WHY's OF PRO-FIRST LANGUAGE USE ARGUMENTS IN ESP CONTEXT

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Introduction

Teaching methodologies are victims to fashion and a range of approaches have proceeded through classrooms in the past 25 years. Principled teaching is not about pre-packaged methodological products, however, individual teacher's construct of personal, and context-specific framework allow him or her to select and combine compatible procedures and materials in systematic ways for a local context.

In ESP classrooms these frameworks are influenced by the fact that the students bring both specialized knowledge and learning process from their disciplines to their ESP classes. The teacher can seek to harness and build on those to develop learners' discourse understanding in various ways (Hyland, 2006). There should be time and balance reserved for not only presenting but also practicing linguistically and socially appropriate language relevant to the topics and situations the learners need to function in real world. Language objectives resulting from learners' needs should be included in the syllabus hand in hand with authentic activities. The effort to determine the specificity of the language in ESP courses for optimizing and economizing them has led to development of a number of suggestions and techniques as short cuts to obtain objectives.

Among other suggestions, the use of the students' first language in the foreign language classrooms has been a bone of contention for linguists and teachers alike since the fall from grace of grammar translation as a teaching method. The lack of positive literature available on translation and L1 use in classrooms and the negative coverage it receives by "the experts" and trainers has certainly made teachers wary of experimenting with it or doing research on it.(Atkinson,1987).Yet using the second language throughout the lesson may make the class seem less real. Instead of the actual situation of a group of people trying to get to a grip with a second language, there is a pretend monolingual situation. The first language has become an invisible and scorned element in the classroom. The students are pretend native speakers of the second language rather than true L2 users. (Cook, 2001)

According to Cook (2001) the practical reason for avoiding the first language in many English language teaching situations is that the students speak several languages and it would be impossible for teaching to take account of them. However, the practical reasons for avoiding the first language in multilingual class do not justify its avoidance in classes with single first language, like most ESP classes. Implicit reasons have been brought by translation and L1 use opponents. The reasons seem to be two-fold: 1- It does not happen in first language acquisition, and 2- the two languages should be kept separate in the mind. (see section 2)

While there may be some negative effects from using translation, this paper, taking the position that there is a place in learning environment for translation, will first explore the theoretical background for using L1 in EFL and ESP contexts and next examines some of the studies regarding L1 use and the way it help teachers and students to optimize the course. With careful application aimed at specific goals and situations, translation can contribute to the students' acquisition of the target language at all levels in general and at tertiary level in particular.

1- Theoretical Arguments for L1 Use
1-1-Bilingualization in Monolingual classrooms!

Indeed the widely accepted idea that the first language should be avoided at all costs in the second language classroom and translation discouraged, is based on the belief that contact between two languages is the last thing the teachers want.

The objective of a language teaching program is to develop in students a capability in the language (L2) other than their own(L1).The students come to class with one (at least) language, the task is to get them to acquire another one, to help them be bilingual. So if bilingualism is our aim and as Spolsky (1998:49) holds," it is the prime example of language contact, for the two languages are in contact in the bilingual", we should be busy getting the first language and the foreign language into contact in our learners. (Widdowson 2003: 150). The foreignness of English means that the other language is implicated in some way in the process of achieving bilingual capability. As to the process of bilingualization there is plenty of evidence of contact in bilingual situation, often described negatively as interference, the effect of which assumed to be minimized.

1-2- Coordinate Bilingualism Through Compounding!

Language contact within an individual requires the languages to be compounded where the two languages fuse into a single system, and it is distinct from coordinate bilingualism where the two languages are kept apart as separate system. (Widdowson 2003, Cook 2001)

The policy of avoiding the first language assumes that the only valid form of L2 learning is coordination. But mostly the distinction between the two types has been watered down because of evidence that the two languages are very far from separate. All the evidence is that what the learners do is to go through a process of compound bilingualism through interlanguage stages. Even if the languages are distinct in theory, in practice they are interwoven in terms of phonology, vocabulary, syntax and processing. (Cook 2001). While teachers are busy trying to focus attention on the L2 as distinct from the L1, thereby striving to replicate conditions of coordinate bilingualism, the learners are busy on their own agenda of bringing the two languages together in the process if compound bilingualism.

1-3- Contrastive analysis of Languages, a Prophylactic Measure or means for focus on form!

