

The Pedagogical Implications of L1 Use in the L2 Classroom

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Introduction

What role, if any, should the students' mother tongue play in the language classroom? What is the language classroom? The language classroom is not one classroom, but many, encompassing both second and foreign language instruction, as well as a variety of levels from novice to near native proficiency. Given this, there are a variety of answers to just how much of a role the students' mother tongue should play.

In countries where language students are studying an official language of that country, the students are often foreigners, in many cases immigrants. They come from various countries with various mother tongues. Employing their L1 in the language classroom is difficult, though not impossible, so long as there are at least two people in the class that speak it. Whether this is practical is something that needs to be considered on a case by case basis depending on the student composition of the class. The use of the students' L1 becomes a far more practical issue when dealing with linguistically homogeneous classrooms. This paper will focus on the latter.

Even in the case of linguistically homogeneous classes, there is still controversy over L1 use. Students need exposure to the L2. In many cases the only exposure the students may get is in the classroom; therefore, shouldn't the instructor speak only the L2? That depends on what the purpose of the language class is. Is it a class full of novice learners of the L2? Is it a class of students preparing for a stay abroad? Is it a class of students training to become translators/interpreters?

The amount of L1 use and how it is employed should vary with classroom environment. The L1 provides scaffolding that should be gradually dismantled as the students' progress. Not enough and affective filters may be raised, too much and progress is slowed. The L2 should be used as much as possible. Maximizing L2 use should be the goal in every classroom.

The primary role of the students' L1 in the language classroom is lowering affective filters. This is done through comprehension. Comprehension not only of the L2, but of the procedures that take place in the classroom. Regardless of the subject being studied, the classroom can be an intimidating place, even for adults. It can take some time to become accustomed to new surroundings, faces, classroom procedures, and educational approaches. Add to this the exclusive use of an L2 in the class, and

confusion and anxiety may soon follow. Should this anxiety increase to too great a level, facilitative anxiety may turn into debilitating anxiety as affective filters are raised.

The fifth hypothesis of Krashen's Monitor Model (as outlined by Lightbown and Spada, 1999:39), the affective filter hypothesis, implies that students or more accurately 'acquirers' of a language will filter or block out the target language if they become tense, angry, or bored. Intuitively, this makes sense. Students who are confused will become frustrated, upset, angry, and resentful at the environment of the language classroom. When this happens learning stops. This not only has immediate implications, but may also have negative consequences far into the future, as it may bring some students to regard learning the language in question or even other languages as a hopeless endeavour. To prevent this from happening, it is imperative that the students' comprehend what is happening both administratively in the classroom, and pedagogically with the target language.

The fourth hypothesis of Krashen's Monitor Model (ibid), the input hypothesis, asserts that an important factor for acquisition of another language is comprehensible input. Optimal acquisition will occur when the student of the language can understand most of the input (via reading or listening), while being challenged by some new vocabulary. Krashen calls this "i + 1," where "i" represents the level of attainment by the student and "1" represents material that is just beyond their current competence.

What happens if (i+1) becomes (i+2) or (i+3)? It is imperative that this does not occur. According to the Teachability hypothesis:

...An item will only be acquired, and therefore should only be taught, when the learner is developmentally ready to acquire it (Nunan, 1999: 46).

Comprehension of the classroom environment leads to lower affective filters. The students' L1 can assist in making the classroom a more comprehensible place and help lower affective filters when used in the following roles:

- 1) To allay a possible perceived threat posed by the L2 to the cultural identity of the students.
- 2) To provide administrative/managerial knowledge - knowledge of school and classroom policies (i.e. classroom management) and for discipline enforcement
- 3) To allow the teacher to conduct comprehension checks.
- 4) To allow students to request clarification from the teacher regarding a specific issue (i.e. grammar, instructions for an activity).
- 5) To provide schematic and contextual/situational knowledge – students' can draw upon their background knowledge of: facts, physical settings, situations and the

culture of the foreign/second language.

- 6) To allow students to attain greater fluency and make learning meaningful by allowing them to engage in code-switching, especially when engaging in story telling techniques.
- 7) To contrast/raise consciousness of similarities or differences between the students L1 and the L2.

Cultural Identity

The self-identity of a monolingual person is inextricably bound up with their native language (Brown, 2000: 64; Piaseka, in Schweers, 1999). Some students may resent the L2 if they feel it is forced on them, thus raising affective filters. Schweers (1999) believes that in a case where the instructor is a native speaker of the L2, students can better identify with them if the instructor speaks the students' L1, thus showing that the instructor respects and values the student's mother tongue. The instructor can also be held as a model of someone who successfully learned another language.

