

Translation in the foreign language classroom

A special classroom use of the native language (L1) is the translation of foreign language (L2) texts into the LI, a procedure that has been neglected, possibly because of its association with the old Grammar Translation Method. However, current research reveals that contemporary translation activities have little to do with the method, which occurred in a non-interactive teacher-centred classroom with few activities aside from the translation of difficult, non-relevant, and often boring texts. Indicating the lack of correspondence between L1 and L2 forms can enhance understanding of the language being learned. It is a natural linguistic phenomenon for a learner to display positive and negative language transfer of the LI through interlanguage, and translation offers one way to highlight these similarities and differences. Translation can also be used as a productive means to learn new L2 vocabulary. And translation can draw the teachers' attention to the words and structures that need to be practiced. For something different, we propose the use of L1 to L2 translation as a guided writing exercise for beginners, using process approach activities such as writing practice, dictionary work, and peer-correction opportunities. There are many other activities to use with translation that successfully raise consciousness about the L2. As with other theoretically sound methods, the following principles support the use of translation for L2 acquisition: 1) translation uses authentic materials. Students respond to relevant materials from the real world, and with translation teachers have an opportunity to select the most appropriate types of texts; 2) translation is interactive. Translation does not have to be a solitary activity; 3) translation is learner-centred. The learner-centred classroom is essential to effective teaching; 4) translation promotes learner autonomy.

For these reasons and more, translation is now considered an acceptable procedure for the Communicative Approach to language teaching.