

Back on target: repositioning the status of target language in MFL teaching and learning

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This paper addresses a major issue in language learning, namely the proportion of target language used by teachers and learners in the MFL classroom. It is essential to establish a pedagogical rationale for its use, as well as to analyse the policy that informs and determines practice. This issue emerged as a key preoccupation in a questionnaire and discussions with teachers in partnership schools involved in initial teacher training. During the academic year 1997-98 there were discussions with 22 schools in 4 LEAs, and 46 teachers completed the questionnaire. In the light of the foregoing, we propose strategies for judicious use of the target language, including pupil use, as part of an overall drive towards more effective teaching and learning.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of target language use emerged decisively on the MFL agenda in schools with the introduction of GCSE in 1988. The division of language teaching into four discrete skills at that time necessitated its use as a central methodological feature in at least 50% of these skills, namely listening and speaking. Although there had been previous initiatives such as the Direct Method, with its advocacy of total target language use, and audio-lingual/visual, with an emphasis on drilling and repetition, target language use was nevertheless largely rehearsed and automatised. In theory, communicative language teaching advocated a more spontaneous, improvised oral/aural register. Halliwell and Jones (1991: 1) refer to the seminal statement in the National Curriculum proposals (DES/WO, 1990: 6):

Communicating in a foreign language must involve both teachers and pupils using the target language as the *normal means of communication*. Indeed this is essential if the objectives...are to be achieved. (para. 3.18). (our italics)

There was, however, a tension between policy and practice, for the change ushered in by GCSE and subsequently enshrined in the National Curriculum represented an enormous challenge for teachers, many of whom had previously operated predominantly in the mother tongue (L1). In

addition to this, research findings on the benefits of target language use have been less than conclusive. Thus, an analysis of the context and historical development of this question and of its impact upon classroom practice is needed, so as to re-focus attention on the central issues and teaching strategies implied. The statutory position provides an appropriate point of departure.

THE STATUTORY POSITION

Although the use of the target language emerged as a focus for attention in the National Curriculum (DES/WO, 1990) its roots can be traced back to the Direct Method. This represented a reaction against the Grammar-Translation Method, together with its preoccupation with formal accuracy and analysis and use of the mother tongue. Central to the Direct Method was the premium placed on the target language as the medium of instruction, a feature which gained renewed prominence in communicative language teaching. In turn, this influenced the methodology of the graded objectives movement and subsequently GCSE with its emphasis on the four skills and practical communication (see HMSO, 1985: 1: 2.1).

From our discussions with teachers, it is clear that concerns about the target language relate to both teacher and pupil use. These can again be traced back to the National Curriculum and the requirements of GCSE. In the section on good practice (DES/WO, 1990: 58), sub-section 10.7 deals with the target language as the normal means of communication in the classroom. It states: 'The natural use of the target language for virtually all communication is a sure sign of a good modern language course.' This "normal means of communication" is limited by the artificial constraints of the classroom, where practical communication is in any case largely determined by a clearly defined environment.

By the time of the revised National Curriculum

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(DfE/WO, 1995) the proposal that the target language be the natural means of communication had been subsumed into the Programme of Study, Part I “Learning and using the target language” and Part II, “Areas of experience” (broad topic areas that provide contexts for learning and using the target language at each key stage). As Macaro points out (Macaro, 1997: 19), opportunities for pupil use of the target language are a defining feature of the Programme of Study. This pupil use of the target language was referred to in the earlier document of Non-Statutory Guidance (NCC, 1992: BI): “[The National Curriculum] extends opportunities and experiences for pupils by promoting maximum use of the target language.”

In the current National Curriculum for England (DfEE/QCA, 1999) the emphasis on learning and using the target language is further diminished, since there is no explicit sub-heading as in the 1995 version. But the “Note about using the target language” nevertheless strongly advocates its extensive use: “Pupils are expected to use and respond to the target language” (DfEE/QCA, 1999: 16). This is further underlined in the section “Breadth of study” (DfEE/QCA, 1999: 17):

- a. communicating in the *target language* in pairs and groups and with their teacher;
- f. using the *target language* creatively and imaginatively;
- h. using the *target language* for real purposes. (our italics)

