

HL 43 (2016)

A Late 19th-Century British Perspective on Modern Foreign Language Learning, Teaching, and Reform

The legacy of Prendergast's "Mastery System"*

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1. Introduction

The second half of the 19th century saw a great shift in approaches to modern foreign language learning and teaching in Britain. During this period, there was a rise in private foreign language learning due to sociocultural changes arising from the British Industrial Revolution with the rising middle class and increasing travel to the Continent and Middle East. There was also expansion of access to and growing professionalization of education in both the private and public sectors. This was accelerated by the introduction of compulsory State education and expansion of the university sector from 1871 onwards. The second half of the 19th century was a period in which there was increasing interest in new pedagogical approaches to language teaching in schools and universities. There was also at this time a marked a shift away from Classical language learning by a select number of pupils to a growing number of school and university students with an interest in the study of French and German (Anonymous 1889).

Thomas Prendergast (1807–1886) has been identified as the only significant British innovator in language learning pedagogy in this period by Howatt (1984) in his ground breaking historical review. Prendergast first published his book *The Mastery of Languages, or the art of speaking foreign tongues idiomatically (Mastery)* in 1864. He continued to refine his approach and expand its application in subsequent language manuals and revised editions until his death in 1886. Apart from his books, little other primary materials from Prendergast exists.¹ There has been limited consideration of Prendergast's method of language learning to date (see Tickoo 1986, Smith 2004, Atherton 2010).

* The author wishes to thank the following people for their assistance: Beverly Hallam and Stephen van Dulken, Families in British India Society; Rachel Roberts, Archivist at the Cheltenham Ladies School; Gabrielle Sedita, Assistant Archivist at Cheltenham College; the staff at the Cheltenham Local and Family History

Some few details of his ‘Mastery Method’ are reproduced in Howatt’s brief review, first published in 1984, and repeated in the second edition of his text co-authored by Widdowson (Howatt & Widdowson 2004). While these bare facts are included in most recent surveys of 19th century language teaching innovators (e.g., Zimmerman 1997, Thornbury 2004, Wheeler 2013, Richards & Rodgers 2014) there has been little work investigating the impact of Prendergast’s ideas on later reformers. However, from the recent secondary literature it is difficult to gauge what Prendergast’s actual legacy is. Some indication that his work may have been well received contemporaneously is suggested in the brief comment by Smith (2004: 365-366) that:

Prendergast devoted his retirement years to the elaboration of this system which, while far narrower and more utilitarian than Marcel’s, lent itself more readily to the production of innovative textbook materials, and which accordingly gained him wider contemporary renown.

More recently, Murphy & Baker (2015) judge that the work of Prendergast (together with that of Gouin and Marcel) had little influence on 19th century foreign language teaching methods. They assert that his work had minimal impact in the classrooms of his era, and his influence failed to reach beyond specialist circles. They account for this by arguing that, although he was an academic and scholar, there was a lack of professional associations, annual conferences, and serial publications through which his new ideas could become known. Alternatively, Richards & Rodgers (2014) suggest that because the work of Prendergast was developed outside the context of established circles of education, he lacked the means for wider dissemination and implementation. None of these points, raised by either Murphy and Baker or Richards and Rodgers, appear to be supported by the new evidence presented below.

In order to accurately assess what Prendergast’s influence was on language learning and teaching practice in the 19th and 20th century, extensive archival work has been carried out

Library; Joyce Cummings, Cheltenham Local History Society; Elizabeth Knight, Olney Historical Society; Argharad Meredith, Archives and Records Manager, Harrow School; and Peter Sibson. I would also like to thank the anonymous commentators for their feedback that lead to many improvements in this paper.

¹. Prendergast was born in Madras, India to a British family that had served in the Honourable East India Company for generations. After being educated in England, he returned to Madras as a senior Civil Servant. Upon retiring in 1858, he moved to Cheltenham, England. He subsequently lost his sight and began writing books about his “Mastery System”. For a detailed biographical account of Prendergast’s language learning history, life in the Madras Civil Service and subsequent retirement upon which he commenced his later career in language instruction see Lorch (2017).

to provide evidence that might support or refute these various claims. The limited secondary literature on Prendergast's legacy suggests that his approach may have influenced Henry Sweet's (1845–1912) and Harold E. Palmer's (1877–1949) ideas on language pedagogy. Although Sweet's (1899) direct comments on Prendergast were brief, critical, and dismissive, Atherton (2010) suggests there are indications that Sweet's ideas about the practical study of language were influenced by Prendergast. Sweet, like Prendergast, called for reform in language learning. Atherton (2008) points to certain passages in Sweet (1913 [1877]) that echo the sentiments Prendergast expressed a decade earlier in *Mastery*: “that we have the curious phenomenon of people studying French and German for twenty years, and yet being unable to understand a single sentence of the spoken language ...”. Later, Atherton (2010: 22) proposes that Prendergast may have had a direct but unattributed effect on Sweet:

There is a vague suspicion, however, that he [Sweet] has read more of Prendergast than he admits: sometimes a word or an image is echoed, for instance the image of language as a *mosaic* which grammarians pull to pieces (Prendergast, 1864: 126; Sweet, 1884: 34). Certainly both focus as we have seen on the association of ideas, on natural idiomatic sentences to be grasped as wholes and analysed afterwards.

Sweet's approach stressed that accurate pronunciation of the target language must be the first stage in foreign language learning as does Prendergast's. Moreover, in Sweet's Presidential address to the Philological Society in 1877, he recommends an approach to language learning reform that shares some features with Prendergast's: learners should begin with “natural sentences” that are presented in a purely phonetic form. Sweet, like Prendergast also suggests that a limited vocabulary of approximately 3,000 words will provide beginners with all they need for a good command of the language (Sweet 1913 [1877]). The evidence for Prendergast's influence on Palmer has also been debatable. Some commentators on the history of language teaching suggest Prendergast did have an influence on Palmer, and point to the resemblance of his use of sentence imitation and substitution drill procedures, while others point to a lack of any direct citation (Tickoo 1986, Howatt & Widdowson 2004, Smith 2004). Indeed, the similarity of Palmer's substitution method to Prendergast was noted by contemporaries (Rippmann 1916). Atherton (2010) also discusses the possibility that other linguists such as the Rev. Archibald Henry Sayce (1846–1933) may have incorporated some of Prendergast's ideas in his work, although again without attributing him explicitly. He suggests that like Sweet, Sayce failed to

acknowledge Prendergast's contribution because his approach derived from an earlier, non-empirical paradigm.

The objective of the present investigation is to pursue the suggestion that Prendergast's innovative ideas permeated much of the later work of the language reformers at the end of the 19th century. This paper will present new historical evidence from both professional and lay language learner and teacher sources. The aim is to determine the nature of the impact Prendergast's work had and how long it persisted. The question of interest addressed here is the nature of the contemporaneous reception and later legacy of Prendergast's method of language learning. The objective is to demonstrate how the innovations contained in his "Mastery System" were discussed and what uptake there was by the lay public, educationalists, and other professionals. Evidence of the dissemination of his ideas will be explored geographically, as well, to determine if his sphere of influence extended beyond Britain.

McLelland & Smith (2014: 3) suggest that when compared to the scholarship that exists in France and Germany, "[f]or the history of modern foreign language teaching in Britain, the equivalent research foundations are almost entirely lacking, and the research landscape is patchy". The purpose of this case study is to amplify to the relatively sketchy picture of language teaching practice in Britain in the period when Prendergast first published his books in the 1860s through the turn of the century and the decades beyond when major reform in language pedagogy took hold. The present work makes a contribution to the understanding the landscape of language learning and teaching pedagogy in Victorian England.

2. *Prendergast's pedagogical ideas as set out in the Mastery*

The initial sentence in the preface to Prendergast's first book *Mastery* (1864) frames an original and particular pedagogical approach: "The design of this treatise is to show by an analysis of the child's process [...]. That the power of speaking foreign languages idiomatically, may be attained with facility by adults without going abroad". This clearly signals Prendergast's intention that his book is intended for adults' private study of foreign languages. Prendergast goes on to enumerate several other basic principles to his approach that represent original innovations in pedagogical approach: he rejected learning individual vocabulary items independent of sentences or any explicit study of grammar in the initial stages of language learning. Prendergast asserted that speaking "idiomatically" was achieved by oral repetition, and relied on memory rather than logic. Not only did Prendergast reject the then standard approach to language teaching using explicit presentation of grammatical

structure and practiced through translation (Weihua 2013), but he also rejected the value of memorizing word lists. The commonly held assumption was that the best way to learn a new language was deductive. This meant beginning with lists of nouns, tables of the inflectional forms of verbs, and the explicit presentation of grammatical rules.

