

The Role of L1 in Foreign Language Teaching Classrooms

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Abstract. In the language teaching classes; there may be more than one language as the language of verbal and written instructions, introduced by the instructor or through course materials, the questions directed to the instructor or the explanations of the instructor about subjects which are not understood, or about learner questions and statements. It is possible to divide these languages into three groups: target language, medium of instruction, and native language. In language teaching classrooms, determining the place, the order and the ratio of these languages (target language, medium of instruction, and native language) according to levels and language teaching contexts is one of the basic problematics in the development of pedagogical reasoning skills of instructors and management of teaching. This paper discusses, the place and function of the native language of the learners and what they should be, especially in the context of foreign language teaching among these problematics. In general, it is observed that instructional attitudes towards the use of native language are “complete prohibition”, “allowed as little as possible”, “consciously legitimize the use of certain situations”. This paper focuses on the role of native language of learner in foreign language teaching classrooms, presented data and views by means of literature review and supports the idea, “Native language; if threatens the priority of target language can be ‘the single biggest threat’ in foreign language class on the other hand, if it can be used in ‘systematic, selective and reasonable doses’ it can be ‘the most important ally a foreign language can have’.”

Keywords: Language teaching, foreign language teaching, native language / L1, language teaching in monolingual classrooms.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In language teaching classes; There may be more than one language as the language of verbal and written instructions put forward directly by the instructor or in the course materials, questions directed to the instructor or instructor's explanations about the issues that are thought to be not understood, as well as learner questions and demand statements. These languages can be divided into three groups:

Target language is the language that the individual learns and is used in contrast to the mother tongue (Richards, & Schmidt, 2002). The target language may not be the language in which the instructor speaks as the mother tongue. For Turkish, this is particularly the case in areas where Turkish is not spoken as the mother tongue, while the proportion of the target language in teaching varies depending on these situations.

Medium (language) of instruction: For communication between the instructor who is a native speaker of the target language and the learner whose language is different, the parties may sometimes need a third language (Mostly this language is one of the languages which has high international status).

The mother tongue (first language, L1) was created to conceptualize a person's early language development; (a) a historical term that is based on the assumptions that the first language of the person will normally be the language spoken at home by the caregiver at home, and that the person would be the mother, but this learning is a natural acquisition process by assimilation rather than by explicit instruction (Thompson, 2017). As one of the elements that the learners carry to the language teaching classes, the mother tongue is a third language besides the target language and the medium of instruction in foreign and second language teaching. This language for example, can show homogeneity depending on the potential to create a group with uniformity in terms of learners' mother tongue in the Turkish education class outside Turkey (as a foreign language); whereas in Turkey (as a second language) varies relatively according to the Turkish education classes. In such a case, there are multiple learner languages in the classroom. Opinions about what should be the role of the language of the learner in the language teaching classes may vary depending on these variable situations. It is seen that the instructors and learners sometimes resort to the mother tongue of the learners depending on various social, psychological and pedagogical needs in the classes which show homogeneity particularly in terms of mother tongue.

In language teaching classes, the place, order and proportion of these languages (target language, language of instruction and mother tongue) depending on the levels and contexts of language teaching are primary problems in the development of pedagogical reasoning skills of teachers and in the management of teaching. The article examines the place and function of the mother tongue of learners within these problems and how they should be, especially in the context of foreign language teaching.

2. METHOD

The article is a theoretical study that examines the role of the learner's mother tongue in foreign language teaching classes by identifying the data and opinions presented, through literature review.

3. FINDINGS

The use of the language of the learner as well as the target language, or of a common communication language other than the two, is among the problematic issues of foreign and second language studies. At the center of the discussion of the place of these languages in the teaching process is the question of how the relationship between the acquired mother tongue, the target language, and other languages known and learned outside them, is processed in the mind of the individual. Differences in the approach to the problematic of whether the individual processes the structural and semantic elements of the language separately or together are decisive in the approach to these languages. Ignoring the mother tongue of the learner completely, rejecting it, and attempting to put the languages into separate sections is doomed to fail because they are interdependent in many ways. Because the acquired / learned language is not just adding rooms to your house by building on an extension at the back: it is rebuilding all the internal walls (Cook, 2001). The suggestions of mental processing limited to the target (single) language which is under the influence of children's experiences in the acquisition of the mother tongue ignore the fact that two languages (the mother tongue and the language learned) together are effective in the minds of foreign / second language learners.

