

## THE ROLE OF MOTHER TONGUE IN TARGET LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

### МАКСАТТУУ ТИЛ АУДИТОРИЯСЫНДА ЭНЕ ТИЛДИН РОЛУ

### РОЛЬ РОДНОГО ЯЗЫКА В ЦЕЛЕВОЙ ЯЗЫКОВОЙ АУДИТОРИИ

**Abstract:** This article is devoted to find out extent of mother tongue role in foreign language teaching. First, it deals with issues like an idea that target language should remain as the main language to be used in foreign language classroom, however, with appropriate and judicious use in some cases.

**Key words:** mother tongue, target language, language classroom, multi-lingual classes, acquisition, communicative competence.

**Аннотация:** Бул макала чет тилдерин окутууда эне тилдин ролу кандай деңгээлде тургандыгы тууралуу баяндайт. Класста окутулган тил негизги орунда болуп, ал эми эне тил керектүү учурда гана колдонулсун деген суроолордун тегерегинде кенири баяндалат.

**Түйүндүү сөздөр:** эне тил, тилге которуу, класста колдонуучу тил, класстагы көп тилдүүлүк, ээ болуу, баарлашуу компетенциясы.

**Аннотация:** Статья посвящена выяснению того, в какой степени родной язык играет свою роль в преподавании иностранных языков. Сначала речь идет о таких вопросах, как идея о том, что целевой язык должен оставаться основным языком, который будет использоваться в классе иностранных языков, с надлежащим и разумным использованием родного языка в некоторых случаях.

**Ключевые слова:** родной язык, целевой язык, языковой класс, многоязычные классы, владение языком, коммуникативная компетентность.

In the process of teaching a foreign language, the teachers' use of mother tongue can influence the learners' 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 article 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 article concentrates on the methods and approaches and their changing views on the use of mother tongue in a foreign language classroom throughout the history. I deal with the difference between acquisition and learning according to Krashen's theory and in the next I focus on the term communicative competence as one of the most important goals of foreign language teaching. 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, my own experience of first observing and then teaching English at a primary school proved over usage of Kyrgyz language in English lessons. What actually happened influenced the choice of theme for this paper. Generally, in lessons of English that I had a chance to observe, 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. However, contrary is the case as I will try to present in this paper. Moreover, also my own experience confirmed my assumption of pupils' exposure to abundant mother tongue use in the classroom. This made me think about other reasons why the mother

tongue was used and about ways how to reduce the abundant use of it.

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 pupils absorb any foreign language they are ringed by, and they appear to learn the foreign language more easily than adults do. Therefore, I am sure that a few hours per week of foreign language teaching that are compulsory at schools in Kyrgyzstan should not be filled with plentiful mother tongue use. I remember many lessons observed when I was wondering about the purpose for using the mother tongue. None of those 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. And thus I ask myself to what extent is the teachers' 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?

However, communicative competence cannot be developed without using English in the foreign language classroom as often as possible and without establishing English as the main language for communication. This does not mean that the mother tongue should be banned altogether, since recent studies indicate that appropriate and judicious use of mother tongue can play a significant role in foreign language teaching and successful target language acquisition.

As mentioned earlier, the question whether or not to use the mother tongue in foreign language classroom accompanies this thesis from the very beginning. As Krashen presents, exposure to comprehensible input is crucial for successful language acquisition. To make input comprehensible, the use of mother tongue is generally necessary [1].

Also Willis suggests: banning mother-tongue use altogether may not be advisable. A study carried out recently in Turkish secondary school classes with 12-year-olds revealed that in circumstances when the mother tongue was totally banned in group talk, the resulting interaction tended to be shorter, more stilted and less natural. Many weaker students gave up after a very short time. If learners realize they are using the target language to communicate, they will still use their mother tongue on occasions, but they will use it in a way which is systematic, supportive and relevant to the task goal [2].

In connection to Willis' suggestion, I will bring back Krashen's Affective Filter hypothesis, arguing that when a learner is tense, anxious, bored or angry, the affective filter as a kind of imaginary barrier, blocks out the available input [3]. I would stress that a minimal use of mother tongue can be a facilitating teaching tool however, things that can be done in the target language should be done so. Willis in the introductory unit to her book *Teaching English through English* provides some of the situations for convenient target language use:

Gestures and tone of voice are at first more important than the actual words or phrases used to tell students what to do and how to do it. But if beginners yet get used to hearing nothing but English spoken during their English lesson, they will very soon understand and later learn to say words like 'good', 'altogether' etc.

