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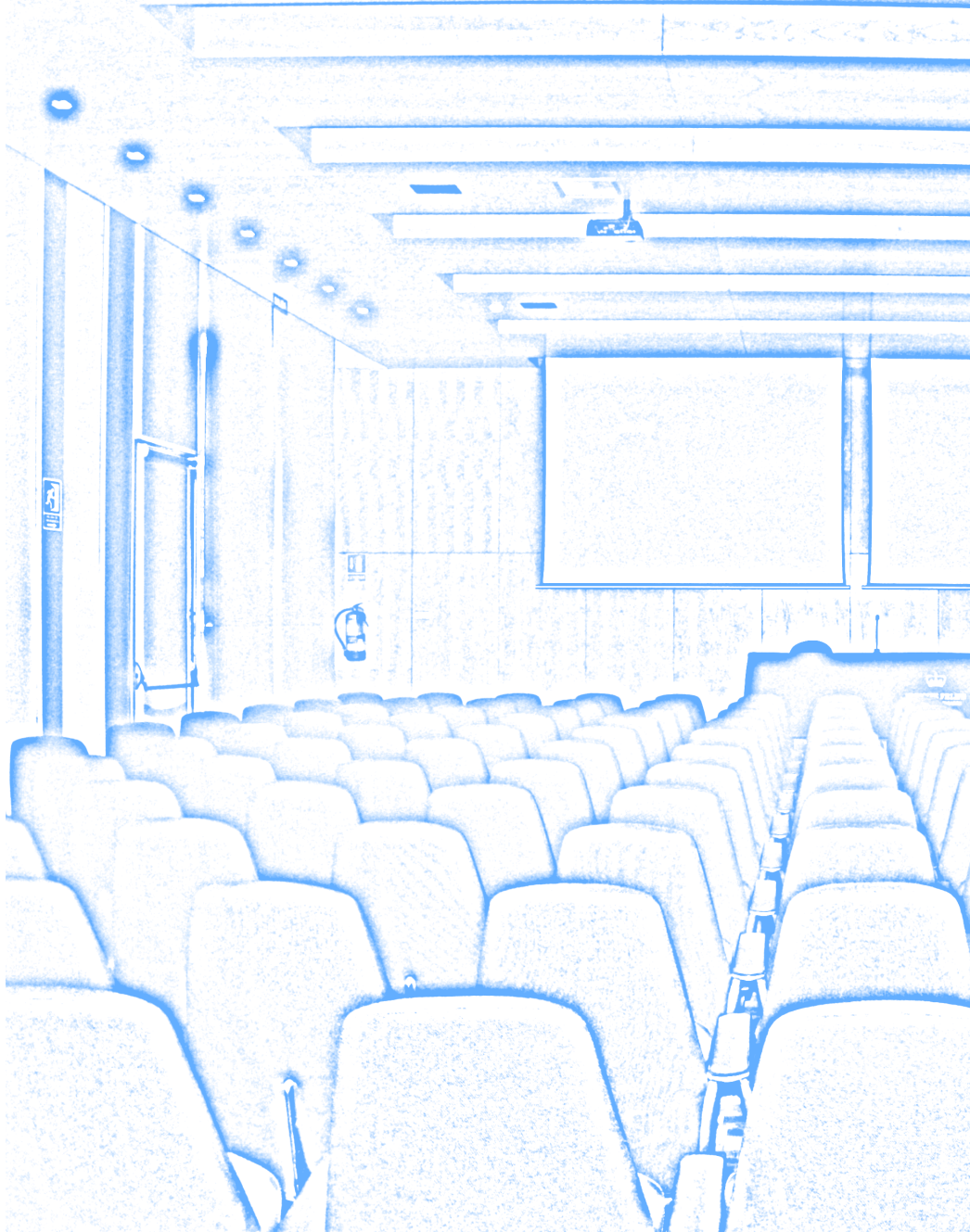


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**Actas del I Congreso Internacional de
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(Coordinadores)



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Use of the target language in the classroom

ANTONIO MARTÍNEZ COPETE

Resumen

Es difícil a veces encontrar un equilibrio entre el uso de la lengua local (o el idioma utilizado en el hogar) y la lengua meta dentro del aula de idiomas. Es un tema crucial a tratar, el aumentar el tiempo de exposición de los estudiantes al habla.

La cuestión pertinente ya fue planteada por Dickson (1996): "¿Qué tipo de actividades y usos de la lengua meta son los más útiles para poner en práctica lo que se aprende dentro del aula?". La respuesta depende principalmente de variables tales como la actitud y la motivación, los tipos de personalidad, los estilos y las estrategias en el aprendizaje de idiomas (Dreyer & Van der Walt, 1996). Además, para asegurar una formación integral, es necesario observar el funcionamiento del aprendizaje incidental.