The sustained notion of behaviorists was regulating responses by controlled exposure to the L2, with the effect of establishing habits which would override interference from the learners' L1 and counteract bilingual compounding. Contrastive Analysis (CA) of L1 and L2 was devised to anticipate such interferences. (Howatt 1984). Under the assumption that all influence from L1 was negative and that the L2 should be directly internalized by the metalinguistic devices, there was no question of exploiting the learners' existing linguistic experience and expertise to facilitate the learning of L2. So CA was directed at making monolingual teaching more effective, the essential purpose of which was to induce a separate modular development which, at the end of the day, yielded another language to be added as a coordinate to the one that the learners already had.

Surprisingly enough, the validity of monolingual pedagogy survived the discrediting of CA as a diagnostic device and the demise of Behaviorism. With more cognitive views of learning comes the realization that learners can not be immunized against the influence of their L1 and that there is bound to be contact. The kind of contact and the extent of its effect is the concern of SLA research and still remain matters of controversy and conjecture. But there seem to be no question that this effect, referred to as *transfer* is a crucial phenomenon to be reckoned with and one which is not to be avoided but positively welcomed. (Ellis 1994, Gass and Selinker 1983).

The early years of communicative methods saw publication of text books which contained little to no explicit grammar content. However as experience and research findings have demonstrated the ignoring of some type of focus on form is not the optimal choice. (Sheen, 2001, Long 1991). The

acceptance of the principle of the need to understand the grammar of a language should justify the provision of CA input as it facilitates that understanding. It is now recognized that CA should be used to explain difficulties, i.e. CA should be used as part of the explanatory stage in error analysis. (Mihalache 2005). Justification for this is provided in the method comparison research of the 60s and 70s. Following their review of that research and a description of their own replicated study, Von Elek and Oskarsson (1973) came to the following summary of their findings:

> "The only safe conclusion one can draw is that, in the teaching of a foreign
> grammar to adults, such techniques as grammatical explanations, deductive
> presentations of the subject matter, translation, the use of the native language
> and Contrastive Analysis are jointly superior to the combination of techniques
> constituting the implicit method."

Rutherford states that CA has positive effects because learning occurs when the subject matter can be meaningfully related to something that is already known (1987). The aim of contrastive studies is not only a better understanding of the linguistic structure, but also applied deduction, meant to raise the entire teaching activity above the empirical and occasional practice, to outline fundamental teaching program based on the scientific knowledge of the language.

1-4- L1 use and the relationship with Self-efficacy and Attribution Theories

Feelings of self-efficacy have to do with one's feeling that one can accomplish a task or project such as learning a foreign language. Self- efficacy is a close partner with motivation; a basic assumption in attribution theory of motivation is that people seek to explain the causes of events in their lives, the students' attributions influence their expectancy of future performance, emotional reactions, and task choice: if you think you can accomplish something, you are likely to want to try it. If you think you are likely to fail or not be very good at something, your motivation may suffer.
(Leaver, Ehrman, Shektman 2005, Yang 1999)

A sense of self-efficacy is normally the result of previous successful experience. People undertake and promote confidently activities that they judge themselves capable of managing, but they avoid those they believe exceed their abilities. (Yang 1999). Considering EFL context in general and ESP ones in particular, the use of translation and students' L1 make the tasks manageable and brings them within the capability domain of learners, it grants positive personal judgment of their performance.(see 2-3)

1-5- Classroom is Not a State: Alienation or Affection

The recently published blog on the plenary session at the IATEFL Conference in Aberdeen, 18-20 April, 2007, refers to the ideas of a well known linguist guy Cook who was a speaker there. The most important statement was the fact that EFL and ESL teachers tend to take a monolingual approach thus neglecting the importance of *translation* in the process of teaching. The EFL/ESL classroom can not follow the motto "One nation, one people, one language", a somewhat overrated statement since it implies that a classroom is a state. Quite contrary to that, L1, i.e. the mother tongue, should by all means be acknowledged. Students' culture is part of their language and by neglecting their language the teacher neglects their culture which leads to the danger of neglecting their identity as well. The disregard of the students' mother tongue can demotivate the students and be counterproductive. There is neither a scientific nor a pedagogic reason to excludeL1 from the teaching process. (Kavaliauskiene, kaminskiene 2007). There are probably more reasons, utilitarian and political, to make the use of L1 quite valuable in the process of teaching English. The former reason implies that the students would be motivated to think more about appropriate equivalents in their own languages and the latter one emphasizes the importance of cultural diversities and tolerance among nations.