The current National Curriculum for MFL in Wales (ACCAC, 2000: 6) refers to the target language in the Focus Statement, which underpins the Programme of Study: ‘they [pupils] should take part in integrated activities in the *target language*, which enable them to demonstrate increasing confidence in understanding speech and written text, within a range of contexts (our italics).’ A stronger statement appears at the end of the Focus Statement (p.7): ‘Pupils should be expected and encouraged to use and respond to the target language *for most of the time*. English or Welsh may be required, but should only be used when necessary’ (our italics). An interesting shift of emphasis emerges in both versions, advocating that pupils should explore the differences between the mother tongue and the target language. In the National Curriculum for England this comparison is used as an example of when English should be used. This allows a less slavish adherence to target language and arguably contributes to linguistic awareness, which will be developed through a comparative study of language. As Rendall (1998: 48) puts it: ‘If English pupils are not schooled in the characteristics of their own language before they come into their first foreign language lesson, how are they to be expected to deal with such inconsistencies in their own language?’ These inconsistencies become highly significant when learning a foreign language, as Rendall notes, citing Ringbom, 1988: ‘The learner’s knowledge of

L1...forms a basic resource to which the learner, in the initial stages of learning, can turn in his making use of general language principles’ (Rendall, 1998: 7). Raising language awareness and support in target language learning through comparison with the mother tongue are pedagogically sound reasons for recourse to the mother tongue, along with using it as an aid to comprehension.

The significance of the principle of target language use established in the National Curriculum is similarly evidenced in GCSE. One of the aims of the syllabus for WJEC (WJEC, 1998: I) is: ‘to develop the ability to understand and use French effectively for purposes of practical communication.’ The assessment objectives for listening and responding and speaking at both foundation and higher tier imply extensive use of the target language, e.g. 3.3.2 Speaking: ‘Candidates will be expected to: – initiate and maintain conversations (foundation) and – express and justify ideas and points of view’ (higher). More significant perhaps is the inclusion of target language rubrics in the revised GCSE examination syllabus (WJEC, 1998: 47). The natural use of these in the classroom will impact directly upon teaching methodology (i.e. teacher use of the target language) as well as pupils’ performance in the examination. Norman (1998: 49) summarises the interrelationship between the National Curriculum and GCSE and their influence on teaching and learning:

... one has a situation in England and Wales in which the examination (GCSE) assumes the role of methodological intermediary, making explicit nationally prescribed proposals (NC) in the development of appropriate test forms, which in turn directly determine classroom method.

The gradual shift in policy from the positive endorsement of target language use as “the normal means of communication” to a measured inclusion of the mother tongue may simply reflect the reality of classroom life and the increasing interest in literacy and more formalised language awareness. Accordingly, less target language use would paradoxically have renewed pedagogical benefit by virtue of comparison of L1 and L2 – signalling not so much a return to “grammar translation” as a redefinition of the communicative approach (see Pachler, 2000: 22-37).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Whilst the statutory position promoted target language use as a natural component of communicative language teaching, the messages from research were less conclusive. In his summary (2000: 174) of the research into teacher use of target language Macaro identifies three positions. Although none of them advocate a return to extensive use of mother tongue they do

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nevertheless represent a range of emphases. He identifies three distinct categories:

- Total Exclusion or 'Virtual', which advocates exclusive use of target language (Chambers, F. (1991); Krashen and Terrell (1988); Frey (1988));
- Maximalist – extensive use of target language, but overlooking any negative impact of mother tongue (Seliger (1983); Macdonald (1993); Halliwell and Jones (1991));
- Optimal Use – appropriate use of target language with acknowledgement of pitfalls (Pattison (1987); Cook (1991); Ellis (1984); Dickson (1992); Macaro (1997); Cohen (1998); Hagen (1992); Harbord (1992); Phillipson (1992)).

An additional consideration that impacts upon the second and third of these positions is the significant role of L1 both as the language of thought (Cohen, 1988) and for code-switching (Hagen, 1992). This gives rise to the significance of L1/L2 connections or associations, whereby L1 becomes a key "processing mechanism" for making sense of the foreign language. Research by Kern (1994), although it is restricted to reading a French text, does highlight some of the advantages of such a procedure. Amongst the advantages he cites, as quoted by Macaro (2000: 176), are:

1. The L1 helps with semantic processing, and permits consolidation of meaning.
2. The L1 helps with chunking L2 lexical items into semantic clusters, a way of attempting to reduce memory constraints.
3. The input is converted into more familiar terms, enhancing the reader's confidence and lowering affective barriers.
4. Mental translation may help in clarifying the syntactic roles played by lexical items, verifying a verb, tense or checking comprehension.

