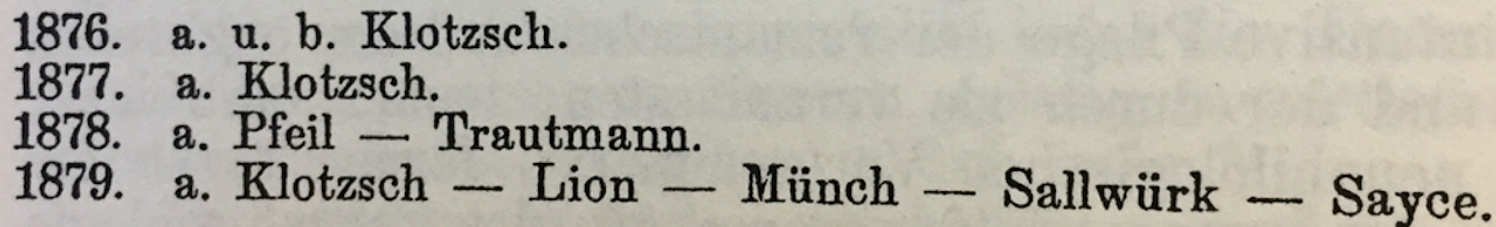
‘Viëtors Verdienst ist es, die nspr. Reformbewegung, wenn auch nicht veranlasst, so doch ganz wesentlich gefördert zu haben’ (Breymann 1895: 6)

Viëtor’s merit is, if not to have caused the Reform Movement, at least to have significantly promoted it’ (my transl.)

Some predecessors

Hermann Perthes

1875 – *Zur Reform der lateinischen Unterrichts auf Gymnasien und Realschulen* [Bahlsen]



1876. a. u. b. Klotzsch.
1877. a. Klotzsch.
1878. a. Pfeil — Trautmann.
1879. a. Klotzsch — Lion — Münch — Sallwürk — Sayce.

[Breymann (1895) bibliography]

Th. B.A. Klotzsch

1876, 1877 – books promoting a kind of natural method for French [Breymann]

Moritz Trautmann

1878 – Article in first volume of *Anglia*, promoting phonetic method [Bahlsen; Breymann; Viëtor]

Count Pfeil

1879 – *Eins!*; 1882 – *Unser Schulwesen ist krank!*; 1883 – *Wie lernt man eine Sprache?* [Bahlsen, Viëtor]

A. H. Sayce

1879 – ‘How to learn a language’. *Nature*. [Breymann; Viëtor]

Some predecessors

1880. a. Baudisch — Bechtel — Foth — Techmer — Vietor — Vietor — Vogel.
1881. a. Kamp — Kasten — Lehmann — Lion — Münch — Rehfeldt — Sallwürk — Scotland — Wilke — Würzner — Anon.
1882. a. Behne — Breymann — Hemme — Isaac — Jörges — Kühn — Saure — Swoboda — Schröer — Timme — Vietor — Voelker — Wolpert.

1881 — S. Brassai — *Die Reform des Sprachunterrichts in Europe.*
Ein Beitrag zur Sprachwissenschaft. Kolozsvár. [Viëtor]

Some near-contemporary publications

Karl Kühn

(1883) *Zur Methode des französischen Unterrichts*. Wiesbaden: Bermann.

Felix Franke

(1884) *Die praktische Spracherlernung auf Grund der Psychologie and der Physiologie der Sprache dargestellt*. Leipzig: Reiland.

Henry Sweet

(1884) 'The practical study of language'. *Transactions of the Philological Society*.

(1885) *Elementarbuch des gesprochenen Englisch*

Increase in RM publications, 1883– 1886

1883. a. Bihler — Heynacher — Josupeit — Klotzsch — Kortegarn — Münch — Pfeil — S. — Völkel — Wilke.
1884. a. Breymann — Breymann u. Moeller — Franke — Klinghardt — Koch — Sarrazin — Steiner — Sweet — Ulbrich — Weil.
b. Breymann — Breymann u. Moeller — Plattner — Schaefer.
1885. a. Bechtel — Bohnemann — Breusing — Ernst — Heims — Hermes — Hirsch — Hornemann — Klinghardt — Kühn — Löwe — Palmgren — Pohlmann — Pol — Rambeau — Rapp — Rhode — Rhode — Schäfer — Schulz — Siegl — Techmer — Ulbrich — Voelcker — Weitzenböck — Western — Würzner — Anon.
b. Breymann — Breymann u. Moeller — Breymann u. Moeller — Kühn — Löwe — Plattner — Schaefer.
1886. a. Ahn — Bätgen — Bierbaum — Böttcher — Bréal — Bretschneider — Duschinsky — Eidam — English — Hempfing — Hornemann — Jaeger — Kamp — Kühn — Lange — Maillard — Morres — Mühlefeld — Münch — Ohlert — Perle — Rambeau — Rambeau — Rhode — Rieger — Schmager — Schugh.
b. Mangold u. Coste.

