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THE ROLE OF MOTHER TONGUE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

The role of mother tongue in second language acquisition has been the subject of much debate and controversy. This paper reports on different views and methods in teaching English throughout the history and tries to find out what is the role of mother tongue in foreign language teaching. The practical part deals with a piece of research carried out in teaching environment using the audio and video recordings of teacher trainees and analyses teachers' usage of mother tongue in their own teaching. The paper suggests that a systematic use of target language and a minimal use of mother tongue in English language classroom may provide learners with explicit knowledge of the target language systems.

- *Key Words : Mother Tongue, Teaching, classroom training, Foreign language*

1. Introduction

In the process of teaching a foreign language, the teacher's use of mother tongue can influence the learner's acquisition of the target language. Throughout the history of English language teaching and second language acquisition, the role of mother tongue has been an important issue. The various views are reflections on the methodological changes in English language teaching, which have in such way brought different perspectives on the role of mother tongue.

In this thesis I will discuss the role of mother tongue in teaching English as a foreign language. I would like to find out to what extent the mother tongue can play its role in the process of teaching a foreign language. On that account, the first part of the paper concentrates on the methods and approaches and their changing views on the use of mother tongue in a foreign language classroom throughout the history. The theoretical part concludes with the mother tongue in foreign language classroom where I deal with all the teaching skills as the base for successful English learning.

Generally, teachers used the mother tongue for all kinds of situations including giving instructions, doing translation or presenting foreign language structures. This happened mainly because some of the teachers feel that the use of mother tongue has always an active and beneficial role to facilitate foreign language learning. After watching the first audio and video recording of my own teaching I realized that the mother tongue is used very often because of the temptation to facilitate the teacher's job but at the expense of pupils. This made me think about other reasons why the mother tongue was used and about ways how to reduce the abundant use of it.

After deeper analysis of what happened during the observations and my own teaching I was aware of the fact that the abundant use of mother tongue

was in most cases ineffective since it was apparent that pupils did not need to hear mother tongue. In its place, other things to avoid the use of mother tongue should have been used including gestures, facial expressions or visual aids.

Although some amount of mother tongue in monolingual foreign language class is acceptable, in the literature concerning the same issue, a good number of researchers stress the increasing methodological need in foreign language teaching for a more systematic and principled way of using the mother tongue in the classroom.

It is said that the younger the pupils are the better they will absorb any foreign language they are ringed by, and they appear to learn the foreign language more easily than adults do. Not once teachers used the mother tongue to solve the off-task behavior or had to put an extreme effort in getting pupils to focus on what they were supposed to do. what extent is the teacher's use of mother tongue in foreign language classroom effective and facilitating pupils' learning? What are the current views for foreign language teaching concerning the use of mother tongue? How to implement these views into the teaching environment?

On the basis of the theoretical part I will try to prove my hypothesis promoting the target language use as the main language in the foreign language classroom. The research will be undertaken in the classroom environment in order to find out whether the teacher trainees of English are willing to use mainly the target language or whether they overuse their mother tongue. The research is based on observing and analyzing the audio and video recordings for the mother tongue is used and if so in what particular situations.

- Major language teaching trends in the twentieth century

One of the examples of language

teaching trends in the twentieth century is according to Mora, the *Reading Method*, where the translation reappears as a respectable classroom procedure related to comprehension of the written text (Internet 1). "Several techniques were adopted from native language reading instruction." (Stern,1999:461). Period from the 1930s to 1960s refers to the *Oral Approach* or *Situational Language Teaching* terms, which is an approach to language teaching developed by British applied linguists. Both took from the Direct Method although

An oral approach should not be confused with the obsolete Direct Method, which meant only that the learner was bewildered by a flow of ungraded speech, suffering all the difficulties he would have encountered in picking up the language in its normal environment and losing most of the compensating benefits of better contextualization in those circumstances (Pattison cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2005:38).

The main characteristics of the Situational Language Teaching, at least those connected to the theme were as follows:

- The target language is the language of the classroom.
- A great emphasis on accuracy to avoid acquisition of errors.
- Language teaching begins with the spoken language.
- New language points are introduced and practiced situationally. (Richards and Rodgers, 2005:39).

According to Richards and Rodgers, the fact that the new language points are introduced and practiced situationally became a key feature of the approach in 1960s, and since then the term *Situational* was used in referring to the Oral Approach. The terms *Structural-Situational Approach* and *Situational Language Teaching* came into common use (2005:39).

