

THE ROLE OF L1 IN CLASSROOM (LEXICAL APPROACH IN ELT)		Language Teaching Keywords: translation, interference, approach, lexical, chunks, acquiring, lexis.
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Abstract

ELT Classes have tried and continue to try new methods and techniques so as to achieve the best possible results in ELT classrooms. Various language teaching methods have treated translation (L1) in ELT classrooms differently. With the introduction of Communicative Approach, translation and interference fell out of favour. But according to Lexical Approach, an approach which is being widely used in ELT classrooms in the world, the importance of translation or L1 in ELT classes is far from being trivial. Seen from a lexical view of language, translation and interference became fruitful again. In the past, language was considered as composed of words, but Lexical Approach has argued that, besides words, language consists of chunks (lexis). With language chunking in mind, we will consider the idea of L1 (translation) role in ELT. In this research paper will elaborate translation inevitability in classroom, L1-L2 comparison, the role the lexis play in acquiring the language, interference and L1 awareness.

I. Translation is Inevitable

Until recently language learning has been considered as a process where the learner has to learn the language (words) and its grammar. But Lexical Approach challenges this view alluding that language composes of chunks which, when combined, produce a continuous coherent text. These chunks are of different kinds but only four of them are considered as fundamental. The first kind of these kinds consists of single words while all others are multi-part items.

Since we saw above that language is no more composed only of words (vocabulary) and grammar, then teachers should pay attention to chunks during the learning process in ELT. When we say chunks, by this we mean, they have to pay attention to lexis: words, *collocations (co-occurrence of words: community service...)* and *fixed expressions (social greetings, politeness phrases, idioms)*

Lexical approach encourages identification of chunks and recognition that word-for-word equivalence is often impossible. Having pedagogical chunking in mind, we need to consider the role learners' L1 would play in classroom. According to this approach, translation became once again a very fruitful tool when seen in the context of lexical view.

Through translation has fallen out of use, teachers still encounter questions like *How do you say..... in English?* or *Can you say.....?* These learners' question reveals two points; when students can not express their selves in English, you naturally fall back into L1, and search for a translation in L1. This is way translation is considered as an instinctive part the brain approaches language learning. The second point that we may infer from the above questions is that learners when posing these questions let us know that they have a feeling for the lexis- they understand that

communities do not invent or coin new words all the time; on the contrary, there are Expressions which the non-natives need to acquire as wholes. They have to be remembered as such wholes so they are available for subsequent use in exactly the same form. Learners have an instinctive understanding that languages have what we call equivalents, correct translations, which are totally different from word-for-word translations.

II. L2 and L1 are not Identical

In Lexical Approach there is an implicit assumption that the relationship between L1 and L2 is more similar than different, that the human mind handles languages in certain non-language-specific ways. However there are some differences between acquiring L1 and L2. Two differences cannot be ignored during language learning process.

By leaning a second language you are able to mediate yourself and your world through language in general. L2 allows you to mediate self and worlds in wider contexts, in other words L2 is a second way of doing something you can already do.

The second difference is that acquiring L2 mirrors acquiring L1 in that you relate L2 words to L2 words, or L2 words to external world (*what is this called in English?*), but you also or inevitably relate L2 words and expressions to L1 (*How do you say..... in English?*); in short, you translate.

III. Translation and Lexis

By lexis, as mentioned above, we mean words, collocations fixed and semi-fixed expressions that inevitably are encountered during learning language process. To prevent word-for-word translation during learning, teachers should pay more attention to developing the skills to chunk language. In my opinion here is where teachers' help is need to guide students and help understand and become aware that the language to be learnt should be viewed as composed of phrases, collocations and idioms, which, in most cases, cannot be understood if translated word-for-word.

3.1. *The value of translation*

Since language is and should be considered as composed of lexis (chunks) not only words alone, there are several reasons why translation should occupy the right place in ELT:

1. It is inevitable that learners use L1 as a source, and that they make both helpful and unhelpful assumptions based on their experience of L1.
2. Comparing L2 and L1 is not always helpful for learners seeking to master the contrasts internal to English. But if this equation becomes L2 lexical item=L1 lexical item then it is helpful as correctly identified chunks do have equivalents in other languages.

3. Searching, discussing and recording appropriate L1 lexical item=L2 lexical item is useful and efficient procedure, but using this technique properly requires a kind of language awareness which a few learners will employ without help from a teacher.

4. The argument behind using translation in ELT is that the techniques and processes made in search for equivalents exactly mirror the processes every student uses when trying to express something for which the language does not come to mind automatically.

3.2. Interference can be helpful

Learners do possess a mental picture and a perception of the structure of L2. This knowledge has been built from different sources such as exposure appropriate reading and listening in L2 and by analogy with L1. Most, if not all, these processes by which this method develops are subconsciously that is why in this context we want to use this natural tendency of learners to assume that features of L1 apply to L2.

Though up to now the language used to describe the “interference of L1” carries negative connotations, many analogies do work and are positive aids to L2 acquisition. The teachers’ task is to raise learners’ awareness of the effects, so helping them both to avoid the unhelpful and to benefit from helpful, parallels.

3.3. L1 awareness as a source

According to Lexical Approach, it is unhelpful to teach structure by comparing L1 and L2. A few grammar mistakes, whether the result of interference or not, impede communication and thus merit no more than occasional correction. In contrast, lexical mistakes do matter and activities which aim at raising awareness of untrue parallels is valuable.

Increased learners’ awareness of certain lexical parallels can be helpful. Most learners have not thought closely about features of their mother-tongue. Therefore it’s helpful to show learners ways their own language and the language they are learning are lexically similar:

- collocation is a feature of all languages
- different genres contain different kinds of collocation
- Fixed expressions exist in their language as well as in English and have immediately recognisable pragmatic meaning.
- Expressions suitable for use to one person may not be suitable if used to a different person: all languages have ways of making formality.

IV. Conclusion

As can be seen from the above said, we can find a lot of positive features and contributions that L1 or translation may bring to our work in ELT classroom. This inevitability of L1 interference that takes place in our mind should not and cannot be ignored during ELT classroom processes. Word-for-word translation should be discouraged, but on the other hand, L1-lexical

unit=L2 lexical unit should be encouraged as this helps student remember and memorise more easily the language they are learning, especially when dealing with adult learners who rarely learn concepts, they learn language, opposite to young learners. Lexical approach focuses on lexis and chunks, and very often these needs to be paralleled with L1 so as to inculcate them into learners' brain. By focusing on similarities and differences between L1 and L2 we make them aware of features that both languages have or don't have in common.

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