The position adopted on this depends upon the perception of the relative contribution of L1 intervention into the L2 environment and the extent to which it assists or detracts from the learning process. In this context Macaro (2000: 177) summarises the potential benefit to learners of L1:

1. Beginners use the L1 to help them decode text.
2. Beginners and more advanced learners use the L1 to help them write text.
3. L1 tends to be the language of thought, unless the learner is very advanced or is in the target country.

Turning to a very different approach, we should not overlook the contribution that Krashen (1988) has made to target language research in his advocacy of "comprehensible input" and a "natural approach" (acquisition rather than

learning). However, his account is very one-sided and furthermore "learners are capable of learning and using metalingual knowledge to a far greater extent than Krashen allows for" (Ellis, 1990: 60). Ellis emphasises (1990: 59):

The 'Natural approach' rejects any attempt to shape the main process of acquisition through the systematic presentation and practice of the linguistic code.

Given the diversity of these positions, it is important to establish a balance in the matter of communication and its role in language teaching, which has become unduly polarised. Acquisition, the natural approach and maximum exposure to the target language must allow for learning strategies, which may also embrace form-focused instruction, conscious, appropriate use of the mother tongue (L1) and the consequent connections and associations to be made between L1 and L2. Whilst accepting the significance of the role of the mother tongue it should not negate the benefit of what Macaro refers to as the "optimal use position", nor as an open invitation to indiscriminate use of L1.

In this context it is interesting that OFSTED (1993; cited in Macaro, 1997: 16) mentioned that 'the increased use of target language by the teachers led to improved standards.' At the time of OFSTED's comments the issue of target language use by teachers was a central feature of methodological debate, turning on the National Curriculum proposal that: 'The natural use of the target language for virtually all communication is a sure sign of a good modern language course.' This prompted a series of articles on the topic throughout the early 1990s (Peck, 1990; Franklin, 1990; Chambers, F., 1991; Chambers, G., 1992; Atkinson, 1993; Page, 1993; Hamilton, 1994; Woods and Neather, 1994; Macaro, 1995; and Powell, 1996). The teacher use of target language subsequently became less of an issue in the latter part of the decade and was replaced by a shift to consideration of pupil use of target language (see James *et al.*, 1999). Empirical evidence referred to by Macaro (2000: 184) supports the benefits of pupil use of target language: 'Only through the learner using L2 can s/he achieve strategic communicative competence', and he reaffirms 'a basic belief that learners' use of the L2 is conducive to successful learning' (2000: 183).

Based on the research evidence an ongoing priority must be to establish the benefit of pupil use of target language and ways of maximising it. Strategies for achieving this will begin to address the key issue identified by OFSTED (Dobson, 1998: 2): 'the development of the use of the target language by pupils,' but it is also the case that 'many pupils in both key stages are reluctant to use it [target language]' (Dobson, 1998: 1).

On the one hand, it would appear that the principle of exclusive target language use overlooks the value of mother tongue in

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developing language awareness and in helping to make sense of the learning process. Learners need to have recourse to a range of strategies which include comparison of L1 and L2. On the other hand, research is inconclusive on the benefits of teacher use of target language. Clearly current methodology is shifting to embrace both L1 and L2 use, and it is necessary to develop appropriate strategies to respond to this shifting emphasis.

DEVELOPING STRATEGIES FOR PUPIL USE OF TARGET LANGUAGE

In spite of teachers' best efforts to pursue a practice of maximum use of target language, the findings of the OHMCI survey (James *et al.*, 1999: 1) on pupils' speaking skills must surely make discouraging reading. The report identified speaking as the weakest of the four language skills:

Pupils' ability to speak the target language (TL) was unsatisfactory in just over half the lessons seen, and good only in a small minority of schools. Few are able to use it spontaneously and fluently.

Whilst acknowledging this, however, it must be appreciated that the development of pupils' speaking skills will never be commensurate with the output from the teacher. As Chambers, F. (1991: 30) points out:

The asymmetry in teacher and pupil FL (foreign language) output must be fully acknowledged and accepted by the teacher...

...There is evidence that pupils do not spontaneously respond in the foreign language, even if the teacher manages the lesson in the foreign language.