Prendergast's rationale for his dramatically different approach was that these were not part of the natural language learning process in children, either for their mother tongue, or for additional languages. The acquisition of grammar was to be an inductive process. The sentence material Prendergast judged to be the most worthwhile for the beginning language learner to concentrate on from the outset were complex ones that represented exemplars of all the grammatical structures of the language. As for the type of sentences to be employed by the beginner, Prendergast emphasises that they should be comprised of between twenty and thirty words, being formed with the most common words in the language. Some sample sentences offered in English are:

Why did you not ask him to come, with two or three of his friends, to see my brother's garden?

Can you let me have a sitting-room on the first floor at the front of the house, and two bedrooms on the second floor at the back?

When the man who brought this parcel for me yesterday evening calls again, give it back to him, and tell him that this is not what I ordered at the shop. (Prendergast 1864: 165)

He describes his rationale thus (*ibid.*, p.109):

The foreign language ought to be presented to the learner in such a manner as to show him, in the primary sentences, the most striking contrasts to the constructions in his own tongue, in order to accustom him, from the outset, to employ forms of expression which are quite at variance with his habits of thought.

He suggests that the practice of mastering the fluent production of these long sentences also leads to grammatical knowledge and insists that due to specific properties of memory and learning this must be instituted in a particular manner (p. 107):

Every well-chosen sentence that we 'master' in its integrity, puts us into possession of some of those items which are exhibited in grammars, and thus we may gradually learn the whole of them. But those items which we learn first cannot be distinctly and practically

retained, unless we can employ them with perfect freedom; nor will the genuine construction and collocation remain durably in the memory, unless recapitulation and imitative oral composition on a limited scale are practiced every day.

Prendergast's focus on the goal of producing fluent spoken utterances was another departure from the 'classical' language teaching methods of the day. He placed an emphasis on mastering the oral form of the language in contrast to the literary in contrast to the 'classical' tradition. Reading and writing were considered a later objective in more advanced stages of language learning, rather than a primary goal for Prendergast.

Moreover, as indicated in the quote above, his method was framed in terms of how memory functioned. This was another unique aspect of his approach. Throughout his books, he insisted that the beginning language learner would get the best results by the oral repetition of a small group of long sentences composed from high frequency words for a short duration several times a day. These technical strictures were grounded in psychological principles regarding the nature of memory function and the properties of the core lexicon. The originality of Prendergast's psycholinguistic ideas is striking. However, space here does not permit a fuller exposition on this topic.²

Four years after the publication of the *Mastery*, Prendergast published the *Handbook to the Mastery Series* (henceforth: *Handbook*) that further developed the theoretical ideas behind his practical method. This was followed by five individual volumes dedicated to language learning materials for the main European modern and classical languages. Manuals for learning French and German also appeared in 1868, with the one on Spanish the next year. Manuals for languages of Hebrew (Prendergast 1871) and Latin (Prendergast 1872) followed in quick succession. While the first book was published in London by Bentley's, the *Handbook* and subsequent volumes on individual languages were all published by the arguably more prestigious firm of Longmans, Green & Co. in England and Appleton's in the USA. Both the British and American editions continued to be revised and republished over the next four decades as will be detailed below.

² This topic has been explored in two conference presentations by the author: "A 19th-century Applied Psycholinguist: Thomas Prendergast (1807?-1886) and the Mastery System of Language Learning". Connecting Cultures? An International Conference on the History of Teaching and Learning Second/Foreign Languages, 1500-2000. University of Nottingham, July 2014 and "Victorian Ideas regarding Language Learning: Thomas Prendergast's (1807?-1886) Mastery System". ICHoLS, International Society for the History of Linguistics Science, Vila Real, Portugal, August 2014. Lorch, M. "Repetition and Core Vocabulary: 19th century Psycholinguistic Ideas about Second Language Learning" 2016, forthcoming.

3. *Reception of Prendergast's Mastery Series*

There are a variety of sources that have been located documenting the reception of Prendergast's new method of language learning: press reviews, testimonials printed by the publisher, and personal endorsements. These reflect many different constituencies, degrees of professional authority, and agendas. Taken together they help build up a picture of the audience for Prendergast's ideas.

3.1 *Press advertisements and notices*

When Prendergast's first book was published, there were advertisements taken out in many national and local British newspapers, and notices appeared in a variety of press outlets. For example, *The Morning Post* (London, England) (Anonymous 1864) published the announcement of the publication of his book *The Mastery* by Richard Bentley, Publisher in Ordinary to her Majesty for the price of 8 Shillings and sixpence. The book was given a brief notice in several of the London newspapers (e.g., *The Examiner*). These were repeated in numerous regional papers throughout England. There were also more scholarly notices such as that in *The Athenaeum* (1864) written by Augustus de Morgan (1806–1871), Professor of Mathematics at University College, London. Subsequent books by Prendergast, which were published by Longmans, were also advertised, received press notice, and review. For example, an anonymous review in the newspaper *John Bull* (Anonymous 1868a) noted:

Among the many educational books issued by Messrs. Longmans those of Mr. Thomas Prendergast are not the least valuable. We have before us two of his *Mastery Series* (*French and German*) and the *Handbook*. This plan is designed to secure economy of time and labour, by compressing a great deal of the language into a small compass, and excluding everything not essential. We can heartily commend them.

The *Handbook*, and *French and German* manuals were also positively reviewed in *The Athenaeum* (1868) by James Elwin Millard (1823–1894), Headmaster of Magdalene College School, Oxford. However, not all notices of Prendergast's books were complimentary. One anonymous negative review of the German manual appeared in *The London Review* (Anonymous 1868b: 188) which includes comments such as "There is nothing original in the plan". It continues by offering the complaint that the English phrases are idiomatic and unintelligible, and wholly "a disgrace".

At the same time, Prendergast's books were published by D. Appleton & Co. in the USA, cost 50 cents. The American publishers also issued many press advertisements of Prendergast's books. Press notices and reviews began to appear in the American newspapers as well.

3.2 *Book Endorsements*

Another potentially interesting source of information regarding the reception of Prendergast's books comes with an acknowledged positive bias. Each book was published with excerpts from reviews and testimonials included in the front and end matter of each volume, as was common practice at the time. These provide evidence of the widespread dissemination of Prendergast's works. It should be noted that given the cryptic nature of these excerpts, it has not been possible to identify the original sources of these quotes to verify them.

Some examples from the British editions are: "We know that there are some who have given Mr. Prendergast's plan a trial, and discovered that in a few weeks its results had surpassed all their expectations" (*Record*); "A week's patient trial of the French Manual has convinced us that the method is sound". (*Papers for the Schoolmaster*); "We know of no other plan which will infallibly lead to the result in a reasonable time" (*Norfolk News*). In the American editions are other examples: "We would advise all who are about to begin the study of languages to give it a trial" (*Rochester Democrat*); "For European travelers this volume is invaluable" (*Worcester Spy*).

