THE IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDENTS' NATIVE LANGUAGE IN TEACHING TRANSLATION

Andreea NĂZNEAN[1]

Abstract

The aim of this article is to emphasize the importance of mother tongue in teaching a foreign language, which has been the focus of many researchers' attention for many years and for many reasons; I will highlight the fact that mother tongue use can help learners to increase and maintain a bilingual personality, it can encourage understanding of other cultures and civilizations, it makes possible prompt and more proficient explanation, it is more appealing and encourages a good relationship between teacher and students.

Keywords: mother tongue, translation, communication, language, method.

In the past, most methods in foreign language pedagogy did not favour the mother tongue and they concluded that it should not be used in a foreign language classroom. Nevertheless, in recent times, the attitude to mother tongue and translation in language classes has undergone an encouraging change, emphasizing the importance of using the mother tongue during classes since it motivates learners to take part actively in the class and also the importance of translation since it can contribute to the development of linguistic, grammatical and cultural features as already mentioned before.

Prodromou claims that "Our strategic objective will continue to be maximum interaction in the target language and the role of the mother tongue will be to enrich the quality and the quantity of that interaction in the classroom, not to restrict or impoverish it" (in Cook 2010: 48).

A foreign class in which the mother tongue is not used is too demanding for many learners, who need to be motivated in their challenge in learning a foreign language and sometimes the best way to do it is to allow them to use their mother tongue during classes or to use it in order to give the necessary explanations. As a result, the activities will have positive effects on the students' identity and emotions besides the fact that a sense of class harmony and collective identity will be created.

The native language should be used in the classroom when the teacher explains complicated concepts, introduces new topics and new vocabulary, checks for comprehension, organizes the classroom, tries to maintain discipline, forms the groups for the activities and evaluates students, or when the level of the classroom requires him to use the native language. Students always feel more confident if they have the chance to check the accuracy of the words in their native language. They can do that either by consulting bilingual dictionaries or by asking the teacher for explanations.

It is also Cook who draws attention to the importance of the use of mother tongue during foreign language classes: "Mother-tongue use, in short, is the way to compensate

[1] PhD Student, "Al. I. Cuza" University of Iaşi

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for the difference between natural first-language and instructed additional-language acquisition". (2010: 51)

We can identify educational and pedagogical reasons that sustain the use of the students' own language during foreign language classes. The educational ones stress the fact that own-language use can encourage attentiveness to other cultures and ways of thinking whereas the pedagogical ones put emphasis on the own-language use which enables prompt and more productive explanation, is more captivating and less isolated and promotes a good relationship between teacher and students.

There is no convincing reason why we should not make use of the mother tongue in the teaching process; on the contrary, its use is rather valuable because it also motivates the students to think more about appropriate correspondents in their own language. If the students try to say something using the foreign language but they do not know the suitable equivalent, the teacher should allow them to express their thoughts and opinions in their mother tongue, then help them translate everything in the foreign language, thus having the possibility to check their understanding of the new words and phrases, but also of the new topic.

I have also noticed that it is constructive to explain the aims of the class to my students and to discuss any concerns that they have. Whenever I do not have harmony in my class I try to avoid activities which involve my learners in using their native language a lot and I also try to find activities which are stimulating and interesting for them, such as discussions and comparisons of foreign language idioms, of aspects related to culture and civilization or to the everyday life. And I have the satisfaction to teach translation to students who are interested in it and who have developed this interest by working a lot and doing a lot of translation activities, thus discovering by themselves that it is an interesting, complex and valuable activity.

There are many ways and benefits to activate mother tongue in foreign language teaching, although most language teachers are against its use. For instance, it can be a way of activating reticent or introvert students to participate in all the activities developed during the foreign language class; the students can also have the chance to discover by themselves the differences and similarities in the structures and the word order of the sentences.

Nonetheless, I do not want to highlight the fact that the mother tongue should be an essential factor or starting point for a foreign language class, but when it is used correctly and in relationship with the aims and objective of the lesson, it is much easier to follow the curricula.

The key purpose in exploiting these methods and activities in language classrooms is to provide support to foreign language students to achieve perceptiveness and familiarity in the target language. Accordingly, the learners have the chance to increase their command of the language, too.

Cook defines success regarding the use of the foreign language in the following way: "What, for example, if one were to regard 'success' as including the ability to move

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back and forth between two languages, to have explicit knowledge of each language and the differences between them, to operate in the new language while not losing one's own language identity, and to have an impact on the new language, making it one's own, and perhaps introducing to it new phrases and ideas from one's own language?" (2010: 100)

Translation requires knowledge and comprehension of both the native language and the foreign one and of the connection between them. Even when translation is only practised in the classroom and students use their native language in other circumstances, it encourages communication across language limitations regarded as a two-way matter, in which significance occurs in the interaction between the two languages. The two languages are equal in the process of translating, since knowledge of both languages and understanding of the connection between them is crucial.

The necessity of translation in language learning is regularly sustained by non-native teachers. Native teachers of English consider that it is not necessary for the foreign language learning to be accomplished so thoroughly during the significant teaching time. They also highlight the idea that, for a better understanding of the lesson, using translation and the mother tongue during the foreign language class is ineffective.

The focus of their attention is communication in the foreign language, so they emphasize the use of the new acquired words and structures of the foreign language in different contexts of communication. They encourage the students to think in the foreign language during the class, but the truth is that the students always relate the new language to their own native language, no matter what the teacher tells them to do, because it is easier for them to find the suitable equivalents in this way. Maybe thinking in the foreign language can be achieved when living in the foreign country for a period of time, getting into contact with its culture, traditions and native speakers and having no other option than use the language all the time. But it cannot be achieved during the foreign language class, or at least not easily.

Translation might be helpful to students in preparing what they want to say or write because it slows the whole process, allows the students to think carefully about what they are about to express and endows them with a source to be as accurate as possible in comprehending what they come across or preparing what they would like to say.

Consequently, in this article, it has been established that translation should be implemented to support a student's natural competence to understand second language information through their first language. Students sometimes use their native language to facilitate the learning of the foreign language and this can have as a result a better preservation of the foreign language and also for a longer period of time.

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