In discussion as to how pedagogy might be designed to facilitate learning and comprehensible input among factors that are thought to inhibit the acquisition process, the suppression of the L1 does not figure. The one that does, according to Widdowson (2003), is affective filter, which concerns the temporary disposition of the learner, but no consideration is given to the possibility that this disposition may well depend on how learners react to the *alienating* effect of having to cope with something foreign without being allowed to refer to what is familiar. Evidence from the research into the crucial issue of the L1 use in classrooms around the world is analyzed by Mattioli (2004). For instance, L1 use in China offers evidence that it is a valuable tool for socio-cognitive processes involved in language learning. Another reason for L1 use in the classrooms relate to the fostering of a positive affective environment. Schweers (1999) encourages teachers to insert the native language into lessons to influence the classroom dynamic, provide a sense of security and validate the learners' experiences. Rogers(1995) clearly stated that the best education is just as the best remedy. Its purpose should be "full functioning person". Using students' mother tongue creates a kind of safety in teaching; the classroom atmosphere becomes harmonious, honest, open and supportive.

1-6- L1 as Cognitive Filter

The input, it is said, has to be comprehensible. The question arises as to how the learners make the input comprehensible: in part by reference to context, but in part also by invoking L1 equivalents.(Widdowson 2003). It would seem unlikely that the learner takes in the items of the L2 per se and only subsequently in the process of interlanguage development relate them to the L1. The L1 is surely on the act from the start in processing the input and in a sense can be said to act as a kind of filter, a cognitive one. If this is the case then one might plausibly argue that explicit reference to the L1 would assist the learner in making the input comprehensible. Furthermore, such explicit reference would have the additional advantage of making formal features of the SL meaningful and noticeable at the same time. For learners, translation is the main tool of comprehension. (Vilnensis and kavaliaauskiene, 2002). It implies that students are unable to grasp the meaning without translating from their mother tongue.

1-7- **Teachers' and Students' attitudes towards the use of L1 in ESP classes**

Teachers' attitudes to the use of learners' native language in the classroom on different levels have undergone significant changes from a complete denial to a reluctant acceptance.

The investigation of students' and teachers' attitudes towards using L1 in L2 classroom was carried out by Schweers (1999:6), who overviewed a number of possible applications of mother tongues in the L2 classroom:

"eliciting language, checking comprehension, giving complex instructions, testing, developing circumlocution strategies, negotiation of syllabus, classroom management, language analysis, presentation of grammar rules, and explanation of errors"

Inspired by what Schweers has done in EFL context, Kavaliauskiene and Januleviciciene(2007)sought to find the teachers' attitudes towards the L1 use in teaching ESP and examined if the learners need any translation at the intermediate and advanced levels. The most important observation in this research was a supportive and facilitating role of L1 in ESP classroom.

1- 8- Code-switching and Translation as a Communication and Achievement Strategy

The process of going through from one language to the other in mid-speech when both speakers know the same language, known as code switching, is employed by all language users in one way or another. People use similar memory processes in both the first and the second language, even if they are less effective at using them in the second language. Code switching is found all over the world where bilingual speakers talk to each other; it is an ordinary fact of life in many multilingual societies. It is a unique feat that the L2 users are capable of that no monolingual can ever

achieve.(Cook 2001). The interesting questions about code switching are why and when it happens. Common reasons for code switching are: to report what someone has said, to use markers from one language to highlight something in another, to feel that some topics are more appropriate to one language than another. Another question to be asked is: what does code switching have to do with language teaching and teaching English for specific purposes? Code switching can be exploited by teacher as part of actual teaching methodology; it also is exploited by learners as communication and achievement strategies. (Cook 2001,Tarone 1980, Faerch and Kasper 1983). When the teacher knows the language of the students, the classroom itself is often a code switching situation. The lesson starts in the first language, or it slips in, in other ways. Rodolpho Jacobson has developed a teaching method known as THE NEW CONCURRENT APPROACH (Jacobson and Faltis 1990), which gets teachers to balance the use of the two languages within a single lesson. In a class where English is being taught to Spanish-speaking children, the teacher can switch to Spanish when concepts are important, when students are getting distracted, or when the student should be praised or told off.