3.3 *Personal testimonials*

Archival research has also uncovered numerous personal testimonials in the private sphere. One early personal report of the success of Prendergast's method is from George Maxwell Gordon (1839–1880) an English missionary in the Punjab, India. Gordon went to South India in 1868 (a decade after Prendergast had left the country). His letters describe his attempt to learn the local language Tamil upon his arrival. In a letter of January 6, 1868 from Sattur, Madras Presidency Gordon wrote:

My present occupation reminds me of you, because it was you who recommended me to try 'Prendergast on the Mastery of Language'. I sincerely hope you have found the system as helpful to you in Hebrew as I have in Tamil [...]. The advantage of such a system *here* is

very great. [...]. I have only been six weeks at work, and I am going to try, very shortly, preaching to the heathen. (Lewis 1888: 43)

Here is direct evidence of an individual requiring the acquisition of immediate foreign language fluency for professional reasons who embraced Prendergast's method. However, Gordon's correspondence also provides some indication of more widespread admiration for the *Mastery*. He notes in a letter later the same year that Prendergast's "system seems to be getting very popular in America, and on the Continent also. Here [in Madras] it is too hastily condemned" (Lewis 1888: 44). This comment provides a confirmation of Prendergast's apparent success that is signalled by the life history of his books detailed below. In another later letter the same year, Gordon states that he has been corresponding with Prendergast³ and expressed the hope that he will persevere with his Tamil and Telegu manuals.⁴

While Missionaries such as Gordon and others mentioned below evidently used Prendergast's method to learn languages to support their vocation, other learners had more recreational interests. Evidence of the utility of his method for such language students was a more direct estimation of its success in some ways. This is because Prendergast had originally intended his method to be used for self-instruction by lay people rather than those with a professional interest. One notable example comes from the Oxford University Mathematician Charles Dodgson (1832–1898) alias Lewis Carroll. In a letter dated July 19, 1881 to the novelist Charlotte Yonge (1823–1901), Dodgson (Carroll 1979: 437-438) recommends Prendergast's system:

I have undertaken on behalf of Mr. Prendergast with whom I am acquainted as a correspondent, to recommend his system of learning languages to your favourable notice [...] having myself tested his system by learning his French Handbook (I am now learning the German one) I can confidently recommend it to any one wishing to begin to acquire the art of conversing in a foreign tongue.

³. It was noted that Prendergast carried out "constant" correspondence about his Mastery Method with "almost all civilized countries" up until a few days of his death (Senex, 1887). This was said to be done with the aid of his secretary Mr. William Bishop Strugnell (1824–1907). However, I have only uncovered one extant archive copy of a letter with a private individual discussing the merits of his system to learn a foreign language (Prendergast, T. 1866). This was found in the correspondence of Thomas Young Hall (1802–1870), a mechanical engineer, director, and investor in the Hartlepool Docks and Railway, and Towneley Colliery, Newcastle. As Senex also included other biographical errors it is not clear if there was an evidential basis for this comment. In fact, there are some doubts as to whether Strugnell served this role (see Lorch 2017).

⁴. No record has been found that indicates Prendergast produced anything beyond the fragments of Telugu outlined in a brief chapter in his first book. A detailed treatment of Prendergast's knowledge of various languages of India is dealt with in Lorch (2017).

His library inventory indicates that Dodgson owned copies of all five of Prendergast's language manuals and his French copy is recorded "with many corrections by Lewis Carroll in MS" (Lovett 2005: 242).

Another example of an enthusiastic admirer of Prendergast's method was the American author Edward Everett Hale (1822–1909). In the introduction to his 1886 book *Seven Spanish Cities, and the way to them*, Hale describes his use of Prendergast's method to learn Spanish, which he had learned to read as a schoolchild but had never spoken. He recounts how he practiced aboard ship during the ocean crossing with the aid of a friend. Hale describes his communicative success upon arriving in Spain and states: "... my experience gives me great confidence in the 'Mastery system'. I had, long before, arrived at great distrust of all the ordinary systems" (Hale 1886: 9). Hale (1886: 10) gives a quintessential description of the kind of language learning that Prendergast had intended from the outset:

The 'Mastery' theory is, that if you learn absolutely well fifteen sentences, which contain all these necessary words of relation, you will plunge almost fearlessly into conversation. Of this theory, I am a living confirmation. For here am I, of nature very timid and shamefaced, who, under Mr. Prendergast's lead, boldly attacked, in three weeks' time, porters, fellow-travellers, literati, and table companions.

Hale took this positive personal experience and used it to literary ends. He has a fictional character employ Prendergast's Mastery system to learn Chinese⁵ in one of his short stories "Colonel Ingham's Journey" published in *Harper's Magazine* (Hale 1883).

3.4 Professional recommendations by contemporaries

More interesting, perhaps, are the evaluations of Prendergast's method by individuals that provide more direct evidence of uptake by language students and instructors. One such view comes from the Scottish teacher and missionary John Murdock (1819–1904). When he revised his book *The Indian Missionary Manual; or, Hints to young missionaries in India* for a second edition in 1870, he encouraged all English missionaries to adopt Prendergast's method for their language learning of the local vernaculars and for French and German.

⁵. Although a manual adopting Prendergast's method into Japanese is documented (discussed below), I have found no evidence of one for Chinese as referred to in Hale's fiction.

In addition, language educators applied his approach to other non-European languages for use in different professional settings. One example is a manual for English speakers to learn the Indian language of Uriya by Thomas James Maltby (1874). An employee of the Indian Civil Service, as Prendergast had been, Maltby intended his manual to be of use to various British Government officials there. With regard to his chosen pedagogical approach, Maltby states: “I would refer the learner to the ‘Mastery of Languages’ by T. Prendergast, Esq., late Madras Civil Service, which is by far the best book upon the subject I have ever read” (Maltby 1874: xiii).

The Rev. Samuel Robbins Brown (1810–1888), who was a missionary to China and Japan, made a more comprehensive and explicit adaptation of Prendergast’s approach. In 1878, he published *Prendergast's Mastery System, Adapted to the Study of Japanese or English*. In the preface, Brown (1878: 2) explains his motivation as follows:

The writer was led to adopt this [Prendergast] method, when engaged three years ago in the superintendence of a Government school. Deeply impressed with the want of something better than the old-fashioned modes of teaching, he prepared the series of lessons contained in this manual, and used them with remarkably favorable results [...].

After Prendergast’s books were initially published in the 1860s and early 1870s, many rival language instruction manuals began to appear. These borrowed heavily from Prendergast’s work, but also claimed their own originality and innovation. One prominent example is Richard Sigismund Rosenthal (1845–post 1901). In 1878, he self-published in German a book whose title echoes Prendergast’s: *Das Meisterschafts-System zur praktischen und naturgemäßen Erlernung der französischen und englischen Geschäfts- und Umgangssprache: Französisch; eine neue Methode, in drei Monaten eine Sprache sprechen, schreiben und lesen zu lernen; zum Selbst-Unterricht* (Rosenthal 1878). Rosenthal subsequently published numerous language instruction manuals in German and English. He left his native Leipzig for a brief stay in Britain, and then settled in America where he had a very active career as a language entrepreneur. In a later English edition of his French manual for “a short and practical method of acquiring complete fluency of speech”, he states “In my own course, I can go no further than to lay the foundation which has been so well formulated by Prendergast” (Rosenthal 1885: 183). It is clear that Rosenthal incorporated many of Prendergast’s pedagogical methods in his own approach, such as the duration and frequency of sessions.

However, Rosenthal (1885: 19) was also quick to point out its limitations, perhaps in an effort to elevate the value of his own work:

Prendergast, perhaps the most original mind among modern philologists, worked out a most able theory; but being himself no linguist, and unfortunately being totally blind, he was obliged to leave the practical part of his work to his assistants, who made – as he acknowledged himself to me – a most miserable failure in the compilation of his text-books.⁶

This was, it seems, a fair point of criticism from Rosenthal, and one that will be repeated by others (detailed below). However, Prendergast made it clear in the prefaces to each of his manuals that he did not create the model sentences for each language without assistance. Rather, he acknowledged the contribution of various native speakers in the preparation of the materials according to his method. So, for example, Professor J. Duprat Mérigon, BA is credited with assisting in the development of the sentences and variations presented in the French manual, along with the assurance of the “purity” of the models. Herr Hermann Ludwig Theodore Sack, teacher at the Clapham Grammar School, is similarly acknowledged in the preface of the German manual. The sentences were rendered into Spanish with the assistance of Don José Sánchez de Santa Maria of London, examiner for the College of Preceptors, while the Rev. Thomas Charles Fry, M.A., who was a Master at Cheltenham College, assisted in the preparation of the material for the Latin manual. Interestingly, for the volume on Hebrew, the assistant is an anonymous Oriental scholar who, we are assured, has the highest attainments and distinguished reputation. No further traces these individuals or the nature of their relationship with Prendergast have been located. The use of native speaker informants to generate the materials for his language teaching manuals may indicate adherence to a pedagogical principle, or may have been more of a practical necessity.⁷ While the quality of the actual sentences was one of the major points of weakness noted in most of the reviews of his work, many still found the Mastery System to be the approach of choice for language learning and teaching.