In addition to teacher-pupil interchanges, however, there is pupil-teacher and pupil-pupil interaction. As Pachler and Field (2001: 99) explain, the structured progression adopted by most departments to target language development contributes significantly to teacher use and passive understanding of the target language by the pupils. It does not have the same impact on pupil-teacher and pupil-pupil interaction, despite the advice of the Non-Statutory Guidance (NCC, 1992: C1, 1.7) that departmental policy should have equal regard to pupil use of target language. In order to achieve this it is necessary to focus systematically on the developmental needs of the pupils, moving them from automatic and pre-learned phrases such as "Excuse me, I don't understand" and "I've forgotten my exercise-book" to spontaneous and individual use of language. As the Non-Statutory Guidance (NCC, 1992) highlights, the challenge to teachers is to find "ways to encourage pupils to keep using the target language when working independently of the

teacher" (NCC, 1992: C6, 4.5). Although this may appear idealistic it is also a goal towards which teachers should work.

Macdonald (1993: 29) provides a useful pupil record sheet for use of the target language, which shows significant progression to the point where pupils are able to: 'use a lot of phrases without [...] having to think about it; work out how to say what I want to'.

There is clearly a need for strategies to encourage pupil use of the target language. Within the context of language practice in the classroom this is relatively unproblematic, and can range from basic repetition drills to more sophisticated information-gap activities. Textbooks and course materials abound in examples of such pre-communicative tasks. The challenge is moving pupils on to re-apply language for the general communication needs of the classroom. Ensuring that the language is available could be achieved by monitoring consistently the different language needs of pupils within the classroom context and providing appropriate target language equivalents. This might also include the displaying of target language phrases on suitably illustrated classroom walls. Guest and Pachler (2001: 100) suggest a "request box", whereby pupils indicate the phrases they need, posting them into a box, and then these are taught periodically to the whole class. A system of incentives, particularly at key stage 3, may help to motivate pupils to make more extensive use of target language.

At key stage 3 some of the sentences needed may be too long and complex to be practicable, for example, "I've left my book at home. Can I do it on paper and stick it in my book?" In this instance pupils should be encouraged to communicate with a combination of body language and such individual items of vocabulary as are familiar at that stage. The overwhelming advantage of this "coping" strategy is that it sets in train the process of natural communication in the target language. Thus in the example given in Year 7 pupils might say, using body language as well: "Livre – à la maison je – écrivez – ici – dans le livre – après". Purists will criticise this approach on the grounds of incoherence and inaccuracy, but it could significantly improve the quantity of target language attempted by pupils, particularly in the early stages of language learning. It will also develop a crucial process of experimentation in the learner, which is essential to language progression. It represents, after all, a drawing upon several discrete topic areas and a reapplying of the lexis in new situations, which is surely what we are trying to encourage in learners. The National Curriculum (DfE/WO, 1995) recognises this and encourages pupils to: "use their knowledge to experiment with language" (DfE/WO, 1995: 3, 3g). In the 1999/2000 versions of the National Curriculum this is expressed as: "[use] language creatively and imaginatively." (DfEE/

"a need for strategies to encourage pupil use of the target language"

QCA, 1999: 17; ACCAC, 2000: 7) The example above will also develop what James, *et al.* (1999: 2) refer to as "the skill of working out what to say, either in response to the unpredictable or in situations requiring autonomy".

Although teachers can provide situations and opportunities such as the above, the real impetus will lie with the motivation of the pupils themselves to speak.

This is more problematic than it might seem, as is evidenced by findings of the OHMCI/CILT project (James *et al.*, 1999: 2), which amongst its main findings noted that:

even the most enthusiastic pupils rarely use the target language spontaneously amongst themselves.

The real reason for its problematic nature, however, centres upon encouraging intrinsic motivation in pupils, and Pachler and Field (2001: 195), suggest that "the more imminent the reasons for wanting to learn, and the more they can be determined by the learner, the more influential they are." By this criterion the examples given by Pachler and Field (1997: 195) of pupils wishing to tell a penfriend about themselves, and a desire to complete a challenging task, or win in a competitive situation would be appropriate. However, the importance of the classroom environment cannot be over-estimated. James *et al.* (1999: 2) state that "a stimulating classroom environment and a real audience can have a marked impact on the motivation to speak." Teachers should therefore be encouraged to create the sort of "cultural island" that this implies, because of its significant influence on the motivation of the learner and also on the use of the target language.

