

USING THE TARGET LANGUAGE

Using the target language in the classroom

The target language can be said to be used 'for real purposes' when it is used to communicate what people in the classroom need and/or want to say anyway. In other words, during language learning sessions, teacher and pupils attempt to use the language for all necessary purposes, even if they are not, strictly speaking, part of the language lesson.

Some examples:

- greetings (teacher/pupils pupil/pupil);
- completing administration procedures (e.g. calling the register);
- pupils: asking for help or permission to do something.
- teachers: giving instructions, admonishing, praising etc.;

Conveying meaning in the foreign language

Many teachers are worried that if they try to use only the foreign language, some pupils will fail to understand and to learn, so they use both languages. However, it is very difficult for pupils to become confident users of the language if the teacher is continually swapping from one language to the other, or translating each utterance. If pupils expect the translation to be made available they will learn to switch off and wait for it. It's better to 'teach' what's going to be said in certain situations and then to be consistent in using it. The teacher sets the example here, but if students are confident they will soon follow suit. Posters and other visuals can be placed around the room as reminders of common phrases.

Using the target language in this way is not as difficult as it sounds, because:

- routine activities and situations provide opportunities for regular repetition of associated vocabulary and structures;
 - most situations arise in a context which will be readily understood by pupils whatever the language used;
 - facial expression, tone of voice, use of objects and pictures, mime, pointing, gesture and demonstration can be used to make meaning clear;
 - pupils' understanding of language used in context will grow quickly; and language frequently used by the teacher will eventually be picked up and used by pupils.
- If a situation becomes particularly problematical:

- use a puppet as a 'model pupil' to demonstrate what is required
- use another pupil who *has* understood to interpret meaning for the others, allowing the teacher to remain 'in role'
- as a last resort, if the word has to be given in English, spell it out using the foreign alphabet

Of course, any teacher may need to resort to English at times. When this happens, try to signal the change in advance by telling the pupils in the target language that you are going to speak in English, so that the changeover is controlled and explicit. Pupils will have this difficulty too, so teach them to ask in the target language for permission to resort to use of English. The teacher can then do it too.

Problem solving: learning to cope with language difficulties

It is important, quite early on in the process, to teach the pupils how to address their linguistic problems without resorting to the first language of the classroom. This skill will be vital when the language is used in the foreign country.

Teaching pupils to use the target language

Working towards a situation in which pupils can confidently use the target language for classroom interactions is no different from other topic work. The words and phrases needed to undertake the desired task need to be presented, modelled and practised in just the same way before they can be confidently used for real.

Some teachers have found it useful to explain to their class the distinction between **practice language** and **use of language for real purposes**, so that when the class is ready to shift into 'real' language, the reason for using target language is understood, accepted and acted upon.

Where to look for materials and further help

In *Ici On Parle Français, / Wir Sprechen Deutsch* and *Se Habla Español*, Unit 9a covers coping with language difficulties, and use of mime and gesture Teacher's notes are provided. Unit 9b deals with problem solving.

Cartoons for Classroom Communication covers all these situations and more besides.

Speak Up! Using the target language in class Peter Satchwell & June de Silva. CILT 2009.