Palabras clave:

lengua meta; motivación; aprendizaje incidental.

Abstract

It is sometimes difficult to strike a balance between using local language (or language used at home) and the Target Language (TL) in the classroom. It is important to increase the students' exposure to the target language.

The question to be raised has already been stated by Dickson (1996): "What kinds of classroom activity and communication in the TL are most likely to help pupils to learn and to practice what they learn?" The answer depends mainly on variables such as attitude and motivation, personality types and traits, learning styles and language learning strategies (Dreyer & Van Der Walt, 1996). Besides, to round off the learning process, an insight into the workings of incidental learning is required.

Keywords:

target language; motivation; incidental learning.

1. Introduction

Often, teachers seem to miss the premise that second language learners are expected to use and respond to the second language while in class. "The natural use of the target language for virtually all communication is a sure sign of a good modern-languages course" (Department of Education and Science (England and Wales), 1990, 58)

It is also undoubted that learners cannot hone their skills at a consistent rate in a new language without hearing it and having opportunities to speak it. The teacher is the main provider of the Target Language in a classroom context. Dealing with the anxiety of avoiding the use of your mother tongue is both beneficial and challenging for the students.

A term to be considered at this stage is 'comprehensible input', a term popularized by Krashen in 1977, which refers to the thought that the context used in the classroom should contain messages that students really want to hear. We may add that routine expressions and certain classroom commands help the acquisition and use of the second language. Secondly, there is motivation, since we model the world through the language we use, a positive and practical attitude toward the language will improve the value given to the TL itself. Indeed, highly motivated individuals can overcome obstacles and soften the strain of the first attempts when starting a new language.

All in all, it is clear that the TL should increasingly be the natural means of communication in the classroom. In the lower levels, it is challenging but ultimately worthwhile, as students are made aware of the need to feel immersed in a foreign social milieu. The sooner learners appreciate making the effort, the sooner their attitude will improve in relation to performance.

2. The Target Language (TL) in a classroom context

It is certain that learning English in a classroom is far from engaging real life situations.

Bilash (2009) writes about the importance of using the Target Language (TL) in the language classroom since activities that integrate the four skills give learners scaffolded support, opportunities to create and confidence. Beginners in the English teaching profession may show uneasiness when using the target language in the classroom. Frequently, teachers find it difficult when moving from using local language (or language used at home) to the TL. Although using the TL can cause some stress, it is very important to do so for the process of language learning.

It also may seem necessary to increase the students' exposure to the target language, especially when they don't have the chance of hearing the TL outside the educational environment. The context and feedback has to be as close as possible to what learners would hear and say when immersed in real life situations.

Fortunately, students freezing or going blank when asked to respond in the target language is mostly something of the past. Current undergraduate language learners, when treated as the adults that they are, react naturally because they have, one way or another, already been in contact with the language for years.

Academically, modern communicative approaches tend to naturalize the learning progress. Besides, the shifting landscape that modern technology offers, that is for example, watching TV shows via video streaming in the original versions is a real breakthrough to be taken into consideration. This not only motivates students to keep the language up but also makes incidental learning gain weight. Now it is frequent to hear students say that they cannot wait to see the latest released episode of their favourite American TV show, just in original version, time before Spanish TV channels would dub them.

3. Comprehensive input and routine expressions

Exposure to the language is valid since the theme or topic is pertinent to the receiver. The willingness and curiosity to know more about the direction of the plot will often arise because basically we are talking about products of entertainment, specifically tailored for general consumption. Being entertained is not being instructed and a language learner in turn perceives this.

In terms of linguistic competence, Krashen (1977) put primary importance to comprehensive input (CI) and, consequently, the creation of more complex language structures. "The best methods are therefore those that supply 'comprehensible input' in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are 'ready', recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production." We may add that routine expressions and certain classroom commands help the acquisition and use of the second language.

There are plenty of examples on how modern language learning books integrate skills and always contextualize the units. Any other approach would seem artificial and difficult to carry out. Comprehending structures is not just stringing, but even noticing:

- Similarities with the first language.
- Contextual guessing.
- Vocabulary guessing and subsequent checking.
- Everyday English expressions acquired through practice.

To exemplify this, a B2 upper-intermediate classroom unit would perfectly present a colloquial situation as itemized below:

Grammar point. Use of:

How + adjective: How wonderful!

