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### *The use of the mother tongue in the foreign language classroom*

In recent years there has been a growing interest in Foreign Language Teaching in our country. To some extent, this is the result of our Educational System's efforts to keep up with the new tendencies that have emerged in the present world.

A good deal of our teachers now handles such terms as functions, notions, role-playing, communicative competence and others with relative ease.

Although the availability of up dated information in the field of Foreign Language Teaching is not as plenty as in others; several non-governmental organization as the ALLC, GELI and others have made it possible to foster most of our teachers with the needed background.

Amidst all of the information that we have at our disposal and which no doubt, helps us to improve the quality and level of our teaching. There is one aspect that is seldom dealt with. We refer to the use that is made and should be made of our Mother Tongue as part of teaching.

Our paper plans to cover, with some degree of generalization, some areas where it is possible to make a proper use of the Mother Tongue in order to facilitate the learning of the foreign language.

A basic knowledge of the role of the Mother Tongue in Foreign Language Teaching is paramount when we prepare our lessons. In practical terms this means that we should have sense of the right dose at each particular lesson under each particular circumstance.

There are extreme holders of two antagonistic tendencies. On the one hand, there are the ones who completely neglect the use of the Mother Tongue. They view it as an element of interference with irreversible negative consequences. On the other hand there are those who overuse the Mother Tongue. Thus simplifying too much the learning process. When this happens neither learning nor acquisition is attained.

We think that both stand points are totally instaken and thus deserve our analysis and consideration.

Our own experience has led us to reject the Mother Tongue in the classroom. We do it on the ground of our belief that this is the right pedagogical path or else on the grounds of tradition itself. We hold for valid that the quality of our lessons depends to a great extent on our student's use of the target language and the teacher's use of the Mother Tongue only when it is absolutely necessary.

Of course, this rejection can cause us more than one difficulty in our effort to reach our goal. Among the negative effects of this behaviour we can mention the following:

- Unnecessary waste of time.

At times we overuse induction, deduction, visual aids, circumlocution and others resources to make sure that a lasting effect is attained in the student's minds about the linguistic material that is presented. This leads to an excessive consumption of time.

- Risk of ambiguity.

It also happens that in not properly handing paraphrase something is not totally assimilated and at the end more than one alternative is open for interpretation. This has an adverse effect that can arise either at the level of the vocabulary or grammar.

- Misinterpretation of information.

Mainly at elementary levels, when introductions are given in order to undertake a given task and the Mother Tongue is totally neglected, there is the risk of not attained 100%. This may bring about the students performing a different task that consequently deviates them from the goal since they are not aware of they are doing.

- Scarce chances for feedback.

When not Mother Tongue at all has been set as a policy percent the classroom for both teachers and students, we may lose right of how much has been assimilated of the material at issue.

- Negative psychological effect on the students.

If we overuse the need of 100% Foreign Language, a big amount of students (the less privileged) will be inhibited in relation to the rest of the class.

Likewise, we consider that the use of the Mother Tongue in an exaggerated way in the classroom, besides hampering the normal pedagogical processes that should take place for effective assimilation, brings about some negative effects as the following:

1. The student's chances of exposure to authentic samples of the language being taught are reduced.

One of the requirements for learning a language is permanent practice and exposure, not only in the receptive but at the productive level as well.

2. Misleading students it comes to testing.

If the teacher gets used to giving all the instructions in the Mother Tongue in the classroom, the day of the test, if a change is made in this policy, the students will lose totally or partially what is required to do.

3. Little practice is ensured out of the classroom.

A communicative methodology stimulates practice beyond the classroom. What is not assimilated in the classroom or at least reminds unclear, is consequently hard to attain beyond it.

4. Total motivation towards the Foreign Language is not attained.

While some students advocate for a heavy dose of Mother Tongue in order to feel sure of what they are learning others prefer quite the opposite and obviously lose interest and motivation when they face this tendency.