3.5 Professional recommendations continued long after Prendergast's death

⁶ I have not found any further evidence of the relationship between Prendergast and Rosenthal.

⁷ It is not clear to what extent Prendergast himself could speak any of these languages. This topic has been addressed in detail in paper on Prendergast's language learning biography (Lorch 2017).

While there were some minor criticisms, many of the innovators in language learning and teaching in the next three decades were influenced directly by Prendergast's ideas. Other innovators cited Prendergast as a source of pedagogical ideas in their books which were influential in their own rights, for example François Gouin's (1831–1896) *L'Art d'enseigner et d'étudier les langues* (1880) and Maximilian Berlitz's (1852–1921) *Méthode Berlitz pour l'enseignement des langues modernes* (1887). Well into the 20th century, Prendergast's approach was still serving as a pedagogical foundation for language learning methods in immersion settings.

One such was developed by the missionary Thomas Fulton Cummings (1863–1942) in 1916. Cummings wrote several language learning manuals that were intended for English foreign resident language students in India. His method is an acknowledged adaptation of Prendergast's, with the addition of Sweet's phonetic approach. In Cummings's autobiographical remarks included in the preface, a litany of different personal language learning experiences is detailed by the author. Cummings notes that the traditional approaches to language tuition in school for various languages had failed to produce results for him, while self-tuition with Prendergast's method resulted in an improvement in both his own language learning, and subsequently, his language teaching success. Cummings employed Prendergast's method of repeating whole sentences that included the full range of parts of speech and grammatical forms from the beginning, referring to it as "the slip method" in his own manuals for the learning of various Indian vernacular languages. However, the complaint regarding the poor material in the language manuals made by Rosenthal, mentioned above, was echoed by Cummings. In his annotated bibliography of significant language learning books, Prendergast's *Handbook* is noted to be "excellent in theory, poor in applications in manuals" (Cummings 1916: 100).

Even as late as 1940, in parts of the world where Colonial rule in multilingual contexts still existed, Prendergast's method was still found useful for communicative language learning. The Australian linguist Arthur Capell (1902–1986) urged those professionals who were to embark in learning any of the various indigenous languages of New Guinea to consult the methods of Prendergast. His work was recommended alongside the works of Cummings, Sweet, and Palmer (Capell 1940). This is indication of an impressive legacy for Prendergast, as his work was by then almost eighty years old.

4. Uptake by Contemporary School Educators

Although it was Prendergast's stated intention at the outset that his method be used by adults in self-study at home, transition to use in classroom settings with children came almost immediately. A version of the French *Mastery* manual specially adapted for use with children in British schools appeared in the same year as Prendergast's original (Coignou 1868). Its expressed intention was to aid in the passing of examinations, something with which Prendergast had not initially concerned himself. Alfred Coignou's adapted edition also includes notes to the teacher and detailed lesson plans. There are indications of a rapidly expanding school market for his books. Coignou's adapted version was published in a third edition in 1871, under the title *The Public School Edition of the French Mastery Manual* (Coignou 1871). It is not clear whether Prendergast was directly involved in or authorised Coignou's work.

At the same time, revised editions of Prendergast's own manuals began to acknowledge and sanction this change of use in the classroom. New editions of his books began to include advice to schoolteachers in the introductory pages of his manuals. The success of his method for the passing of exams apparently became a point of pride for Prendergast. According to William Spurrell (1813–1889) author of *Practical lessons in Welsh in imitation of the natural method* (1881), Prendergast advertised the fact that a Woolwich cadet passed examinations in colloquial Spanish, Italian, and Hindi⁸ by using his method of study for half an hour a day for a year. It appears that the spread of Prendergast's method was also appreciated in the United States early on. In a 20th-century review of the history of French language teaching, Watts (1963: 113) states, "The 'Mastery System' of Thomas Prendergast of London [*sic*] began to occupy an important place in American French instruction during the late 1860s". Unfortunately, Watts does not provide any substantiating evidence for this observation. We do know that all of Prendergast's books were published simultaneously in London and New York editions.

4.1 *Early adopters*

One notable example of uptake, albeit outside of more mainstream sphere of British educational institutions was the newly created public schools for girls, where innovations in pedagogy were embraced. The Headmistress of the Cheltenham Ladies' College (founded 1853), Dorothea Beale (1831–1906) was an early adopter of Prendergast's method for the teaching of modern languages. His approach was singled out for favourable mention in her

⁸. There were no manuals for Italian or Hindi published under Prendergast's name.

responses to the British Government Schools Inquiry Commission in 1869.⁹ She wrote approvingly of Prendergast's inductive method for the teaching of grammar, contrasting it favourably with current practice:

When sentences are first taught and variations made, upon the plan recommended by Mr. Prendergast, I have found that the children do not pronounce with the usual British accent, and do learn to express themselves in idiomatic French and German. They get to know... the sentence-moulds of other languages. Besides, the power of observation is cultivated, they learn to make rules themselves, and their grammatical faculty is developed. So far from the mastery system *rightly understood* being a superficial one, it is the most thorough I know (Beale 1869: xviii–xix; italics in the original.)

Prendergast's method was also embraced by those outside of the conventional school system by teachers of the Deaf in the USA. In fact, the preface to the first American edition of his *Handbook* in 1868 was written by Professor Edward Miner Gallaudet (1837–1919), President of the National Deaf-Mute College,¹⁰ Washington, D.C. Gallaudet describes his trip to Europe in the summer of 1867 to inspect the systems of deaf-mute education in various countries. While he was a fluent speaker of French, he knew no German. He goes on to explain the very positive outcome of his experience using Prendergast's system in preparation for his travels:

Most opportunely making the acquaintance of Mr. Prendergast and of his theory before leaving England for the Continent, the writer determined to put the Mastery system to the test in Germany. He had not the advantage of the valuable manual recently given to the public...The theory, however, of the Mastery system he followed implicitly. The results which crowned the labor of the first week were so astonishing that he fears to detail them fully, lest doubts should be raised as to his credibility. But this much he does not hesitate to claim, that, after a study of less than two weeks, he was able to sustain conversation in the newly-acquired language on a great variety of subjects. (Gallaudet 1868: 9)

It appears that Gallaudet (1868: 9) was happy to serve as a strong advocate of the system: "So completely did the Mastery system vindicate its practicability [...] that the writers [...]"

⁹. Beale was invited to give evidence on the state of education for women.

¹⁰. This was called the Columbia Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb and the Blind upon its founding in 1857, adopted the name National Deaf-Mute College in 1864, and continues to this day as Gallaudet University.

recommend[s] it [...] not only to scholars and students of linguistic science [...] but to tourists and pleasure-seekers [...].” At a Conference of Principals of Institutions for the Deaf and Dumb in 1868, Gallaudet (1869: 34) stated that he “had been so convinced of the benefit of that [Prendergast’s] system that he would recommend all instructors of deaf-mutes to examine these treatises, feeling sure they would gather from them valuable suggestions”. Prendergast’s books were also favourably reviewed alongside Marcel’s in an article on the acquisition of foreign languages by deaf mute individuals (Fay 1869). By 1872, the teaching staff at the National College for the Deaf were also convinced of its utility, and Prendergast’s French and German manuals were adopted for the foreign language curriculum (Anonymous 1873: 5).

4.2 *Entering the mainstream*

There is evidence of the growing acceptance of Prendergast’s method amongst more conventional school educators. His books began to be adopted by educators across England. His *Mastery* is listed as one of twelve Modern Languages books in the national publication read by principals of schools, tutors, and governesses *The Scholastic Register* (Anonymous 1869). Prendergast’s books also featured in amongst lists of recommended school textbooks in more public outlets. One such example is an advertisement appearing in an 1880 issue of the *Cheltenham Looker-On*, where numerous highly regarded schools were located.¹¹ It indicates that Prendergast’s German manual was still included in a list of School Books for sale over a decade after its first edition (Anonymous 1880).