In the language teaching processes which are conducted so that the learners become natural and active members of the environments in which the people write and speak the target language as their mother tongue, the exposure to the target language and production in target language can be considered as one of the main success criteria.

In foreign and second language teaching, it may be useful to ensure that the target language is the basic or even the only communication language of the teaching process. The benefits of this can be outlined as follows:

- Further develop communication skills in the target language.
- The self-confidence provided by the ability to communicate in the target language increases the motivation of the learner in the learning process.
- The learner can manage his or her own learning process and begin to take more initiative in learning processes.

In order to achieve all of this, the instructor must have special training or have many years of experience.

On the other hand, the real subject to put emphasis on about the mother tongue of the learner, which is acceptable to use in beginner level, is in which kind of occasions, how and to what measure can be the mother tongue used. Thus, the credits of those working in foreign language teaching practices to use all the opportunities that will enable their learners to reach their goals of effective comprehension in the target language and to be

able to make verbal and written productions can be mentioned. As Cook (2001) states, it may be more appropriate to consider the mother tongue as a useful element in creating authentic foreign / second language users, rather than seeing it as something to be avoided at all costs. In fact, for more than a hundred years, this view has attempted to show the need to re-open a tightly closed door in language teaching, that is, the systematic use of the mother tongue in the classroom.

It can be said that Natural Approaches, Natural Methods, and thoughts that prioritize communication skills in the target language are determinant behind the long-term suppression of the use of mother tongue in foreign / second language teaching. However, bilingual techniques are considered as oldest language teaching techniques which were utilized to convey the meaning compared to the monolingual principle which focuses on the exclusion of the mother tongue (or other previously acquired languages) from the classroom and enabling the target language to be both the object and the sole means of teaching (Butzkamm, 2017). Although the approaches of Foreign / second language instructors whose identity has been established for a long time, to mother tongue in teaching practices do not overlap from time to time in practice, they have been negative at the theoretical level. This, in fact, does not conflict with Turnbull and Arnett's (2002, p. 211) general assertion with regards to "near consensus", that the highest level of use of the target language should be achieved.

However, in many techniques today (information exchange tasks or role-playing, etc.), even if the task itself is simple, instructions or explanations are so complex that only using the target language can sometimes cause problems; Many previous methods and approaches, such as the Direct Method or the Structural-Situational Approach, have adopted techniques that are relatively easy to prevent using mother tongue from the beginning (Littlewood, & Yu, 2009).

In the 1970s, theoreticians of Communicative Language Teaching made the idea that using mother tongue in the classroom is contrary to productiveness, very popular. Krashen, one of the pioneers of this, stresses that "learning" (as opposed to acquiring) is not particularly beneficial, and instead that learners should be exposed to as many natural "input" produced in target language as possible; with sufficient natural input, the target language skills (more or less through the transition process) will be gained through the mysterious 'affective filter'. Unfortunately, there was no serious challenge to the "status quo" about the use of mother tongue until the publication of Swan's articles in the 1980s. According to Swan (1985), who argues that although language learners sometimes make mistakes as a result of the influence of the mother tongue, many things that learners do right are done with reference to this also (as cited in Holthouse, 2006), if comparison-based conformities are not continued to be developed between the elements of foreign languages and the elements of mother tongue, foreign languages are never fully learned (Holthouse, 2006).

While the theorists' insistence on classroom communication being limited to the target language does not mean that their mother tongue is not used in many classes in practice

(Cook, 1999), there might be established prejudices which are strong enough to make language instructors feel guilty of professional abuse. Among these prejudices, there are also thoughts that the spoken language is more basic than the written, open discussions on grammar should be avoided, and that language teaching practices should be carried out as a whole, not as separate parts (Cook, 2001).