One of the possible reasons for the differences in the language proficiency levels among student has been considered to be efficiency of use of language learning strategies and the effect explicit language learning strategy would have on the development of discipline-specific language proficiency in relation to the four skills and vocabulary within tertiary education ESP context (Jorkovic 2006).

Communication strategies have been defined differently by different authors. Tarone (1980) defines them as mutual attempts to solve L2 communication problems by the participants. She emphasizes the social aspects of communication. Communication strategies, distinguished from other types of strategies known as production and learning strategies, involve falling back on the first language through four different processes: translation from the L1, language switch, appeal for assistance, and mime what you need.

In their approach to communication strategies Faerch and Kasper (1984), concentrate on the psychological dimension of what is going on in the L2 speakers' mind: "communication strategies are individual solutions to psychological problems of L2 processing". The divide them into two main groups: achievement and avoidance. Achievement strategies subdivide into cooperative and non-cooperative strategies. One form of non-cooperation is to fall back on the first language when in trouble, by code switching and foreignerization.

Considering the theoretical considerations mentioned so far, some of the teachers have found the first language useful in the classrooms, either in EFL or ESP contexts, in areas such as: explaining grammar to the learners, explaining tasks, scaffolding, checking comprehension, giving feedback to students, using first language to maintain the discipline, and testing.

2- Hows and Whys of L1 use
2-1- Hows and Whys of L1 use as consciousness- raising device for building ESP students' discourse competence

ESP courses always involve attending to the text learners will most need to use beyond the classroom. Making text and context a focus for analysis allows the teacher to raise students' awareness of the interdependence of disciplinary valued genre, the resources used to create meaning in context and powerful genres can be negotiated.

With the advent of discourse approach to description of language on the one hand, and recognition of match between specific disciplines and cognitive styles (Widdowson 1981), genre analysis was proposed to characterize how linguistic forms realize the conceptual and rhetorical structure, mode of thought and action, which are established as conventions for certain communities.

To raise the learners' consciousness about rhetorical structures and genres, they can be presented with a particular genre in both L1 and L2, comparing them to find the commonalities, if any, that may originate from universal cognitive style and pattern of thinking that dominates the

discipline, and contrasting them to find how cross-cultural differences are reflected in the way texts of one specific genre are created.

Rutherford maintains that consciousness- raising is a top-down approach to understanding language and encourages students to see grammatical features as " the on-line" processing component of discourse and not the set of syntactic building blocks with which discourse is constructed.(1987:104).

The approach takes various forms but all address the ways meaning is constricted. Some common procedures involve comparison and attention to language use through tasks where students reflect on how far features correspond with their use in students ' first language and on the attitudes to the expectation of academic style in relation to their own needs, culture and identities.

2-2-Hows and Whys of L1 use for Scaffolding and Grammatical Competence of ESP students

A complementary methodology used to build students' discourse competence in ESP classes follows the ideas of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978) in giving considerable recognition to the importance of collaborative or peer interaction and scaffolding or teacher-supported learning. Scaffolding emphasizes interaction with experiences others in moving learners from their existing level of performance to a level of potential performance. (Cook 2001, Hyland 2006). If collaborative dialogues between students have been stressed as scaffolding the learner, the first language can provide part of the scaffolding that goes with this dialogue.

2-3- Hows and Whys of L1 use in Tired-task for ESP mixed-level classes

When faced with mixed-level class such as ESP context, what the teachers do is to adopt reading and listening activities to suit strong and weak students. One of the communicative teaching principles, according to Bowler and Palminter (2002), is:" Students' ability to read or listen successfully is governed by a simple equation: text level of challenge + task level of support= student success". (p: 59)

With a long, complex text, a simple task, namely the use of first language and translation makes the reading or listening achievable for weaker students and with a short simple text the task can be more demanding.

Bowler and Palminter (2002) proposed Tired-task for adapting reading or listening activities for mixed-level classes. The authors liken tasks with different level of difficulty to unequal slices of a wedding cake. They add that the top tier of cake gives most support and least freedom for error and hence good for weaker students. In reading comprehension and listening activities the teacher may want the weaker student to produce the answers in L1 or translate the idea taken from the text. The bottom tier, the slices of which are bigger gives the least support and the most freedom to experiment, hence good for stronger students. The questions and answer in English are suitable for advance level students.