A development of note several years after his death was the offering of formal courses in language learning that employed Prendergast’s method:

Supplementing the instruction imparted in our Schools and Colleges, a course of Twelve Lectures is announced by Mr. J.L. Powell, expository of the late Mr. Prendergast’s System for learning languages, which, so far as applies to the three sister tongues of France, Italy¹² and Spain, offers many advantages to those who have had no opportunity of acquiring them on the spot, or from the teaching of a competent native linguist. And seeing how rapid and popular is now the intercourse subsisting between these countries and our own, among all classes of the community, the methods for acquiring their language propounded in Mr. Prendergast’s System—which would seem to be the purpose of Mr. Powell’s Lectures to explain—deserves to be more generally known. (Anonymous 1888: 283)

¹¹. Cheltenham College, founded in 1841, was considered one of the leading new public schools of the day.

¹². Prendergast did not produce a manual for learning Italian, only Latin.

Other notices appeared in various local newspapers such as the *Sunderland Daily Echo* advertising language classes using Prendergast's material from his French manual as late as 1890. This indicates that up to the turn of the century there was still a market for his particular approach to foreign language learning.

4.3 Contemporary British Educators' views

In the 1860s and 1870s, British education was undergoing a great sea change. Government reform during this period would eventually lead to the creation of universal primary education and further development and expansion of the secondary and university sectors. There was huge growth in the professionalization of teachers and scrutiny of educational practices. A number of new organizations, journals, and lecture series to provide forums for consideration of language teaching were instituted. Atherton (2010) documents some supporters and detractors of Prendergast's work in this context in the mid-1870s. He draws on an exchange of letters in the *Journal of Education* between critics of Prendergast such as the author of *Handbook of the History of the English Language* Augustus Henry Keane (1833–1912) and Prendergast's "defensive" replies.¹³ Prendergast also wrote to the *Educational Times* in response to Quick's assessment of his work in the 1875 lecture to the College of Preceptors, discussed below, which was printed there in full (Prendergast 1875). In another lecture there on the acquisition of language later that year the philologist Alexander John Ellis (1814–1890) also explicitly mentions Prendergast alongside other notables (Ellis 1875). These examples indicate that his work was known and discussed by English educators and linguists in the 1870s.

A stronger indication that Prendergast's method had achieved a place in the academic canon amongst the teaching profession by the 1870s is evidenced by the fact that one of the questions included in the College of Preceptors examinations for the Licentiate'ship on Theory and Practice of Education was: "Give an account of *one* of the methods of teaching languages which bear the names respectively of Ascham, Jacotot, Robertson or Prendergast" (Anonymous 1875: 25). In 1879, J.M.D. Meiklejohn, Professor of Education at the University of St. Andrews, Scotland presented a training course for teachers. In the ninth lecture, on the topic of Modern Languages, he presented three methodological approaches—Jacotot, Naismith and Prendergast (Anonymous 1879).

¹³. Apart from these two letters to the editor that appeared in 1875 there is little evidence that Prendergast actively contributed to professional educational discussion or debate. This may be due to his blindness, advanced age and modest character as much as to his identity as a retired civil servant rather than a teacher.

I have located additional views by other British educators on using Prendergast's method for their own language learning and in teaching public school boys through extensive archival investigation. These are drawn from the personal recollections, lectures, and essays of several prominent educationalists of the day: Robert Hebert Quick (1831–1891), Edward Ernest Bowen (1835–1901), Francis Storr (1839–1919), and Charles Colbeck (1847–1903). These materials provide detail of the landscape of modern language pedagogy in Britain in the second half of the 19th century.

Robert Quick was assistant master at Harrow School (1869–1874) and member of the newly formed Teachers' Training Syndicate at Trinity College, Cambridge (1879–1883). Quick wrote extensively on reforms in language teaching¹⁴, critically examining the ideas of Prendergast and earlier practitioners in an effort to develop his own pedagogical theories. Only days after his appointment at Harrow in November 1869, Quick describes in his diary being sent by the Headmaster Montagu Butler (1833–1918) to Neuilly, France to meet a Mme. Pressensé. He records his personal experience:

As to French, I don't find that I can start talking at all, though I can understand a little. I don't think that Prendergast's book has given one at all the knowledge that the time spent in other ways would have done. I attribute this to the badness of the book rather than to the method. If there were any analysis of constructions on which the sentences were based, and if whole verbs were given instead of scraps, I think I should have learnt much more. (Storr 1899: 390)

However, a diary entry dated shortly thereafter records his "time-table of an ordinary day's work at Harrow. Down at 6. Worked at Prendergast and French construing till school at 7.30 ..." (Storr 1899: 41). This suggests that although he did not find Prendergast's method entirely helpful on his visit to France in the autumn of 1869, Quick felt this approach to be pedagogically valuable enough, or at least preferable as compared to others, to continue to employ it in his study of French subsequently.

Quick also subscribed to Prendergast's method for teaching his own students: "A language like French can't be put together by rule: it must be learnt by imitation, and instead of drilling in rules which children cannot apply, I should rather drill them in model sentences, then vary these sentences after the Prendergastian method" (Storr 1899: 193). He seems to have embraced some of Prendergast's more theoretical views as well. In an essay in the *Quarterly Journal of Education*, Quick (1872: 7) states: "A language, Mr Prendergast tells us,

¹⁴. Quick's *Essays on Educational Reformers* (1864) is viewed as "a classic work of pedagogic theory" (Lindgren 2004).

is like a sphere; it matters not where you begin". He also subscribed to Prendergast's notion that the successful foreign language study is based on the unconscious and intuitive learning of how to use words, leading to the direct communication of ideas (Storr 1899: 388-389).

Atherton points out that while Quick had been an enthusiastic supporter of Prendergast's method, he did voice misgivings from time to time over the course of his long teaching career. In a critical journal article, Quick mentions the "potential dullness" of the manuals and the "repulsive" sentences. Prendergast responded in an open letter to this attack, pointing out that he was a language learner rather than a teacher himself, and suggested that the merit of his approach was in the "multiplicity of techniques to be used with it, rather than (presumably) the length of its model sentences" (Atherton 2010: 18). Nevertheless in Quick's lecture "The first steps in teaching a foreign language with some account of celebrated methods" delivered at the College of Preceptors only three years later (mentioned above) he singles out Prendergast for great praise. After a historical review of language teaching pedagogy beginning with the work of Roger Ascham (1515-1568), he says: "Last, not least, on our list, we have Mr. Prendergast, whose system deserves a much more lengthy exposition..." (Quick 1875).

After over a decade of experience, Quick records his view of the state of affairs in British modern language education in a diary entry from 1888:

Take the art of learning languages. Surely some sort of agreement might have been reached in this before now, but our teachers have not settled first principles, and don't know what has been done towards settling them. Marcel's book is out of print. Prendergast's valuable book never reached a second edition, and even people who try the Mastery System don't seem to have heard of it. (Storr 1899: 397)

It is not clear why Quick was unaware of the later editions of Prendergast's books which were very much still in press. Nevertheless, he makes the significant point that Prendergast's method still appears to be employed in the language classroom, but had lost its source attribution with the next generation of teachers. In fact, Joshua Fitch (1824–1903), who was for many decades the Chief Inspector for Schools in the eastern counties, provides evidence of this loss of attribution in his lectures on teaching delivered at the University of Cambridge in 1880. In discussing the teaching of modern foreign languages, Fitch suggests that the best approach for the beginner is to learn whole sentences "parrot-fashion" and a rough sense of what they mean. Fitch (1881: 251) states: "This is often what is called the *Mastery System*".

(Italics in the original.) While the use of the italics might suggest that Fitch is referring to a specific book, no mention of Prendergast as the inventor of this method is made.

In Quick's second edition of his *Essays on Educational Reformers* (1890), Prendergast is included in his list of "language-learning methodizers" alongside the much earlier work of Roger Ascham (1515–1568), Comenius (1592–1670), Joseph Jacotot (1770–1840), and James Hamilton (1769–1831). Nevertheless, Quick (1890: 427-428, note) restates his negative opinion of one aspect of Prendergast's method:

Still more repulsive are the long sentences of Mr. Prendergast: -- 'How much must I give to the cabdriver to take my father to the Bank in New Street before his second breakfast, and to bring him home again before half-past two o'clock?' I cannot forget Voltaire's *mot*, which has a good deal of truth in it, -- 'Every way is good but the tiresome way'. And most of the books written for beginners are inexpressibly tiresome.