The issue of examination rubrics in the revised GCSE (WJEC, 1998) has raised many concerns. Research by Buckby (1999) indicates some confusion amongst pupils in interpreting the precise nature of the questions set. Teachers should be reassured, however, by the support given by examination boards in the form of lists of rubrics (see WJEC, 1998: 47). Methodologically teachers will, of course, need to introduce such phrases in the rubrics gradually, beginning at an early stage and using them progressively and consistently in the classroom in order to accustom learners fully to their use. This should not present too demanding a task, since most can be readily illustrated and incorporated into everyday classroom routine. More challenging are the unforeseen rubrics, which require judicious practice of dictionary use, and this of course has implications for developing dictionary skills. Even though these are no longer required in the examination, they remain a valid additional language learning skill.

Although the pupils' use of the target language should remain a primary goal, one should not lose sight of the significance of teacher use of the target language. As Macaro clearly indicates, on

the basis of empirical research we do not yet know the effects on learning of teaching in the target language (Macaro, 2000: 184).

TEACHER USE OF TARGET LANGUAGE: SOME ISSUES

Any discussion of language teaching and learning will include as defining features the two distinctive elements of grammar and communication. The Grammar-Translation Method by definition implies extensive use of the mother tongue and an analytical grasp of structure. By contrast, communicative language teaching's prime purpose is to convey and understand messages in the target language with less emphasis on applying systems and understanding and transferring concepts. These two apparently opposing approaches are reflected to a certain extent in the distinction between the processes of learning and acquisition that Krashen and Terrell drew in their theory of the "Natural Approach" (1988).

Although the critics would contend (see, for example, Ellis, 1994) that this is unduly simplistic and polarised, Krashen and Terrell's categorisation can nevertheless provide useful provisional working definitions.

Accordingly, learning implies a conscious, scientific organising principle, which in turn presupposes higher cognitive abilities that correspond to appropriate levels of development and maturity. Acquisition on the other hand implies exclusive exposure to and use of the target language without formal instruction.

The theory of acquisition put forward commands a certain measure of initial appeal. As they point out (Krashen and Terrell, 1988: 21), acquisition depends upon relevant and interesting topics, expression of emotions, feelings, low anxiety levels, a good rapport with teacher, friendly relations with other students. The danger of the formal process of learning lies in the tendency for it to become a subject of study and analysis, rather than an instrument of communication, and a tool of practical use. Affective levels can be raised because of anxiety over accuracy; access to language can be restricted to pupils who are able to operate at a higher cognitive level.

Few would dispute that mother tongue acquisition is an effective method of language learning, but the debate hinges more upon the extent to which this can be replicated in the rather less than "natural" conditions of the foreign language classroom in schools. Do these conditions necessitate some compensation in the provision of mother tongue use?

A characteristic of language is after all its cultural uniqueness, such that there are many instances of words, phrases, idioms that do not benefit understanding from direct translation, and indeed may positively detract from meaning. For example, the French *croissant*, when translated directly, becomes "crescent", and the term "French

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breakfast roll” remains a mere circumlocution, and does not do justice to the original. Similarly, culturally specific idioms such as “Je vous en prie” or “Ça ne fait rien” do not benefit from the mother tongue intervention. This should surely lead to a more cautious approach to the role of the mother tongue in language teaching and a recognition that the ability to use the mother tongue is not necessarily beneficial, and can, on occasion, be misleading.

On the other hand, one cannot deny the comforting effect of selective use of mother tongue support in certain circumstances in the interests of economy of time and psychological reassurance. Macaro (2000: 177) suggests three distinct reasons for judicious use of L1:

Beginners use the L1 to help them decode text. Beginners and more advanced learners use the L1 to help them to write text. L1 tends to be the language of thought, unless the learner is very advanced.

He therefore concludes that “It would be unwise to recommend the total exclusion of the L1 from the foreign language classroom.”

Allford (1999: 231) perceives the advantage of the role of the mother tongue in supporting language learning:

Translation activities which require close scrutiny of vocabulary, structures and discourse can sensitise learners to differences between the two languages that may be less apparent if all the work is conducted in the target language.

He argues for the complementary and interdependent nature of L1 and L2:

Employing the mother tongue...is entirely compatible with extensive use of the TL, which is being complemented, rather than undermined by cross-lingual comparisons. (ibid.)