Concerning Situational Language Teaching, it is still true that "this method is widely used at the time of writing and a very large number of textbooks are based on it." (Hubbard cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2005:36). In the United States, toward the end of the 1950s, the need for a radical change and rethinking of foreign language teaching methodology resulted in the emergence of the Audiolingual Method with strong ties to linguistics and behavioral psychology (Richards and Rodgers, 2005:53-67). The Audiolingual Method, like the Direct Method that was already discussed, had a goal very different from that of the Grammar-Translation Method. Larsen-Freeman specifies: "Teachers want their students to be able to use the target language communicatively [...], to over learn the target language, to learn to use it automatically without stopping to think." (1986:43). Here are a number of Audiolingual Method key features:

- The meaning that the words have for the native speaker can be learned only in a linguistic or

cultural context and not in isolation.

- Very little use of the mother tongue by teachers is permitted.
- A great effort to get students to produce error-free utterances.
- Items to be learned in the target language are presented in spoken form before they are seen in written form.
- Focus on accuracy through drill and practice in the basic structures and sentence patterns of the target language. (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:35, Brown, 1994:57).

Towards the late 60s, it became clear that the monolingual orthodoxy was untenable on any grounds, be they psychological, linguistic or pedagogical. To refer only to pedagogical qualms, how can teachers and students be expected to use English exclusively, when both of them are non-native speakers of English and share the same mother tongue? (Medgyes, 1994:66).

Many teaching approaches and methods developed with different characteristics and assumptions about how a foreign language should be taught and further many teaching techniques were changed to improve the teaching methodology in the last century. There has always been a concern for method, but " [...] the current attraction to 'method' stems from the late 1950s, when foreign language teachers were falsely led to believe that there was a method to remedy the 'language teaching and learning problems'." (Lange, 1990:253).

Research Aims and Objectives

This research aims to reveal whether the teacher trainees are able to conduct their lessons in English, using the target language as much as possible and thus discover the role of mother tongue in English language classroom. The following questions are directed in order to achieve my aim:

- 1) Do trainee teachers use mother tongue in English language classrooms?
- 2) If so, in what situations do they use the mother tongue instead of English and how frequently is the mother tongue used for this purpose?
- 3) Is the teacher trainees' use of mother tongue effective?
- 4) What is the amount of mother tongue in English language classroom?

Concerning these questions, to support my hypothesis, the teacher trainees should be able to conduct their lessons mostly in English to follow the monolingual approach. Krashen, who was a strong advocate of this approach, pleaded that learning foreign languages has the same characteristics as acquiring a mother tongue; therefore the use of mother tongue in foreign language classroom should be none or minimal (1981). However, Medgyes takes this view for "untenable on any grounds, be they psychological, linguistic and pedagogic" (1994, 66). Nowadays, there are some situations when it is possible for teachers to slip into their mother tongue, but the teachers need to very careful to avoid its abundant use.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to find out to what extent the mother tongue plays its role in foreign language teaching. Beginning with early teaching approaches, displayed in the first part, the focus on form later changed into developing pupils' communicative ability, which has shifted to adopting current communicative approaches such as The Natural Approach and Communicative Language Teaching. These approaches emphasize pupils' communicative competence, which is described in the third chapter. It suggests that without sufficient exposure needed for pupils to acquire the foreign language and to start to use a new knowledge, communicative competence is not likely to be upheld.

It is apparent from my paper that I support the idea that the target language should remain the main language to be used in foreign language classroom however, with the appropriate and judicious use of mother tongue in some cases. I also encourage communicative approach arguing that pupils should be exposed to as much as possible to the target language use to allow its acquisition development considering that their foreign language class is the only opportunity when they get in contact with the foreign language. Unlike the second language learners who have to use their second language in everyday life, the foreign language learners have not the same chance to the target language use outside the classroom so they cannot practice what they have learnt in the classroom.

The possibility when to use the mother tongue in foreign language classroom is presented based on the fact that a judicious use of the mother tongue can sometimes have both pedagogical and effective role in the communicative language classroom. However, I want to stress out that teachers must keep in mind that the target language should remain the main language.

In the practical part of my research I tried to investigate to what extent and in what situations the teacher trainees use their mother tongue. The research based on observing thirty audio and video recordings examined the amount of mother tongue the teacher trainees used during their own teaching. Although I believed that my research would prove the theoretical part foundations and strengthen my beliefs, the results showed a complete flip side. Based on the results, I tried to find the cause of such a failure, which may lie mainly in teacher trainees' teaching experience or their problems to provide a comprehensible input to pupils.

Although I find my results useful the major limitation of my findings might be a relatively small sample of participants so in case of further research I would suggest to have a larger sample of teacher trainees.

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