In general, it is observed that the instructional attitudes towards the use of the mother tongue are “completely prohibited”, “as limited use as possible”, “consciously legitimizing its use in certain situations”. For nearly a century, the common theoretical view is that the mother tongue should be banned in classroom communication. As Eldridge (1996) stated, the reason of this is probably maximizing the time spent using the target code, thereby improving learning efficiency, yet there is no empirical evidence to support the idea that restricting the use of the mother tongue will necessarily improve learning efficiency, and a significant part of the code switch in the classroom appears to be related to multi-purpose and pedagogical objectives.

However, learners find it useful and necessary to use the mother tongue at the beginner and, to some extent at intermediate levels. A similar situation applies to the fact that learners find it useful when the teacher knows their mother tongues. Especially in the implementation of in-class practices, for example, in the formation of pairs and group work, organizing an activity that does not work in a suitable and clear way, checking whether the understanding has been realized and in relation to this, it is thought that it is beneficial to give limited place to the mother tongue of the learners since it has managerial functions to ensure the continuity of teaching and natural learning as planned (Atkinson, 1993).

Especially at the beginning levels when processing topics that allow cultural comparisons, typological similarities and differences between the target language and the mother tongue of the learner it may be helpful to the use the mother tongue. For example, the meaning of proverbs, idioms, aphorisms; In addition, when speaking on words, mimics and gestures used in expressions of emotion in certain communication situations, the mother tongue may be used, especially in monolingual classes. Combining the target language with the mother tongue in this way can reduce communication anxiety in the target language, may be interesting and provide opportunities for comparative cultural views. In addition, many original content brought to the classroom by the instructor who wants to provide the original oral and written uses of the target language in the classroom loses their originality as they lack the natural communication context in which they were produced. As Cook (2001) states, the instructor who says non-artificial communication sentences, such as “what time is it?”, “put your homework on my desk”, in the native language of the learners or in a medium language, deprives the students of the only real target language experience and precious communication opportunities in the target language.

Deciding to use L1 instead of L2 must depend on several conditions:

- efficiency (if something more effective can be done in L1),

- learning (if it will help students learn),
- naturality (if students are more comfortable with natural code switch) and
- the level of external interest (if it helps students use the target language better outside the classroom) (Cook, 2001).

Cook (1999) argues that the practical problem of the second language teaching classes, which consist of learners with different mother tongues, requires consistent use of the target language in multilingual classes, but this restriction should not apply to the classes in which the learners share a common mother tongue; that the mother tongue is constantly present in the minds of those who try to learn the target language; that every activity that students perform visibly in the target language includes invisible mother tongue knowledge; hence, the class's structure which is shaped with target language, includes the presence of the mother tongue in the minds of the students.

Particularly in a monolingual classroom, there will be some differences in determining the language of instruction and communication of the class between an instructor who speaks the target language as the mother tongue and the instructors with the same mother tongue with the learners. Instructors who have the same mother tongue as the learners tend to use the mother tongue in the face of falling into artificiality in class communication and being able to overcome the difficulties (explaining the functions, processes, abstract concepts of complex grammar structures, as well as reducing or eliminating the risk of high-sensitivity issues, etc.) encountered by communication in the common mother tongue. In similar situations, if the instructors who speak the target language as their mother tongue do not know the language of the learners, tend to overcome the difficulties they encounter in target language with either a third language of communication (this language is usually one of the international languages) or with the means of communication in target language (body language, animation, drawing, explanation, illustration) or more, or by allowing learners to make explanations in their mother tongue among themselves.

In the process of teaching Turkish as a foreign language outside Turkey, in monolingual classrooms (and monocultural) which have different relationship levels with Turkish language (and the Turkish culture) when planning and implementing instruction, in addition to words, grammatical structure or functioning features, which are the concrete products of this affinity there is a need for teaching practices that use common cultural elements and sufficient experimental studies which test these. In addition to the common cultural elements that can be explained for many religious, historical, ethnic and diplomatic reasons, for Turkish language teaching practices in countries that share hundreds of common vocabulary with Turkish, it is understood that such theoretical and experimental studies will bring new dimensions to the subject of the place of learner's mother tongue and culture in language teaching processes. To illustrate, the study of *Turcizmi u srpskohrvatskom jeziku*, published by Abdulah Škaljić in 1966 for the common vocabulary in Bosnian, presents various grammatical functioning features that appear under the influence of Turkish with 8742 words. A common vocabulary in the