In the light of these issues to what extent is target language in fact being used and is there an implicit model of practice?

TEACHER USE OF TARGET LANGUAGE: THE PRACTICE

From our research questionnaire with teachers we attempted to establish the proportion of target language used in their teaching. Table 1 summarises the percentage of lesson time spent using the target language at both key stages and at three ability levels.

Our research indicated that at key stage 3 the proportion of target language use increases for the middle and upper ability levels. At key stage 4 the same pattern follows, although overall proportionately less target language is being used at a stage when knowledge and understanding should in fact generate increased use. Macaro (1995: 53) suggests teachers’ reasons for this:

when a pupil began to learn a foreign language they were enthusiastic and regarded it as a means of communication. Later on it became ‘work’ and the pupil, especially the one who was not a high-flier, should not be allowed to become frustrated because of overuse of target language.

The modest proportion of target language use at both KS3 and KS4 lower ability is a significant feature and could indicate that teachers feel that grammar teaching and use of target language are inextricably linked to ability level. Franklin’s research (1990: 21) supports this. She found that 79% of teachers did not use the target language because of “the presence of many low ability pupils in the class”. Also significant were the 59% whose practice was determined by the age of the year group.

REASONS FOR USING TARGET LANGUAGE

In setting out a rationale of the benefits of teaching learners in the language they are learning Halliwell and Jones (1991: 1) give three reasons:

- they need to experience the target language as a **real** means of communication;

“teachers feel that grammar teaching and use of target language are inextricably linked to ability level.”

Table 1

| n= 46 | % of lesson time | Lower Ability % of teachers | Middle Ability % of teachers | Upper Ability % of teachers |
|-------------|------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Key Stage 3 | n/a | 13 | 13 | 15 |
| | 0-10 | 9 | 0 | 2 |
| | 10-25 | 17 | 9 | 2 |
| | 25-50 | 26 | 20 | 17 |
| | 50-75 | 22 | 24 | 22 |
| | 75-100 | 13 | 35 | 41 |
| | | | | |
| Key Stage 4 | n/a | 35 | 20 | 15 |
| | 0-10 | 2 | 7 | 0 |
| | 10-25 | 20 | 4 | 0 |
| | 25-50 | 13 | 22 | 9 |
| | 50-75 | 20 | 30 | 41 |
| | 75-100 | 11 | 17 | 35 |
| | | | | |

- if we teach them in the language they are learning we give them a chance to develop their own in-built language learning system;
- by teaching through the target language we are bridging that otherwise wide gap between carefully controlled secure classroom practice and the unpredictability of real language encounters.

Thus one has arguments that are both instrumental (language as a means of getting things done) and linguistic (developing language awareness, skills and knowledge). This dual purpose is referred to in the National Curriculum final report proposals (DES/VO, 1990: 58/59):

Learners are enabled to see that the language is not only the object of study but also an effective medium for conducting the normal business of the classroom.

There must also be advantages to the learner in being in a position to exclude the interference of another layer of cognitive processing (i.e. L1). This was the guiding principle behind the Direct Method, where a direct link was made between object or action and language, without the extraneous need to interrupt and translate, which has not always proved to be appropriate.

Similarly, it is necessary to give status to target language use in the classroom, since it manifestly diminishes L2 if the most significant utterances are spoken in L1. Learning is demonstrably more effective when learners are exposed to a pure model, that is, one that does not instantly translate language into L1 but requires learners to solve the problem of meaning for themselves. It is this very process that is crucial if the learner is to progress. In some instances indeed language becomes secondary to the task being carried out. This lies at the heart of cross-curricular initiatives in recent years, referred to as “content-based instruction”, which have aimed at teaching other subjects through the medium of the foreign language.

The advantages highlighted above have in themselves intrinsic worth. Teachers will need to view them alongside the research findings, establish their own principled approach and develop a range of strategies to promote their use of the target language.

TEACHER USE OF TARGET LANGUAGE: THE STRATEGIES

Franklin (1990: 21) highlights two further considerations in teachers’ use of target language, namely the behaviour of pupils in the classroom (95% mentioned this) and teachers’ own confidence in the use of the TL (83%). Macaro corroborates this with reference to the perceptions of Italian teachers (Macaro, 1995: 53). With

reference to the matter of behaviour there is much to commend Macdonald’s assertion (1993: 7) that:

- most enforcements of discipline can be carried out effectively in the target language;
- it can be an advantage, as it can defuse the situation and turn it into a learning situation;
- it will ensure that pupils find it more difficult to argue;
- the tone of voice will make it clear that you are angry.