In what is perhaps a more revealing comment about his own proclivities as a language teacher, Quick continues this remark by stating that he has taught German through the memorization of Niebuhr's *Heroengeschichten*,¹⁵ which did not bore him in the least.

While the views of Quick were somewhat mixed, the later Headmaster of Harrow School, Edward Ernest Bowen was more positive about the utility of Prendergast's method. In his lecture at the Headmasters' Conference¹⁶ at Eton in 1879, Bowen¹⁷ considered the various challenges presented by the teaching of modern languages (i.e. French and German) in Public Schools. He recommended Prendergast's series for the practical training of oral fluency in modern languages in school. He saw this as a secondary but equally valuable effort to the attainment of grammar, reading, and writing skills, which required a more formal approach (Bowen 1879).

¹⁵ This refers to Barthold Georg Niebuhr's (1776–1831) German children's book of heroic stories from Ancient Greece *Griechische Heroengeschichte*, first published in the early 19th century, with a major new edition in 1842.

¹⁶ The Headmasters' Conference was established in 1869 as a Society for English Public School Headmasters. English Public Schools were private institutions for educating elite wealthy boys from the age of approximately 13 years. The original group of seven long established schools (Eton, Harrow, Westminster, Charterhouse, Rugby, Winchester, and Shrewsbury) were joined by a larger number of more recently established Public schools in the 19th century that were overseen by the Headmasters Conference.

¹⁷ Bowen was notable for introducing the 'Modern side' to Harrow. The new curriculum gave precedence to the learning of French and German over Latin and Greek.

The views of some teachers were complementary about Prendergast's theory but not as positive about employing his method in the classroom. Francis Storr (1883: 242)¹⁸, Chief Master of 'Modern' subjects at Merchant Taylors' School, and Editor of the *Journal of Education*, contended that:

Mr. Prendergast has, in my opinion, grasped a true and valuable principle of language teaching, but has not been very happy in working it out. I have no doubt that the pupil who conscientiously worked through his book would have a better grip of the French language for conversational purposes than one who had followed the regular routine of grammar and translation. But the model sentences are so hopelessly dull for the pupil that few will endure it to the end. And if the method is dull for the pupil, what must it be for the master! A drill-sergeant's work is lively in comparison.

However, in a review of French 'class-books' published in his journal, Storr (1883) states that Prendergast's 'well-known' method is analogous to that presented in Herbert Courthope Bowen's textbook *First Lessons in French* (Bowen 1880). This remark in some way seems to telescope the twelve-year priority of the Mastery System.¹⁹

Charles Colbeck was also an assistant master at Harrow, having joined the school in 1871, a year after Quick. He gave two lectures in the Lent term of 1887 at Cambridge University "On the teaching of Modern Languages in theory and practice". Here Colbeck acknowledges the 'real service' Prendergast as done to language teaching. He asserts that Prendergast's method is "an ingenious, practical, labour-saving instrument, and should be known to every teacher and learner" (Colbeck 1887: 21). In his lecture, subsequently published in book form, Colbeck discussed the strengths and weaknesses of Prendergast's method at great length and considered its utility and application for the classroom. Colbeck (1887: 22) also gave examples of how his own study of French using Prendergast's method did and did not contribute to his ability to converse when abroad:

I am myself a *corpus vile* on which experiment has been made. I have heard the French book once a week for fifteen years, and have gone as near to mastering it as any one ever has, I verily believe; but if I depended upon it for my power of making my wants known abroad, I should get a smaller percentage of them satisfied than I do now [...]. I admit however that not unfrequently in earlier days, with an inward chuckle, I used to frame my

¹⁸. Storr's not entirely complementary comments regarding Prendergast echo those of Quick. This shared sympathy is notable, as Storr became the editor of Quick's posthumous memoirs.

¹⁹. Storr's editorial approach to Quick's memoirs does not preserve chronological order either.

remarks into one of the well-known tags and sail away glibly to the end of my sentence, to the mingled pleasure and astonishment of my interlocutor at my sudden access of fluency and accuracy [...] I once cowed a German official at a post office into obsequiousness with a round shot from Prendergast.

This, it seems, is evidence of the success of Prendergast's manuals for both French and German, even though Colbeck did not follow the method prescribed. After much praise for the practical and theoretical aspects, Colbeck (1887: 22-3) goes on to state a number of objections to Prendergast's system:

1. The results are not commensurate with the pains required. The pupil is not qualified to converse at the end. The book forms a useful series of repetition lessons nicely graded and is a good subsidiary...
2. The process is deadly dull, and of methods it may surely be said that none is wholly wrong but the dull one.
3. Idioms are far more isolated than Mr Prendergast will admit. You cannot pass from one to another by nice gradations. The result is that much of Mr Prendergast's French is poor and flabby.
4. The vocabulary is very small, and Mr Prendergast sets himself sternly against increasing it by reading a book.
5. It is illiterate, or at best unliterary.
6. Following upon this, it affords no training in English as translation does. When you translate, you are learning two languages at once.
7. It is very hard to adapt to class teaching (except in the way I use it), yet our education must assume class teaching as its basis.
8. The teacher's power is wasted; his part is a poor one at best, and he cannot diverge from the dull track assigned to him. Yet the manifold influence of the teacher upon his class can hardly be set too high as a factor in the development of the young.

This seems an example of finding fault in a teaching method while disregarding its instructions, or carrying out its intent. In his first book, Prendergast clearly states that this method is to be used for self-instruction, not classroom teaching; that repetitions must be practiced several times a day, not once a week; that reading may be included at later stages; and that grammar could be investigated after mastering the initial set of sentence variations. After two decades, Prendergast's method was now being applied to a quite different set of conditions, which may be taken as a sign of its success. It was being delivered by teachers in classrooms with groups of young children in order to pass examinations. To some extent though, blame for this development can be laid at the feet of its inventor. Prendergast did increasingly include directions for the use of his manuals in schools in subsequent editions.

4.4 *American Educators' views after Prendergast's death*

The fact that Colbeck gave such extensive treatment to Prendergast's pedagogical approach in this forum, some twenty years after its initial introduction, is a testament to the serious consideration it was given by professional educators at the highest levels. This can be taken as strong evidence that Prendergast had a significant impact and lasting uptake in the wider academic community. Another indication of the status of Prendergast's method is that it merited its own entry in *Sonnenschein's Cyclopaedia of Education* (Fletcher, 1889).²⁰ The evaluation offered here is that "no better method has ever been invented for 'winding up and setting in motion the talking machinery;' and it might well be used for the first stages in learning any language, even when something more is desired than the mere power of speaking" (Anonymous 1889: 286).

While the merits of Prendergast's approach for language teaching continued to be referenced and critiqued in British educational circles, there was also sustained acknowledgement and uptake in the United States. A major American review of "Methods of Teaching Modern Languages" by Charles Frederick Kroeh (1846–1928) appeared in the transactions of the recently founded Modern Language Association of America (Kroeh 1887)²¹. In his review, Prendergast's system is considered in at length, alongside the methods of Ollendorf, Toussaint-Langensheidt, Gaillard, and Marcel. He acknowledged Prendergast's "decided originality". In a discussion of the acquisition of colloquial fluency, Kroeh (1887: 177) states: "The great merit of Prendergast [...] consists in formulating so exactly the problem to be solved in learning to speak a language. His solution of the problem, however, is one that involves mere drudgery unrelieved by any interesting exercise". This was a criticism that had been raised by his British colleagues, discussed above. However, Kroeh (p. 183) also hands Prendergast high praise in admitting: "In my own course, I can go no further than to lay the foundation which has been so well formulated by Prendergast".²²

By the end of the century, Prendergast was ranked amongst the historical founders of the field of language teaching by one prominent American language teacher:

Many of the methods advocated or practised by eminent educators in the past have more than an historical interest to the teacher of today: the views of men like Erasmus,

²⁰. Brief reference to Prendergast's approach to Latin appears in a much earlier education encyclopaedia (Anonymous 1877).

