

Teaching Languages to Students of Translation

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Although teaching languages is closely related to teaching translation, it is necessary to make a distinction between the two because before they deal with translation, students need to have acquired a significant level of proficiency in languages.

In what follows I will mention the methods used in teaching languages basing my arguments on my personal experience as a lecturer of English as a foreign language for more than twenty years and as a speaker of Arabic and French.

I will suggest methods for improving students' performance and strategies to sensitize students to the aspects of the language they must learn and master grammar, syntax and lexis.

Although teaching languages is closely related to teaching translation I will present arguments against the use of translation in language teaching.

How is language taught to students of translation?

There are linguists, who are for the use of L1 in the teaching of L2, literature review presents an issue which is longstanding and of central importance to foreign and second language teachers in a variety of contexts namely teachers use of the first language in L2 classroom.

Among a number of professionals in the field of second language teaching, there is an increasing conviction that the L1 has a facilitating role in the second and foreign classroom.

They advocate that L1 should be used/Widdowson 1978:62; Ellis1992:46;

Bowen, Marsh 1994: 93; Uri; 1996:40; Duff 1986; Atkinson 1993, as an example.

Careless; 2004 showed that some teachers in Hong Kong use Cantonese in their English class because they think their students won't get the content of it if they use just English. They also think it saves time, it helps supporting weaker students, and L1 Cantonese is used for grammar points difficult to explain in English.

Some others firmly believe that the use of the mother tongue was counter-productive in the process of acquiring a new language and therefore the use of translation in the classroom could do more damage than good.

Counterevidence for using L1 in L2 teaching

I will explain in the following lines why L1 can't be a tool in L2 English learning as the claims stated above for the use of L1 are not convincing arguments.

my belief joins the position of linguists who support the idea that L1 is not suitable in the early stage of learning L2 (Marsh 1987:30.Snell-Hornby 1985:21.

L1 forces learners to view the foreign language always through their mother tongue. This causes interference and a dependence of L1 that inhibits free expression in L2.

L1 influence on L2 acquisition

Larsen & freeman state that a person learns a second language in terms of the Kinds of meanings already learned in the 1st language (Larson & Freeman & Long, 1991)

In Algeria most students arrive at university with an elementary level in English.

Those students are very much influenced by their first languages (Algerian Arabic or Berber the mother tongues, Standard Arabic and French as the first and second learning languages, respectively), and they have for the majority been taught English with L1 as a tool.

Consequently, they are not mastering the L2 language. As argued by Marsh 1987:30 ; Snell- Hornby 1985 : 21.) , before the learners tackle translation productively, they need to have acquired a significant level of proficiency in the second or foreign language. They need to have moved beyond beginners level, where their linguistic competence allows it.

My own experience as a language lecturer

As a lecturer of English as a foreign language in the Translation Department, University of Algiers, for more than 2 decades and being myself a speaker of Arabic French and Tamazight, I have noticed, recorded and analysed the various kinds of errors students have been doing as they are very much influenced by their first languages.

I firmly believe that the use of the mother tongue or any other first acquired language in the classroom is not helping the process of acquiring a new language as the learner is very much influenced by his first language or languages and he/she inevitably transfers negatively the properties of his L1 to L2 which generally leads to errors as languages are different.

The other reason is that English is a language that is only used in an academic environment in Algeria. Unlike Arabic French and Berber, English is hardly heard outside the class. Thus encouraging the student to hear and use the English language is an important aspect of the language teaching.

The method for teaching English as a foreign language

As our students are learning the target language along with translation, we have to take into account the differences that are particular to both languages.

It is the task of the lecturer to create a linguistic environment where the student is given the opportunity to practice and use the English language, so the course is solely given in English.

Along with the use of the audio-lingual method; creating in class a linguistic Environment that will enable the learner to listen to English by means of tapes and videos for example as well as encouraging the learner to develop the four skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing expressing himself/herself in English. The role of the language teacher is to help the learners understand those particular grammatical and syntactic features of the language that do not exist in their L1 or are used in different ways, and help the students reach the linguistic competence allowing them to translate.

My knowledge of Arabic and French has enabled me to understand the Linguistic weaknesses of students in the acquisition of English: For example a great number of students tend to misuse the English particles.

I thus focus the course on those particular aspects of English students have some difficulties with , because of the first languages influence.

My main concern is to help the learner understand the particularity of the target language: get familiar with the different features of English. Teaching Particular structures of the language that commonly give problem to the learners. Techniques should be developed for teaching language skills.

A learner of English whose mother tongue is Arabic must learn and perfectly understand for example that English makes use of the passive form much more than Arabic.

It is the role of the teacher to stress much more on the differences that exist between English and other languages.

Thus the teacher must help the learner understand the sentence structure of English emphasizing on the grammatical and lexical features.

The lecturer must consider the contrastive difference between the two languages, training the students with techniques and paraphrasing.

Here are some examples to illustrate my position.

- a) The use of articles, prepositions and pronouns in English cause a great Problem to students as they differ from the way they are used in Arabic or French.
- b) The use of the active/passive form.
- c) The use of tenses; students have some difficulty with the present perfect tense.

The purpose of the course is consequently to help the learner reach the following goal as a final year undergraduate student of translation:

- a) Understand the structure of the English Language.
- b) Compare with the other languages.
- c) Reach the linguistic competence allowing him to translate.

To conclude, I would like to say that translator training programmes and language courses have different objectives, while there can be a productive exchange between the two, we shall have to be cautious when drawing parallels between them.

The use of L1 in English classes should be banned in foreign language acquisition and limited to advanced levels only. As the role of the teacher is to create linguistic environment which will enable the learner to listen to English and express himself/herself in the language.

I would also like to mention that translation is an awareness of the contrastive differences between the 2 languages as well as transfer competence that is to say the skill that distinguishes translators from people who are merely bilingual.

Translation thus requires a high level of proficiency.

This is why the role of the language lecturer is teaching the differences between the two languages at the lexical, syntactic levels along with teaching courses in economics, finance, science and technology, legal and medical terms by means of audio lingual methods.

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