As far as the content of reprimands is concerned most expressions are short and recur frequently, are often cognates and can in any case be supported by gesture and body language. In French, for example, Macdonald gives 19 core phrases of reprimand and criticism (Macdonald, 1993: 30-31). Halliwell and Jones (1991: 19-20) suggest that teachers “build up a repertoire of words and phrases” and using such headings as “Instructions for classroom activities” (e.g. *Cochez votre grille*), “Instructions for classroom organisation” (e.g. *Travaillez avec un partenaire*), “Change of activity markers” (e.g. *Pour terminer*), “Nature of activity markers” (e.g. *Réponses*), “Mild discipline exhortations” (e.g. *Tu as un problème?*) and “Expressing emotional reactions” (e.g. *Parfait!*). In addition they propose an “experiment with distinct blocks of target language talk in a lesson, rather than constantly switching between languages” (Halliwell and Jones, 1991: 20). This strategy is particularly useful when starting to use the target language, but the goal should of course be that the blocks of target language increase and become a normal feature of the lesson.

The lack of teachers’ confidence in the linguistic resources needed to manage classroom situations rests upon the need to apply previously unencountered language. This corpus of vocabulary and phrases should not intimidate teachers, who, like other professionals, must be prepared to research and acquire the necessary “tools of the trade”. Such texts as Macdonald (1993) and teachers’ handbooks accompanying course-book materials provide a trouble-free source of reference, and in the even more specialised area of ICT there are customised lists on websites such as <http://vtc.ngfl.gov.uk/resource/cits/mfl/index.html>.

A further aspect of perceived confidence relates to continued professional development, the updating of language skills. Teachers often have neither the time nor the opportunity to sustain and develop their target language skills, and their everyday use of language is furthermore limited to basic transactions with pupils, which do not extend or challenge. Opportunities offered by ICT provide ample scope for individual language enrichment (email, internet, CD-ROMs etc.), but the individual has to find the time to use them.

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CONCLUSION

The debate continues about the amount of target language use that is desirable in the language-learning classroom. In devoting a whole chapter to a critical appraisal of teaching in the target language Guest and Pachler (2001: 84-101) point out that "the use of the target language (TL) for instruction and interaction is a key methodological question for modern foreign languages (MFL) teachers." The importance of learners' TL use is stressed by Macaro (2000: 184):

Only through the learner using L2 can s/he achieve strategic communicative competence. The over-arching pedagogical tool should, therefore, be learners' use of the target language, not teacher use of the target language.

However, whatever position one adopts on the proportion of target language use, as Macaro points out "it would be unwise to recommend the total exclusion of the L1 from the foreign language classroom" (2000: 177). Although there is no conclusive evidence to link widespread teacher use of TL with effective language learning, there is clear evidence that pupil use of TL positively affects learning. From his own observations Macaro points out that there were high levels of pupil use of target language when routines and instructions, reactions and simple requests were conducted in the target language, thus creating a "target language atmosphere", which in turn manifestly affects pupils' progress (Macaro, 2000: 185).

It is crucial that teachers pursue appropriate strategies for the development of principled target language use by teachers and learners. That research into TL use is inconclusive should not detract from its importance as a central focus of current methodology. In support of this we would therefore offer the following recommendations as useful guidelines:

- systematic use of the TL for simple classroom instructions, commands and routines;
- measured use of L1 for clarification and comparison with L2 to develop language awareness (see NC (2000) key stage 3 Programme of Study Focus Statement, p.6 and NC (England 1999), key stages 3 and 4, PoS, p. 16);
- maximum use of teacher TL to improve learners' pronunciation, develop problem-solving and enable learners to deal with the unpredictable;
- visual support to accompany use of the TL to motivate learners, increase cultural awareness and define meaning where direct translation is unclear or ambiguous;
- optimal use of TL to convey to learners that the foreign language is a genuine vehicle of communication, rather than merely a tool for intellectual activity;

- increase exposure to TL to promote confidence and facility with listening (widely perceived by learners as the most difficult language skill);
- greater contact with the TL to facilitate experimentation with language, and attendant learner autonomy.

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