Balkans can be mentioned. The common Turkism Dictionary in Balkan Languages by Prof. Dr. Lindita Xhanari Latifi, which was prepared in 2015, lists about 5000 words as a study showing the common vocabulary. For foreign language teaching studies which will be conducted utilizing the various common cultural elements in addition to common vocabulary and grammatical usage with Turkish, the number of these languages can be increased for also the Iranian and Arab languages easily in accordance with the width of historical and geographical relationship area. The use of the mother tongue in foreign and second language classes can be explained not only by the orientation of the learners to their mother tongue with the belief of overcoming the difficulties easier, but also by the beliefs and preferences of the instructors about the use of the mother tongue. In particular, it can be more decisive in these processes for instructors who have the same mother tongue as learners to use their mother tongue as a facilitating tool to use at any time.

There are three important variables in learner tendencies. The first is the context of learning (whether the target language is learnt where it is spoken as the native language or elsewhere), the second is the instructors' attitude, and the third is the level of awareness and motivation of the learner to learn the target language. It should be kept in mind that both instructor and learner beliefs can be shaped appropriately with the help of the right strategies.

Macaro (2001) wants instructors to think about three different theoretical positionings about the use of mother tongue in the language teaching process:

- Accepts the class as the country of the target language; do not see pedagogical value in the use of the mother tongue; aiming to exclude the mother tongue completely from the classroom as the class is accepted as a natural communication environment for the target language; (1) *the virtual position*, which believes that the mother tongue can be removed from the foreign language class as long as the teacher is sufficiently skilled.
- Again considering that there is no pedagogical value in the use of the mother tongue; however, as there are no perfect teaching and learning conditions (2) *the maximal position* (in which the target language is used as much as possible) that believes instructors have to resort to their mother tongue.
- In addition to believing that there are some pedagogical benefits in using the mother tongue; arguing that some aspects of learning can actually be improved by using the mother tongue; therefore, supporting the idea which considers that pedagogical principles should be continuously investigated in terms of whether or not the use of the mother tongue is correct and how its accuracy can be demonstrated (3) *optimal position*.

The acquisition of basic communication skills may be considered sufficient for monolingual foreign language classes in many contexts. It may be necessary to set more realistic learning objectives, considering that most learners will not be able to acquire

advanced proficiency in the target language, especially in monolingual classes (Holthouse, 2006).

In addition, the conscious and limited use of the mother tongue by the instructors who do not speak the target language as the mother tongue, can be accepted to a certain extent with their different performances from the linguistic productions of the natural speakers of the target language in monolingual classes consisting of learners with the same mother tongue with the instructor. From this point of view, the value attributed to fluency and accuracy in the learner performances by instructors may also vary according to the monolingual - multilingual classroom contexts and the relation of the instructor with the target language. Instructors who prioritize accuracy in speech performances in second language learners who are highly exposed to the target language due to both lecture hours and natural communication opportunities (as their own expectations and demands may be in this direction), might have tolerance which aims to encourage fluency in order to reduce anxiety, increase self-esteem and motivate in similar performances of mostly monolingual (this may be less applicable to classes of refugees, asylum seekers, guest community members where the target language is the mother tongue.) foreign language learners.

The most natural aspects of mother tongue use that cannot be ignored in foreign language classes are code switches. According to Eldridge (1996), who sees code switch as a natural and purposeful phenomenon that facilitates both communication and learning, code switch is a strategy that provides short-term benefits to the second language learner but with the risk of preventing long-term acquisition; secondly, they can be analyzed inter-lingually; thirdly and perhaps more likely, there may be a strong relationship between learner styles and abilities and code switches. Eldridge (1996) states that, as the result of his empirical study about the subject points out, 77 percent of all code switch examples show, most of the coding in the classroom is related to learning objectives, in other words, tasks in the classroom. 16 percent of the remainder are questions or comments directed to the teacher about target language but not related to current task or questions on procedural matters. Eldridge's corpus analysis on the subject reveals that there is no relationship between the achievement level in the target language and the use of code-switching strategies. Highly successful learners changed the code as regularly as other learners. Based on these data, the higher the competence in the target code, the less the learner will pass to the local code may not be necessarily true.