Classroom Management

One way to give students a great deal of comprehensible input is through classroom management (Nation, 2003). While the first few classes (for novice students) may be conducted using the students' L1 for administration, the students should be gradually weaned off of the mother tongue. To make a desirable start, an effort should be made to make use of various standard phrases, such as "repeat after me" (allowing for translation in the first few classes). Using the L2 for classroom management in a planned and consistent way can afford a good opportunity for the students to learn through meaning focused input.

While the use of standard phrases may be useful for giving basic classroom instructions using the L2 for disciplining a class may be questionable. Cook says: "Saying "shut up or you will get a detention" in the L1 is a serious threat rather than practice of the imperative and conditional constructions (Cook, 2001b)." While Cook was referring to high school classes, those who teach undergraduate university classes may also agree.

Comprehension Checks

Comprehension checks are another way the students' L1 can be useful. Harbord agrees with using the L1 for comprehension checks, though he believes that the presentation of new structures should be done in the L2 (1992: 354). Teachers who have

adequate training in L2 strategies such as concept questions and who have prepared for class in advance “should be able to communicate the meaning of a structure unambiguously without recourse to the mother tongue (ibid.: 353).” Whether a language teacher can ever “unambiguously communicate the meaning of a structure without recourse to the mother tongue,” is open to question.

Atkinson recommends using the L1 to check comprehension by asking students questions like “How do you say ‘I’ve been waiting for ten minutes’ in Spanish (1987: 243)?” In monolingual classes, this is often quicker and more accurate than concept questions.

Learner Preferences

Most students, particularly older students, have strong opinions and beliefs as to how the teacher should deliver instruction. Student’s previous learning experiences lead them to assume that a particular kind of instruction is best (Lightbrown and Spada, 1999: 59) Atkinson points out that for most language students around the world; translation forms part of their preferred learning strategy (1987: 242). He continues that:

...effective teaching will involve some aspects which are unfamiliar and/or initially unacceptable to some students (pair work and group work for instance). It is clearly in the interest of all concerned that the teacher be aware of the students’ reaction to what takes place in the classroom, and learners have a right to express their views on this as clearly as possible. For this reason discussions of methodology at early levels are best conducted either in a mixture of both languages or exclusively in the students’ mother tongue (Atkinson, 1987: 244).

This sentiment is shared by Harbord.

...if students are unfamiliar with a new approach the teacher who cannot or will not give an explanation in the L1 may cause considerable student de-motivation (Harbord, 1992: 352).

Student Requests for Clarification

While a child’s language ego is flexible, growing and dynamic through the age of puberty, an adult’s is defensive and protective (Brown, 2000: 65). This is especially true

for young adults. In this context a student must be willing to risk looking like a fool in attempting to understand and speak a foreign language. In cultures such as Japan's, where individuals have a very high uncertainty avoidance, this can result in high affective filters. Nation (2003) says: "...using the L2 can be a source of embarrassment particularly for shy learners and those who feel they are not very proficient in the L2." Indeed, Shimizu (2007: 77) found that Japanese students rarely asked clarification questions and often went forward without resolving misunderstandings, resulting in slower progression in the target language. In sum, allowing for the use of the student's L1 may help students who would otherwise not speak out of embarrassment.

Language Anxiety

As seen above, the absence of the student's first language when explaining the unfamiliar can raise the level of anxiety the students feel. Indeed, according to Brown, language anxiety has a strong affective influence on second language acquisition (Brown, 2000: 150).

Language anxiety can be broken down into three components:

- 1) Communication apprehension, arising from learners' inability to adequately express mature thoughts and ideas
- 2) Fear of negative social evaluation, arising from a learner's need to make a positive social impression on others
- 3) Test anxiety, or apprehension over academic evaluation

(Horowitz et al; MacIntyre and Gardner, in Brown, 2000: 151)

Allowing the use of the first language in the classroom will mitigate all three components. Communication apprehension can be mitigated because the students' first language allows them to "adequately express their thoughts and ideas." Fear of negative social evaluation can be reduced, because students are able to communicate directly with each other and have the opportunity to make a positive social impression. Test anxiety can be reduced, by allowing instructions to be given in the first language during evaluations, at beginner or low levels. Increased comprehension of classroom interaction acts to decrease anxiety and increase motivation.

Schema

Schema theory suggests that cognitive knowledge is organized into interrelated patterns. These are based on an individual's previous experiences regarding a given aspect of the experiential world (i.e. their first language) and allow them to hypothesize about future experiences (Nunan, 1999: 133).

Schema theory is supported by other similar theories, such as Ausubel's Meaningful Learning Theory (Brown, 2000: 83), Andersen's Nativist Model (Ellis, 1985: 253), as well as research by McLaughlin and Taylor (Ellis, 1985: 37). Ausubel contends that humans relate "new events or items to their existing cognitive concepts (Brown, 2000: 83)." Meaningful learning occurs when new material is related or anchored to "relevant established entities in cognitive structure (ibid.: 83-84)." McDonough refers to the use of schema in L2 learning as "the accretion of knowledge from instances of incomprehension embedded in the comprehensible (McDonough in Cook, 2001a: 101)."