So as well as learning the specific language items that are actually being taught in the lesson, they will also be practicing unconsciously a number of language skills, and beginning to think in English for themselves, thereby reducing the amount of interference from L<sub>1</sub>, their mother tongue.

This means that when teachers teach English merely in the target language, pupils will not only become familiar with their foreign language but they will be later able to produce new structures themselves since "language is much better learnt through real use than through pattern drills and exercises" [4]. Willis further specifies that also the very first lessons of English are possible to teach in English only, but it is very important to persuade pupils of the advantages of classroom English, which can be accompanied by a demonstration [5]. "Whenever a new classroom item is introduced, it should be accompanied by gesture or demonstration to make the

meaning clear as possible". Every time pupils say something relevant in their mother tongue, the teacher should say the same thing in English and make pupils to repeat it, after some time pupils will respond in English naturally.

Sometimes it may be easier to introduce the target language in the classroom slowly, in classes that have learnt English for some time before, it is good at first to keep mainly to the vocabulary and structures that they have come across before. Later, other useful phrases can be introduced.

However, Willis confirms my opinion that unless teachers teach multi-lingual classes, they may not speak English all the time, and sometimes it might be more economical to use mother tongue instead of English. This can be done for example when: Explaining the meaning or use of new words would be time-consuming.

Introducing the aims of lesson or the next activity to make sure pupils know what they are learning. When checking of pupils' understanding after the presentation stage. Discussing the main ideas of a reading passage, but only when the aim is to improve the reading skills. Pupils got teacher's permission to use their mother tongue, but it is important to make clear when pupils must stop using the mother tongue and return to English.

Auerbuch adds other possibilities:

- Classroom management;
- Language analysis;
- Presenting grammar rules;
- Discussing cross-cultural issues;
- Giving instructions, prompts;
- Explaining errors;
- Checking comprehension.

As stated above, the reasonable use of mother tongue can play its role in some cases, but the target language should remain the main language. It may sometimes happen that pupils keep using their mother tongue rather than a target language in foreign language classroom. In that case Willis proposes reassuring whether pupils are not eventually bored or whether they are unsure about something, which is once again related to Krashen's Affective Filter hypothesis. It might indicate that something is wrong with the lesson, and a change of activity would be needed.

Harmer suggests that this may happen because pupils want to say something important, and the easier way how to do it is to use their native language. Nonetheless, Harmer also proposes a number of things that t

- Talking to pupils about the issue: teachers can discuss with pupils how they feel about using English and their mother tongue in the classroom.
- Encouraging pupils to use English appropriately.
- Responding only to English use: teachers can ignore what pupils say in their mother tongue.
- Creating an English environment: teachers themselves should use the target language for the majority of time, so that pupils are constantly exposed to English.
- Keeping reminding pupils: teachers should go on in encouraging pupils to use English.

These Harmer's suggestions how to deal with overusing the mother tongue can be labeled as strategies for encouraging more target language use in the classroom. Concerning his point about creating an English environment, I would add that teachers should also establish rules of conduct in the classroom, so that pupils know about the expectation to use the target language. In addition, pupils must believe that the target language is important throughout their lives.

Since there are several factors influencing teachers choice of mother tongue or target language, teacher should be able to find the best way how to involve mother tongue if necessary, but with respect to current communicative approach and its demand for *increasing amount of target language in the foreign language classroom*.

The aim of this thesis was to find out to what extent the mother tongue plays its role in foreign language teaching. In order to do this first I had to deal with issues like teaching methods and approaches throughout the history. Although I tried to be as objective as possible I cannot say

that there is only one answer to my question and thus I understand that not everybody would agree with my ideas presented in this paper.

Beginning with early teaching approaches, displayed in the first part, the focus on form later changed into developing pupils' communicative ability, which have 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 first 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 article 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.

In the next paragraph, 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 roles 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.

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 teachers.

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