More salient assessments, re. ‘impact’

‘[*Der Sprachunterricht*] set the Reform Movement alight in Germany in 1882’ (Howatt 1984: 333).

‘Seine Schrift [...] wirkte wie ein Trompetenstoss, zum Aufrütteln von Schläfern sehr gut geeignet’ (Breymann 1895: 6, citing Münch)

Viëtor’s book [...] acted like a trumpet-blast, excellent for the awakening of sleepers’ (transl. Bahlsen 1903: 18)

‘I am pleased to think that [the pamphlet] has actually played a role in prompting a Reform Movement [*Reformbewegung*] which has grown in strength since [1882]’ (Preface to *Der Sprachunterricht*, 2nd ed. (1886))

But ... ‘der Trompeter bildet sich ja nicht ein, er sei Feldherr und Führer’ (Viëtor 1903: 305)

‘The trumpeter does not imagine that he is a general and a leader’ (my transl.)

In what senses had a Reform *Movement* developed by 1886?

Klinghardt's (1884) review of Kühn (1883) states that 3 leading principles of reform are already generally accepted in Germany:

1. Principle of connected texts, 'the grammar being kept in the background' [Connected text]
2. Learning by imitation and thinking in the L2, not by translating [Use L2]
3. Living languages should be learnt before dead ones [ML vs classical languages]

(as reported by Sweet 1884: 581)

i.e. [inductive grammar] and [no L1 -> L2] were not (yet) established, along with [phonetic transcript]?

Early RM routes to impact 2: 'practical impact'

1. Junior scholars / teachers debated and voted on proposals at Philological Congresses

Some leading activists:

Viëtor (Germany)

Lundell (Sweden) Jespersen (Denmark), Western (Norway)

Giessen Philological Conference 1885, Modern Languages Section

Papers by Kühn, Rhode and Ihre ->

Viëtor chaired a meeting where the following principles were debated and voted upon:

- 1) Priority of spoken language, with initial presentation in phonetic transcription [Spoken vs written] [Phonetic transcript]
- 2) Elimination of translation into and out of L2 [No L1 -> L2] [Use L2]
- 3) Study of connected texts (including dialogues) [Connected text]
- 4) Inductive teaching of grammar [Inductive grammar]

[more extreme [Use L2]; addition of [Phonetic transcript]; no mention of [ML vs classical] vs. Viëtor 1882]

The same principles were discussed at the 1886 Stockholm conference, informing reform in Scandinavia

2. Founding of new associations of teachers, and new bulletins / journals

fonètik tîtcerz' asóciécon (Jan. 1886) ->
Association fonétique
des professeurs de langues vivantes (Jan. 1887)

3 January 1887 agreed principles, for reform of language teaching:

1. Start with spoken language [spoken vs written]
2. Use phonetic transcription [phonetic transcript]
3. Use connected texts, dialogues etc. [connected text]
4. Teach grammar inductively [inductive grammar]
5. Replace translation with reference to things / pictures, and paraphrase [use L2 - speaking]
6. Written homework should be retelling texts etc., not translation [use L2 – writing]

[very similar to Giessen 1885 & Stockholm 1886, with [use L2] expanded]

Conclusions

In HoAL, we need to consider *origins* in practice and *impact* on practice as well as scholarly influences on ideas and of ideas (cf. Smith 2016)

Der Sprachunterricht – with associated actions – seems to have had immediate impact, more significant perhaps than ‘influence’ of its ideas.

This impact was mediated by Viëtor’s actions/activism (form and style of the pamphlet as well as associated subsequent actions) and practical orientation more than by logical argumentation / scientific justification.

A trumpet blast for applied linguistics?

This depends on your conception of AL, and of HoAL.

If 'history of linguistic ideas applied', then perhaps Sweet's (1899) *Principles of Language-Study*, Palmer's (1917) *Scientific Study and Teaching of Languages* and Bloomfield's (1942) *Outline Study* are more salient.

If (also) history of action/activism/activity, then Viëtor's (1882) *Der Sprachunterricht*, with associated actions, has a claim to prominence in HoAL.

The case becomes very strong if we move away from a focus on individuals' ideas and valorise/investigate circulation of ideas within *networks* – i.e. RM as a/the pioneering applied linguistic network.

We should note, too, that the overall ‘Reform Movement kind of AL’ (not Sweet’s conception) drew on educational concerns, social, political and historical awareness, and psychology – with a foundation in educational experience – and was not linguistics applied.

By avoiding anachronism and revealing alternative conceptions existing in the past, HoLLT and HoAL could support revision to present-day conceptions of applied linguistic activity.