²¹. A shorter version was presented to the Modern Language Association meeting in Philadelphia, December 30th, 1886 and a modified version of his article was published in *Scientific American*, 1888. The Modern Language Association of America was founded in 1883.

²². Kroeh was Professor of Modern Languages from 1871–1925 at The Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken, New Jersey.

Melanchthon, Ratich, Comenius, Locke, the Jesuit teachers, of Jacotot, Hamilton, Marcel, Prendergast, Heness, Sauveur, and others, are suggestive and stimulating, and the history of their methods is instructive (Lodeman 1893: 100).

Another turn of the century view of Prendergast's legacy in America is presented by J. C. Street (1897) in a historical review of language teaching methods. Street describes Prendergast's "Mastery Method" in detail and offers this comment that indicates the standing his approach had at the time: "The soundness of the principle on which this method is based is admitted by nearly all reformers of language study" (Street 1897: 276). However, Street goes on to suggest that it ultimately fails because of the "unfortunate choice" of model sentences. He concludes that Rosenthal's approach, which extends Prendergast's method, may be a more successful choice. However, an even more notable sign of Prendergast's status in American education circles may be his inclusion in a survey of the teaching of modern languages carried out by the US Bureau of Education (Handschin 1913).

4.5 The mid-20th century view of Prendergast's contribution

One much later trace of Prendergast's legacy can be found in the work of the British linguist Charles Kay Ogden (1889–1957). "Basic English" was Ogden's attempt to create a form of English comprised of less than a thousand words to be used as an auxiliary international lingua franca (Ogden 1930). Ogden (1930: 29-30) identified Prendergast as a valuable contributor to the development of language learning practice generally, and a direct source of ideas for devising his own system:

The most sagacious and systematic attempt to profit by the experience of childhood, though his interest was almost exclusively in learning to speak, was that of Prendergast, who combined with this point of view a knowledge of Indian difficulties in virtue of his work in the Madras Civil Service. The success of children in picking up languages was due, he held, to their following the light of nature. We have ignored that beacon and taken to grammar, whereas the child advances progressively by means of simple words in model sentences. Such words and sentences it was the object of Mr. Prendergast's book to provide. (Underlined in the original.)

Prendergast's work was still being cited in the mid-20th century by practical language professionals, as noted in the work of Capell (discussed above). Moreover, Prendergast's Hebrew Manual was included in a 1961 bibliography of textbooks for learning this language

(Nakarai 1961). However, my survey of a large number of academic books on foreign language learning from the beginnings of Modern Movement in the 1960s and 1970s failed to find any mention of Prendergast. As pointed out in the introduction, Prendergast's contribution to the development of language teaching and learning underwent a resurgence of interest after being included in Howatt's influential textbook on the history of the field in 1984. One indication of the renewed interest in Prendergast's work was Tickoo's 1986 article marking the anniversary of his death in the *ELT Gazette*. A book review (Rossner 1987) that appeared in a subsequent issue of the same journal begins with a long quote from the *Mastery*. Rossner (1987: 301) reflects on the point that interest in the type of learning vocabulary as developed by Prendergast is currently "echoed frequently in staffroom discussions and books for teachers".

In their historical review of language teaching methods, Richards & Rodgers (1986) styled him as the first to record the observation that children use context to aid language comprehension; the first to appreciate that they use 'memorized phrases and 'routines''; and the first to propose a 'structural syllabus' to learn the basic patterns of a language. They suggest that he anticipated the developments of teaching practice in the 1920s and 1930s. The widely popular revised edition of Howatt's book (Howatt & Widdowson 2004) and subsequent editions of Richards's and Rogers's book (2001, 2014) introduced a new generation to the history of ELT and in some small way to Prendergast.

5. *The Life History of Prendergast's Mastery Series*

As a final step in the investigation of the dissemination of Prendergast's ideas, the publishing history of his books is examined and the pattern of diffusion of his books is considered in order to trace Prendergast's activity in the language learning market. The following questions were addressed: how long were his books in print? how many still exist? and, where are they now? A detailed analysis of Prendergast's publications was carried out through examination of the number of editions, revised editions, and reprints that were produced. Records of editions, print run sizes, or sales numbers could not be ascertained directly from the publishers. As an alternative strategy, the online database Worldcat provided by the OCLC Online Computer Library Center, Inc. was used to gather source data. It represents the world's largest catalogue of library holdings including over 10,000 library catalogues throughout the world. These sources were pursued to provide indirect information regarding the longevity of Prendergast's books. This evidence further documents the reach and significance of his books indirectly through the examination of current library holdings.

5.1 Reprinted editions and revisions

The WorldCat search assisted in determining the numerous new and revised editions that each book underwent after their initial publication, and therefore, indirectly provides a picture of their period of market success. However, it must be acknowledged that this may not represent an exhaustive listing of all the books that may have been published. *The Mastery of Languages*, had a third edition in 1872, but does not appear to have been issued in later editions according to Worldcat. In contrast to his first book, *The Handbook* appears to have been issued with more and later editions. There is a listing of a fifth edition in 1882. Worldcat does list two further editions, which appear to have been produced after Prendergast's death in 1886. There is an 1893 eighth edition, "revised and greatly improved" published by Longmans in London and New York. It is not clear who was responsible for this revised edition in 1893. There were a further two reprints: an 1895 edition published by Appleton in New York, and a 1911 edition published by Longmans. Hence, the *Handbook* remained in print for over four decades. This is a remarkable achievement in a very crowded field of language learning and teaching which is greatly subject to fashion trends. Such evidence clearly suggests that there were a large number of language learners and/or teachers eager to use Prendergast's "Mastery Method" for several generations, even though there were many others who had developed rival approaches in the intervening time.

With respect to his individual language manual editions, there were the following listings in WorldCat: *The Mastery Series, German*, 8th edition, 1874; *The Mastery Series, Spanish*, 4th edition, 1875; *The Mastery Series, French*, 12th edition, 1879; *The Mastery Series, Hebrew*, 3rd edition, 1879; with *The Mastery Series, Latin*, 5th edition, 1884 being the last he appears to have produced, two years before his death. Like the *Handbook*, the individual language learning manuals continued to be in print and revised through the turn of the century: *The Mastery Series, French* was printed in a 26th edition in 1898; *The Mastery Series, German* was reprinted up to 1900; *The Mastery Series, Spanish* was reprinted up to 1903; *The Mastery Series, Hebrew* was issued in a 6th edition in 1896; *The Mastery Series, Latin* the 2nd edition was reprinted in 1906. WorldCat lists the latest edition of one of Prendergast's books as the 1911 reprint of the *Handbook*, that is, twenty five years after his death. Taken together with the fact that presently WorldCat lists hundreds of copies that still exist in libraries in many countries, this is a strong indication of the longevity of his work. It should also be noted that all of Prendergast's books have been scanned and deposited in

several online repositories accessible through the Internet Archive and Hathi Trust, and are also currently available from print-on-demand publishers such as Kessinger.

Interestingly, in addition to the market of English speakers wishing to learn foreign languages, it appears that some of Prendergast's books were marketed for those who wished to learn English. For example, *The Manual for Spanish* was also subtitled as the *Manual para aprender Inglés* and appears under this title in WorldCat. Direct translations of the *Mastery* and Prendergast's French manual were also made into Dutch: *Het taalonderwijs langs natuurlijke weg: verhandeling over de methode* (Prendergast 1873) and *Methode Prendergast. Handboek voor de Fransche Taal* (Prendergast 1874).

5.2 Current British library holdings

In Britain, there are three main legal deposit libraries that receive copies of all books published in the UK since the early 18th century. Entries in The British Library catalogue include holdings for three dozen volumes of different Bentley and Longmans editions of the seven books authored by Prendergast, while there are only two dozen listed in the Bodleian Library at Oxford and the University of Cambridge Library. It is relevant to note that as these books were intended at least originally as self-instruction manuals, they would not necessarily be likely candidates for being deposited in other scholarly institutional libraries. So, for example, the University of London Senate House Library currently owns no copies of his work, while the more specialized Institute of Education Library at University College London has only the 1893 8th edition of the *Handbook* at this time. However, historical records indicate that the *Teachers Guild of Great Britain and Ireland Library Catalogue* from 1900 lists holdings of two books by Prendergast (Anonymous 1900: 34). As this library was later given to the University of London, one can only assume that these were later discarded from their collection.