What + adjective + uncountable noun: What terrible weather!

What a + adjective + countable noun: What a lovely surprise!

Current teaching methods require a context so the students can allocate and naturalize colloquial expressions. The logical construction behind is presented at first, but it is inevitable that the learner may find it difficult if it was presented as a traditional memorization activity.

To help acquisition, a listening with different random sentences should complement, for example:

1. Speaker A: You know what, I am getting married!

Speaker B's reaction: How wonderful!

2. Speaker A: It has been pouring with rain all day.

Speaker B's reaction: What terrible weather!

3. Speaker A: John is taking me to Rome.

Speaker B's reaction: What a lovely surprise!

Once examples are offered, it is of major importance that the teacher work on how such everyday English expressions have to be presented:

- Structurally, by noticing the form that correctly corresponds in each case.
- In terms of pronunciation, together with the right intonation. Complementary listening activities will be fundamental for the students to familiarize with a different sound system.

Finally, only if necessary, translation or the equivalent expressions in L1 may help consolidate the use of these words. Not all of them will grow on each individual, but at least some should be memorized, for example in order to be used in the oral exam if the situation is pertinent. Therefore, the candidate will make good use of a colloquial expression placed in the right moment.

4. Motivational aspects

In terms of motivation, since learning depends heavily on the mood of the learner, having the right attitude toward the language conditions the whole acquisition process from its roots. From here it is fundamental to stand out the figure of the teacher, native or non-native of the target language, who serves as a model and paves the way to a successful long term relationship with the language and all the aspects concerning everyday usage.

The teacher's feelings and emotions conveyed when engaging students in eventually longer speeches and more accurate use of expressions, are a sign of success and thus, students will be more likely to gain a better appreciation for the language. Indeed, highly motivated individuals can overcome obstacles and soften the strain of the first attempts when using a new language.

Dickson (1996) pointed out that "one of the factors that is thought to affect TL use is the teacher's competence and confidence in the spoken language". On the other hand, studies reveal that it is not only the lack of confidence is really hindering the use of TL in the classroom, but also disorderly behaviour and lower achieving pupils impede a regular progress.

Taking advantage of teaching undergraduate students, whose behaviour is far from unsystematic, we have observed how, from the first class, it is worth presenting the possibility of using the viewing of TV shows in English as an activity that will make their use of the language shoot up. Asking the students about that with the students in the classroom helps create a relaxed atmosphere.

For decades, experts in the study of the acquisition of English as a second language have tried to find out how a student can learn and retain vocabulary with resources proving to be increasingly effective. When broadening the perspectives on their language acquisition process, students feel encouraged to develop their language skills. There is no dichotomy between motivated and unmotivated students, and therefore it may vary during the endless process of learning a language. It is important to connect language learning to students' interests outside of class (Karaoglu, 2008). Limiting students to traditional methods would be totally unfair today.

All things considered, teachers are the most important factor since they directly influence students' motivation and have to initiate a positive anchorage that will condition how learners perceive the language as a whole.

5. Incidental learning when watching TV shows

Traditional teaching methods used to instruct through words, "verbal modes of instruction have a long history in education and words are clearly the dominant vehicle for delivering information in schools" (Mayer, 2003). However, considering what the student does outside the classroom is of major importance nowadays. We are facing a new scenario where students have access to original version material, a massive range of contexts and situations through which they not only learn, but also find and excuse to enjoy and acquire the language passively.

Incidental learning is referred by UNESCO as random learning: "Random learning refers to unintentional learning occurring at any time and in any place, in everyday life" (UNESCO, 2005, 4)

Trying to follow this line, the argument of encouraging students to become autonomous to obtain better outcome in the long run will require an analysis of how students perceive, acquire and absorb words and phrases and make sure when a student is ripe for being voluntarily exposed to, for example, original-version TV programmes, so that he or she finds the perfect balance between the understanding of the plot and acquisition of words, structures and pronunciation.

After having a look at the breakdown of different studies related to the subject, TV shows have to be categorised into level, country of production, theme and genre. Afterwards, it is mandatory to attain the happy medium when the student's level and likes and dislikes are in tune with the right video sorting.

Ultimately, it is necessary also, correlated to what was mentioned above, to comprehend how motivation would affect the area of the individual and their internal process, fed through dedication and practice with conceivable time consuming, gentle at first and gradually more demanding language acquisition activities. Regarding SLA, any individual's interest goes hand in hand with in site classroom motivation, either intrinsic or extrinsic, in which several agents take part, i.e. the attitude of the student towards the learning environment and degree of exposure, the printed material and audiovisuals they work with and, most important of all, the teacher, whose implication and approach would help keep a necessary low or mild level of concern in the students which will certainly help learners receive more input and cause them to reflect.