Using the student's L1 is possibly the best way to make new material relatable to the learner's structure of knowledge, especially at low levels. According to Lightbown and Spada, most teachers and researchers do not doubt that students use knowledge of their first language (and other languages they may be familiar with) to decipher the target language (1999: 85).

Code Switching

Code switching in the classroom involves students substituting vocabulary items from their own L1, when they have yet to acquire sufficient knowledge of the L2. Code switching techniques can be an extremely useful way of employing the students' L1 to emphasize important concepts, reacquire the students' attention when they become distracted, and to praise and reprimand as required (Cook, 2001b). The use of the L1 in the classroom can be gradually phased out as students become more proficient in the L2. Code switching can also involve using the L1 to supply vocabulary items, which the students are unfamiliar with, and then gradually remove them as the students progress (Ibid.). This can be especially useful when employing story-telling activities (Bradley, 2003). Permitting the use of some words from the student's first language may keep the class moving forward, by allowing the students to express themselves, while making the class more fun and helping them to anchor new L2 vocabulary to L1 concepts.

Consciousness Raising

Raising awareness of the similarities and differences between the student's first language and the target language can be a useful way of accessing the students' schema,

and alert them to potential challenges the new language may present them with. Students need to be aware of the problems associated with attempts to translate between the first and target language.

Atkinson regards translation exercises, which highlight recently taught language items, as a useful reinforcement of the conceptual, sociolinguistic, and structural differences between the L1 and L2 (1997: 244). Translation of words or phrases in context can be a useful way of illustrating differences between the L1 and L2.

The L1 can play both positive and negative roles in L2 learning, depending on how similar the two languages are.

The beginning stages of learning a second language are especially vulnerable to interlingual transfer from the native language, or interference. In these early stages, before the system of the second language is familiar, the native language is the only previous linguistic system upon which the learner can draw (Brown, 2000: 224).

Related languages have a general advantage in that they share concepts, cognates, and may be structurally similar. This can be extremely advantageous for language learners as they are able to access schema from their L1 (Swan in Schmitt et al., 1997: 163). Although a short language distance between the L1 and the L2 is generally a positive thing for students, care must be taken to avoid false cognates. Swan describes how he "...once seriously upset a French student by telling him that he made dramatic progress (French *dramatique* = disastrous) (ibid.: 170)."

Oller and Ziahossieny (in Brown 2001: 212) found that confusion may result when patterns are minimally distinct in meaning or form between the first language and the target language. They found that for students studying English as a second language, those whose native language used Roman script (i.e. Spanish or French) had greater difficulty with English spelling than those whose first language used a non-Roman script (i.e. Japanese or Arabic). The teacher needs to be aware of this and emphasize spelling to their students, whose first language is close to the target language.

Some unrelated languages, such as Hungarian and Spanish, may not share cognates, but have similar concepts (Swan op. cit.: 164) owing to a shorter cultural distance. Other unrelated languages may have such cultural distance that they do not possess similar concepts to the L2. How a teacher could use the L2 to communicate a concept that doesn't exist in a student's L1 with any accuracy; is questionable. Using the L1 is likely the most efficient way of doing so.

Loanwords

Increasingly, as the world becomes more globalized, words (especially English words) are being lent and borrowed into other languages. Daulton (in Nation, 2003) estimates that fifty percent of the most common three thousand words in English have some loan word equivalent in Japanese. Indeed, Brown says that loan words in the Japanese language "...clearly constitute a 'latent' English vocabulary base (Brown, 1995)." He found that university students performed better with English words borrowed into Japanese, than those English words, which had not. Daulton's research with junior high school and high school students had similar results (Daulton, 1999).

Though research with loan words has shown promising results, there is some cause for concern.

Sources of Loanwords in Japan

In Japan, the leading source for new loan words is the mass media (Shepard, 1996). News programmes, sports, documentaries, quiz and game shows, all add new foreign words to the Japanese language; however, the greatest source of new loan words is advertising. English words are used by advertisers in an indiscriminate and affective manner. Their purpose is not so much to communicate, but to get the attention of the audience.

English words are being used as a creative device rather than for their pure communication value...What they do is put English words in a Japanese syntax. They're thinking Japanese, but speaking English (Simon-Maeda, 1995).

Some researchers have voiced concern over their potential dangers. Shepard (op. cit.), Daulton (op. cit.), and Simon-Maeda (op. cit.), have noted some potential problems associated with loan words in Japanese.