In order to more thoroughly address the question of where Prendergast's books are still held, a survey was carried out of the library catalogues throughout the world using WorldCat. This type of search provides a snapshot of what now exists in libraries globally. However, it must be kept in mind that this will not assist in determining what libraries may have owned in the 19th century but have now de-acquisitioned. As such, this will provide a very conservative estimate of the number of books that might have been owned by public libraries since 1864. A detailed search of the holdings for each of Prendergast's books was carried out through extensive record searching on WorldCat.

5.3 *Geographical diffusion*

Evidence of patterns of diffusion can also be determined by querying WorldCat records. In contrast to those current holdings of Prendergast's books in Britain, which appear to be primarily in the legal deposit national libraries, WorldCat lists extensive holdings in numerous large and small academic and local public libraries throughout the USA. Other countries whose major libraries have copies are Ireland, Canada, France, Germany, Switzerland, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Australia. It should be noted, however, that this sample is also a biased picture, and very conservative estimate of the extent copies, being limited to those libraries whose catalogues have electronic databases compatible with linking to WorldCat. Additionally, there is noted limited coverage of libraries from the Asian Subcontinent and the Far East, which may be expected to have holdings of Prendergast's books for reasons discussed below. Notwithstanding these caveats, this analysis gives some indication that Prendergast's work spread well beyond their places of publication in England and America.

This investigation of the life history of Prendergast's books provides indirect evidence of the broad audience and lasting significance of his work from the long period for which his books remained in print and the number of libraries around the world that still holds them. A more direct measure of the impact of his books is the recorded views of those who still include Prendergast in discussions of language learning and teaching methods today.

6. *Prendergast in the 21st century*

Currently Prendergast's work is again commonly cited when historical reviews of language teaching and learning methods are made, albeit briefly (e.g., Wheeler 2013, Laviosa 2014). In 21st century approaches to language learning, there is a resurgence of interest in methods that focus on oral fluency. Gatbonton and Segalowitz's (2005) developed one such method: *Automatization in Communicative Contexts of Essential Speech Segments* (ACCESS). The authors acknowledge their debt to Prendergast's innovations:

Because of the strong focus on utterances, ACCESS is an utterance-based teaching approach. There is precedent for such a focus. In the history of language teaching, two trends have either alternated or run in parallel with regard to the primary content of teaching (Howatt 1984). One trend sees grammatical rules – the underlying language system – as primary; the other sees utterances and texts – items or exemplars – as primary. Most language teachers have followed the first trend. But some have focused directly on

teaching utterances for their own sake before talking about structures, if at all. For example, Prendergast's (1821–1866) [*sic*] mastery method was based on the idea that students should first learn well a small set of utterances that, once fully memorized, would lead to the construction of new and novel utterances [...]. Prendergast's targeted utterances were artificially constructed to pack in a great deal of linguistic information that could be unravelled by learners as their competence with the language grew (Gatbonton & Segalowitz 2005: 336-337).

Prendergast's work was favourable cited in reference to gaining oral fluency in the works of Scott Thornbury (2004), and in social media discussions from language learners such as the Australian Mezzofanti Guild (Slogger February 13th, 2013 6:32pm). Most recently, there has been a podcast about Prendergast as a pioneer of ELT by three enthusiastic ELT teachers based in Tokyo (The ELTons 2015).

As mentioned in the introduction, recent assessments of Prendergast's work (e.g., Richards & Rodgers 2014, Murphy & Baker 2015) judged him to have had little influence on 19th century teaching methods. They assert that his work had minimal significance or reach. To the contrary, the extensive documentation presented here attests to how Prendergast's method was embraced and implemented by individual language learners and language teachers in both England and the USA for decades in the late 19th and early 20th century. Although Prendergast's approach to language learning was successfully integrated into educational practice, it does appear that towards the turn of the century the attribution to him was lost for a time.

The present investigation has provided evidence from a broad range of sources that Prendergast had deep and lasting impact on language learning and teaching practice both for lay learners, professionals, and educationalists alike. The numerous editions and reprints of his book are still held in libraries throughout the world. His theory and method were discussed in contemporary specialist education circles and by the broader public through lectures, journal articles and newspaper notices, as they are again today. Although he did function outside academic circles, his work was discussed at education conferences and in scholarly publications. His legacy is evident in a wide range of sources presented here from its first appearance in 1864 to the present day. At the height of Prendergast's books' popularity, the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* styled him "the greatest living Linguist" (1883). As late as 1915, three decades after his death, an anonymous report in *The Gloucester Journal* notes Thomas Prendergast's contribution, "for which he will be long remembered the

improvement and popularization of what is called the Mastery System of learning languages” (Anonymous 1915).

This case study investigation of the reception of Thomas Prendergast’s innovative method also serves a wider purpose in providing a detailed picture of the 19th century landscape of foreign language teaching theory and practice. It documents how Prendergast’s work influenced changes to the conventional deductive grammar-translation approaches that had long been the norm. His impact was registered from the first appearance of his books in 1864 in Britain and the Colonies, the USA, and more remote parts of the world. As such, Prendergast’s work was well in advance of the so-called Reform Movement and the development of the Direct Method at the end of the 19th century.

The results of this study suggest a re-evaluation of the assumed methods of language learning used in Victorian Britain. Prendergast’s method emphasised inductive learning and placed a premium on oral fluency. Evidence presented here supports the notion that in the second half of the 19th century, educators began to value such an approach and used it in conjunction with other methods in a more pluralistic pedagogy. This study contributes to the development of a richer and more nuanced picture of the history of educational innovation in language teaching. In a recent evaluation, Decoo (2011: 54) suggested that the 19th century history of language teaching is much more intricate one than current scholarship currently provides and offers the critique that “the attention given to new nineteenth-century methods from a contemporary research viewpoint seldom takes into account the impact of such methods”. The present study contributes to rectifying such limitations.

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SUMMARY

The late 19th century saw a great rise in private foreign language learning and increasing provision of Modern foreign language teaching in schools. Evidence is presented to document the uptake of innovations in Thomas Prendergast's (1807–1886) "Mastery System" by both individual language learners and educationalists. Although it has previously been suggested that Prendergast's method failed to have much impact, this study clearly demonstrates the major influence he had on approaches to language learning and teaching in Britain and around the world both with his contemporaries and long after his death. This detailed case study illuminates the landscape of modern language pedagogy in Victorian Britain.

RÉSUMÉ

La fin du XIX^e siècle vit un grand développement de l'apprentissage personnel des langues étrangères, ainsi qu'une offre croissante de l'enseignement des langues étrangères modernes dans les écoles. On démontre ici, en la documentant, l'utilisation des innovations du "Mastery System" de Thomas Prendergast (1807–1886) à la fois par les apprenants individuels d'une langue que par les enseignants. Bien qu'il ait été précédemment suggéré que la méthode de Prendergast n'avait pas réussi à avoir beaucoup d'impact, cette étude montre clairement l'influence majeure qu'elle a eue sur les méthodes d'apprentissage et d'enseignement des langues en Grande-Bretagne et dans le monde, à la fois auprès de ses contemporains et longtemps après sa mort. Cette étude de cas détaillée éclaire le paysage de la pédagogie des langues modernes dans la Grande-Bretagne victorienne.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts gab es einen großen Aufschwung des privaten Fremdsprachenlernens sowie des modernen Fremdsprachenunterrichts an Schulen. In diesem Beitrag wird gezeigt, dass die Innovationen in Thomas Prendergasts (1807–1886) "Mastery System" sowohl von einzelnen Fremdsprachenlernern als auch von Sprachlehrern übernommen wurden. Es ist behauptet worden, dass Prendergasts Methode nicht einflussreich war. Entgegen dieser Ansicht weist der Beitrag nach, dass Prendergast auf verschiedene Ansätze im Spracherwerb und im Sprachunterricht großen Einfluss hatte, nicht nur in Großbritannien, sondern in der ganzen Welt, und sowohl zu seinen Lebzeiten als auch noch

lange nach seinem Tod. Die detaillierte Fallstudie beschreibt die Landschaft der modernen Sprachpädagogik im Viktorianischen England.

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