Every individual is subject to different variables when facing incidental, voluntary continuation with the aim of reaching a certain level of understanding for a second language. Further studies of current scholars like Montero, Peters, Clarebout & Desmet, (2014) help us aim at reaching a midpoint when opting for captioning and the effects on comprehension and incidental learning.

6. Current scenario. Modern technology leads to strong motivated students

As any English teacher can corroborate, current English learning student's books offer a wide range of in context activities that will surely provide a perfect balance among the four skills.

The quantity of target language use is determined by the level, however, any iGeneration student (recently born generation who set precedent for the use of new technology) engages acquisition by simply taking advantage of digital tools:

- **Social Networking:** The concept of staying connected with classmates or foreign friends makes students share experiences and hobbies. In parallel with this, British Council, as a case in point, or famous learning enhancement platforms like Grammarly, use Facebook to offer resources from their pages.
- **Collaborative learning:** Working in groups helps develop solutions to case studies mimicking real-world problems. Sharing projects through cloud solutions like Google Docs, facilitates peer to peer or larger group instruction since everyone feels involved in the completion of a task that can be presented in a variety of forms.
- **Presentation with new media:** Cloud-based presentation software like Prezi encourages students to present their findings in visually enticing, sleek displays that go beyond the traditional slide-based structure.

Presentation media is also evolving to endless possibilities via navigation between images, videos, texts and other multimedia options.

- Application programmes (app for short): Current instructional applications like ABA, provide video classes, level tests, progress tests, and interactive grammar and vocabulary resources. Most apps offer both a free plan and the possibility of upgrading to a premium plan with extra products like unlimited contents, online teaching or tutoring, and eventually obtain a certificate after passing one level.
- Video streaming: Films and TV series video streaming providers like Netflix offers subscribers the possibility of immediate viewing of productions in original version with subtitles in English and most of the local languages. The iGeneration of students mentioned above understand video streaming as the best and most convenient way to gain access to the contents that they themselves tailor to their likes.

Dramatic changes are affecting all learners. Web-based technology has revolutionized education around the world to the point where anyone can learn anything from anyone else at any time (Bonk, 2009). Technology has transformed educators and educational opportunities for learners of every age in every corner of the planet.

7. A gradual transition

The scenario that we are presenting involves undergraduate students doing either general or specialized English courses. From the time when motivation is restricted to each individual's background and their current personal moment, every conclusion regarding how to merge instructional and real, cost-effective English acquisition has to be restricted to common, group concurrencies.

The most obvious and measurable characteristic of the class is when sorted by their level, this is why it is crucial to adjust the pace, contents and contexts to the resources provided to ensure the good involvement of the students.

As an example, a group of Elementary A2 students have been observed. After working on food vocabulary and the concepts of countable and uncountable objects were elaborated, viewing an instructional short documentary explaining what kind of restaurants are typical in every English High Street helps enhance and consolidate several aspects seen in the unit. This way of contextualizing using the appropriate audiovisual materials are seen as wonderful resources, but have to be supplied with care, so students would be enticed to keep looking for what best fits their needs.

Low level students would do an English course mainly due to their background, that is, their poor contact with spoken English at school or because they come from other school curricular sections with subjects like French as a second language. Special effort has to be made when trying to immerse them in real context.

Taken as an example, current Oxford University Press New Headway Elementary books offer multimedia resources adapted to the grammar and vocabulary seen in each unit. Video worksheets provide suitable questions regarding the sketches seen. Subsequently, sticking to a ranked syllabus guarantees that the multimedia content always goes along with the contents acquired. This may seem obvious, but teachers have to be aware that at these early stages, adults may be easily discouraged if they observe that either the question asked or the answer required cannot be followed when structures and vocabulary sound awkward to them.

Another categorization that is relevant in order to advise on the gradual acquisition through authentic material is background. To illustrate this, in a B1, intermediate undergraduate English language learners group, we may find students who have just found the like to following their favourite TV series in English for some time and other without that kind of beneficial exposure so get lower results in the listening test.

Variables like age, maturity and self-consciousness also affect future performance and mastery of the students. It is from early ages until puberty, what is considered the critical period when a language is properly acquired (Lenneberg, 1967). By means of these new ways of exposure to native-like dialogues, the outcome of a grown-up English student will be exponentially enhanced when open to semi-realistic immersion by viewing TV programmes on a regular basis.

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