5. Minimizing the effort and thus hampering learning.

The shortest way to one goal is necessarily always the most efficient. If this is applied to the learning process, this truth is strengthened. The Mother Tongue will not always guarantee the necessary impact that ensures that the material is properly fixed in the students' system of knowledge.

We could go on listening samples of negative aspects of two extremes touched upon so far. We think it is more convenient to see this situation in another dimension.

The different stages of a level and different levels of a curriculum demand a certain use of Mother Tongue. The dose that it is defined can be underused, overused or altered

simultaneously. Only the teacher, with his expertise with the students will decide the behaviour to follow. This on the grounds of permanent exploration.

Although we take for granted that the right balance is hard to reach, we hold the view that there are well-justified instances in which Mother Tongue can be used.

At the presentation stage, the use of the Mother Tongue is sometimes not desired but conversely highly justified.

While explaining a giving lexical item a chance for ambiguity is probable, it is more effective to appeal to translation. This saves time thus ensuring that the activity goes on fluently. (We do not mean by this that the attempts in the target language are not first made). At this stage of the lesson, economy of time plays a capital role since our main goal is just limited to more understanding. Hence procedures should be brief and efficient.

As to the use of the Mother Tongue by the students, there are also points to make. We must not forget that at the production stage, its use represents the high level of motivation attained in the task at the hand. Abbot's paradox frequently arises. "The more motivation, the higher tendency to use the Mother Tongue". When this happens, it is because a main goal has been reached. Students have prioritised meaning in relation to form or grammatical choices. Once they can not rely on the required linguistic means in order to express what they wish, they grope for the nearest and most logical available device their mother language.

When the Mother Tongue turns into a goal in itself, we are striving for the supreme level of mastery of the Foreign Language...namely translation. To reach this level, a solid previous training is necessary and it is worth while remarking that translation is not only what it has traditionally stood for. A technical classification offered by U. Lynch sets three categories.

The one that is done to other signs of the same language (intralanguage).

The one that is done to another language (interlanguage).

The one that is done to another non-verbal system (intersemantic).

The first and the second alternatives are the ones that we should facilitate in our lessons.

Since all of these processes involve a conscious analysis and oblige our students into the exploration of resources of the own language as well as to develop techniques of analysis. They are very valuable for learning and acquiring the Foreign Language.

A particularly and interesting and effective task which can be used at any level is double translation. Students translate a given material into Mother Tongue, then the material is collected. What they did is again, the starting point for a bad translation into the Foreign Language. When the original Foreign Language is confronted with the translated material the students trigger a series of analytical and interpretation processes. They ensure a deeper understanding of the details of the Foreign Language as well as the possibilities of the own language.

It is also useful when a comparative analysis is made about those students and lexical items do not have a corresponding equivalent in the Mother Tongue. Translation exercises may serve to consolidate those structures and lexical items.

At the elementary levels the pupil is not completely acquainted with the Foreign Language. It is convenient here to use the Foreign Language and then ask the students to translate into Mother Tongue in order to confirm that the message has been grasped by all of them, and in the meantime some training in translation is done.

It is likewise, evident, that in group work and in pair work the students will use their Mother Tongue when the teacher is not present. This is somewhat taken as a positive aspect since

it is foster cooperation of the class. What did not remain clear via the professor is established through this more humane aspect.

Considering what has been stated throughout the present paper, we infer that the Mother Tongue does has a role to play in Foreign Language Teaching. It is one more alternative that we can make use of when we plan our work. To ignore or neglect its value is like limiting our own possibilities and disregard the different learning styles individual learners.

In our teaching we may consider not only the dose of Mother Tongue that corresponds to the teacher, but also the one that corresponds to the learners. This is one way of keeping the place or our lessons. (In no way do we mean that these actions have spontaneous occurrence. Careful an exhausted planning are paramount).

We also think that the abuse of Mother Tongue in our lessons can bring about irreversible consequences in the future development of the students.

It is only with constant upgrading and permanent dedication that we can make an effective use of the possibilities that the Mother Tongue offers.

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