- 1) Semantic modification – The conceptualization associated with a loan word may differ from the original. "Accessory" in English refers to scarves, hats, ties, jewelry or other objects. "Akusesari" in Japanese refers only to jewelry. Some brand names may take on a general meaning. "Hochikisu" (stapler), came from the Hotchkiss stapler introduced to Japan in the 19th century. "Band-eido" (Band-Aid) can be used as a noun to refer to a bandage, or as a verb to refer to bandaging.
- 2) Speech part modification - many loan words undergo transformation of their grammatical function from their cognates, such as nouns in English becoming

verbs in Japanese.

- 3) Shortening, extending, and combining English words, for example:

Mai-kon = micro-computer

Ame-futo = American football

These have been modified to such an extent, that they bear little resemblance to

the original.

- 4) Colloquial use – some loanwords have different colloquial meanings from their dictionary definitions (Webb in Simon-Maeda, 1995).

These modifications have resulted in many loanwords acquiring meanings, which are quite different from their original in English. This can be problematic. Students may recognize the L2 loan word, but apply their L1's meaning to it not realizing that, its meaning may be substantially different from the original meaning in the L2. Simon-Maeda (*ibid*) points out that many students are surprised when they become aware of this. She discusses how her female junior college students use the term "chaamu-pointo" (charm point) to refer to a person's most attractive feature. The students were surprised to learn that the use of this term in English translation was not acceptable. They simply assumed that because the loanwords were of English origin, the meaning would be the same.

While the concerns raised have validity Daulton (1999) found that radical changes are the exception rather than the rule.

For instance, 23 out of 24 of the "a" loanwords as listed in *A Dictionary of Loanwords Usage* (Motwani, 1991) matched to within the third listed, native meaning in the *Random House Webster's Dictionary* (Braham, 1996). Furthermore, as many as 18 of the 24 "a" loanwords had the same definition as the first listed in this English dictionary...As 734 high-frequency English headword groups correlate to loanword cognates, the loanword lexicon can be tapped to allow learners to gain a large number of highly useful lexical items, particularly nouns, in a short period of time, saving harder ones for later (Daulton, *ibid*).

Employing Loanwords

How can loan words be employed to maximum effect? Simon-Maeda (1995) suggests teaching dialogs between native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) of English, in which the NNS employs loan words and the NS asks for clarification. This helps students become aware of the problems associated with the sample loanwords.

Junko: I think Mary's charm point is her beautiful hair.

Andy: Charm point? If you're referring to Mary's most attractive feature, her hair, then I certainly agree.

Junko: Yes, right. She also has a very charming personality.

Andy: Yes, she does (ibid.)

Students can listen to the dialogue, try to identify the loan word, and then identify how the native speaker "repairs" it (ibid.). This kind of activity has a number of advantages. Loan words are topical. Because they are often used for affect in advertising, they can be used to attract the students' attention to the lesson, while providing schematic background. Because loan words are part of the students L1, the students have something in their L1 to anchor L2 concepts to. The teacher may elicit, "Why doesn't the native speaker understand? How can we change this sentence to make the native speaker understand? Students can suggest possible answers. Daulton (1999) says "...the points at which loanwords and cognates differ significantly enough to cause confusion can become focal points of learning." Such an activity could be used to effectively demonstrate the various modifications loanwords undergo.

Loanwords may have an additional advantage in that they may aid comprehension-based instruction (CBI). Students can relate loanwords to their cognates in the L2 and hopefully anchor the correct meaning to them. Once they have retained the meaning of the cognates, they can use context to help them infer meaning to accompanying vocabulary.

Communication Strategies

One way to help minimize the use of the L1, while expanding the use of the L2 is through teaching communication strategies. Students can be taught to employ such strategies as circumlocution, synonyms and antonyms, mime and gesture, and word coinage (Williams, 2006). If desired, these could be combined with bilingual dictionary work, where the students translate a number of words and employ communication strategies to have their partners guess the word in the L2. If one partner cannot answer, the other partner can provide the word in the L2, or if necessary the L1. This gives

students an opportunity to practice speaking the L2. It can also be expanded from students working in pairs, to students working in groups.

Conclusion

The use of the L2 should be maximized whenever possible. The L1's primary role is to supply scaffolding to lower affective filters by making the L2 and the classroom environment comprehensible. The L1 plays a secondary role by helping students to anchor L2 concepts to the L1 through use of loan words, translation activities, and code switching within story telling activities.

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要旨

第二言語学習教室における第一言語使用に関する教育的示唆

マイヤー ハリー

第二言語または外国語(L2)を学習する教室で、学習者の第一言語または母語(L1)が持つ役割とは何であろうか。本稿では L2 を可能な限り使用すべきであると論ずる。L1 の主な役割は、スキャフォールディングとして L2 の情緒フィルターを下げ L2 や教場環境をより理解しやすくすることである。学習者にとって L1 は外来語使用、翻訳作業、物語の読み聞かせにおけるコード切り替えなどを通じて、L2 にある概念を L1 に結びつけるよりどころとなっており、L1 の役割は二次的なものである。