Littlewood & Yu (2009) provide a framework of specific strategically available techniques and tasks designed to help learners understand, internalize, and produce language related to the target language. According to this; The mother tongue can be used strategically as a planned aiding tool. Because the mother tongue can be an effective means of clarifying the meaning of words, structures, and expressions of the target language; thus, it can provide faster transition to the important stages of effective use and internalization. For this purpose, by Dodson (1972) and Butzkamm (2003), in the presentation of dialogues, a technique called 'sandwich technique' in which the

words, structures, meanings expressed in the target language were placed in the cognitive system of the learners and then re-expressed (*target language* → *mother tongue* → *target language*) over the target language, was proposed. In the presentation of the structures, the comparison between the target language and the mother tongue can help to increase the sense of trust by creating connections between new and familiar (It can also increase students' overall language awareness). In the implementation phase, the key component of the “bilingual method” is the use of native language stimuli as a drilling instrument that repeats itself to reveal equivalent target structures. An important point here is that equivalence is at the level of meaning, not at the word level: the meanings are placed in the learner's cognitive system and then re-expressed through the target language. This can compensate for the weakness of monolingual communicative activities, where learners are rarely forced to use complex structures, as they can use communication strategies to avoid them. In fact, instructors can design activities at the previous stage before production in the target language, starting from the mother tongue usage of the learners (preparing in the mother tongue to present in the target language or directly preparing in the mother tongue and re-expressing them in the target language), and acting as an incentive to generate input in the target language. In addition to significant discrepancies between official discourses, theoretical approaches and instructor, learner performances in classroom practices, in many countries around the world, in most foreign language teaching classes (as learners are able to use only one target language or exposed to only one target language), there are policy-level decisions which reinforces the target language's dominance in classroom communication compared to mother tongue (Littlewood, & Yu, 2009). The important question to be asked at this point should be: Who is responsible for this inconsistency between the principles laid down in theoretical studies and real classroom foreign language practices, theorists or language teaching practitioners? The most accurate source to guide those who seek answers to this question is, of course, data generated through in-class practices. The views of theorists who has a significant distance to in-class practices, and the preferences of the instructors who do not make use of theoretical knowledge and do not convert their practical experience into theoretical knowledge, will continue to exist as a vicious circle that makes it difficult to reach useful results.

Particularly in monolingual foreign language classes, it is seen that the reasons behind the preference of the instructors to use the mother tongue are generally as the following (Littlewood, & Yu, 2009; Macaro, Tian, & Chu, 2018; Turnbull, & Arnett, 2002):

- providing or facilitating the understanding in case there is a lack of understanding (eg to make certain aspects of academic content more understandable);
- checking understanding (sometimes through translation),
- giving feedback,
- ensuring interpersonal communication in case of a communication loss,
- providing important background information,

- giving non-routine operating instructions,
- building constructive social relationships (praise, encouragement, approval, etc.)
- saving time in communicating complex meanings (explaining grammar rules, giving meaning to unknown words, etc.)
- maintaining authority over the classroom environment,
- compensating the teacher's own language proficiencies (deficiencies) (if the mother tongue of the instructor and the learners are the same).

It may be possible to mention the compensatory use of the mother tongue as a temporary 'crutch' to assist in classroom management (Littlewood, & Yu, 2009).

Developing communication strategies in the target language, especially in the early stages of experience, is important enough to deserve attention as an aspect of initial lesson planning to meet the challenges envisaged.

The mother tongue can be used strategically for emotional and interpersonal support when learners need it. The appeal to the mother tongue may also be due to the unpredictable, often complex nature of such communication. This is one of many aspects of language teaching that do not match criteria and do not have a “prescription-type” solution.

It should not be forgotten that the mother tongue; if it threatens the priority of the target language, it may be the “greatest danger” (Atkinson, 1993 as cited in Littlewood & Yu, 2009) in the foreign language class, on the other hand if it can be used in “systematic, selective and reasonable doses’ it may be ‘the most important ally of a foreign language” (Butzkamm, 2003, p. 36).

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