2-4- Hows and Whys of using L1 for learning vocabulary, formulaic expressions, collocations and (productive use of L1)

The importance of vocabulary and vocabulary learning strategies within the broader framework of language learning strategies have been confirmed by different authors, Robinson(1991:4) holds that one of the characteristics, or even a critical feature of ESP is that a course should involve specialist language and (especially terminology) and content. Dudly-Evans and St. John (1998:5) considers lexis among defining features of ESP:" ESP is centered on the language (grammar, lexis, and register), skills, discourse, and genre appropriate to that activities.

Beglar and Hunt (1992) proposed a combination of three approaches to vocabulary instruction and learning, namely: explicit instruction, incidental learning, and independent strategy development. The learners' proficiency level and learning situation should be considered when deciding the relative

emphasis to be placed on each approach. The appropriate approach for ESP student particularly at intermediate level, with limited vocabulary and in need for knowing approximately 3000 high-frequency general academic words is the explicit approach. The approach requires providing opportunities for intentional learning of vocabulary. Coady (1997), for example suggests students supplement their extensive reading with the study of academic words until the words form and meaning are automatically recognized. According to Coady the first stage in teaching the words commonly begins with word pairs in which an L2 word is matched with an L1 translation. Prince (1996) found that both advanced and weaker students recall more newly learned words using translation than L2 context. Hulstijn, Hollander and Greidanus (1996) showed that repeated exposure to words combined with marginal glosses or bilingual dictionary use leads to increased learning for advanced learners. However, the use of bilingualized dictionaries may have some advantages over traditional bilingual ones, since they essentially do the job of both a bilingual and monolingual dictionary.

Kroll and Curley (1988) found that novice bilinguals may rely on the semantic network of words associations already exist in their first language to facilitate lexical access in the second language. In their experiment they presented novice and expert English-to-German bilinguals with a picture-naming and a word-translation task. They found that the novices were significantly faster at the translation task. The experts on the other hand, showed no significant reaction time differences between the two tasks. They then argue that there is a shift during second language vocabulary acquisition, from a strategy of comprehending L2 words by first accessing L1 equivalents, to a strategy of direct lexical access in L2.

Several studies have found that multiword phrases are not learned well through ordinary language experience and suggest that there is a need for them to be learned explicitly. Cowie (1992) found that a large number of familiar and stable collocations appear in texts that must be known for receptive as well as productive skills. Lewis (1993) cites that recent research that has found that native speakers of a language utilize a large number of fixed and prepatterned phrases as they carry out the routines of normal spoken interaction. He then emphasizes that all language utilizes a wide range of expressions including words, polywords, multiword, collocations, and institutionalizes expressions. In his words, "Language consists of grammaticalized lexis, not lexicalizes grammar". He proposes a significantly different method of second or foreign language teaching. Among implications of his Lexical Approach are: De-contextualizes vocabulary learning and the recognition of importance of L1 and L2 contrast in language awareness.

2-5- Hows and Whys of L1 use for Testing

Another benefit of L1 use and translation is that it cal provide the teacher with a pool of incorrect words, phrases, and sentences for multiple-choice distracters, and incorrect options for true/false items (Mahmud 2006). The test developer often resorts to guesswork in determining what might be misunderstood in a reading. In the case of translation the incorrect understanding of the language and ideas in the text is clear and obvious, providing sources for distracters.

Translation also provides the opportunity for the teacher to test the learners' reading comprehension. Using translation as a means for error analysis of learners. The teacher can categorize the translation problems as local errors, which minimally interfere with comprehension, and global errors, which strongly interfere with comprehension.(Brown 2000, Mahmud 2006)

Conclusion

Translation promotes learners autonomy, it motivates students by letting them experience success, is can be used as a technique for raising consciousness at different linguistic and discourse levels, including grammar, lexis, rhetoric and genre. In her article "Contrastive Linguistics in

Textbook and Classroom", Wilga M.Rivers states that:" It may appear that the contrastive technique 'par excellence' in foreign language teaching is the translation exercise. Here the student is confronted with native language forms and structures and required to produce the contrasting forms and structures of the foreign language" The translation in which exact meaning is transferred from one language to another demands a thorough knowledge of areas of contrast on form and function and it is for this reason, being very profitable exercise of the students' control of the foreign language at all levels. (Mihalache 2005).

SLA research and empirical evidence provide no reason why the above mentioned activities employing first language are not rational in the classroom. If twenty-first-century teaching is to continue to accept the ban on the first language imposed by the late nineteenth century, it will have to look elsewhere for its rationale.

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