

THE EFFECTS OF L1 OVERUSE IN L2 LEARNING: EVIDENCE FROM THREE CASE STUDIES

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Abstract

Foreign language teaching based on the mother tongue has been the traditional vehicle of instruction feature in Russian classrooms from the primary to high school levels, at language schools as well in teacher-formation at pedagogical institutes as is evidenced by the results of information obtained through interviews to teachers, observation of the students' in-class behavior and revision of textbooks produced by national authors. Grounded on data (transcripts, essays, and real class examples) gathered during five years, the paper examines the effects of excessive mother tongue use in foreign language classrooms in Ekaterinburg, Russia. The three case studies as well as other classroom instances reported and discussed here illustrate how previous educational experiences have modeled the students' learning style to such extent that limited progress in communicative skills in English and Spanish is achieved due to their constant reference to the Russian language system, despite having had enough controlled practice and performed well in the controlled application stages of the learning process. As a result, this varied in its manifestations perceived need on the part of the student to recur to Russian to communicate in the L2 originates time-consuming psycholinguistic processes that affect accurate and fluent language production. The paper also advances ideas on how to counteract this problem in class as well as the areas that require more attention on the part of the teacher. The study concludes that though this more than a century-old L1 role in L2 teaching dilemma in foreign language pedagogy is still far from been resolved, one thing is clear: excessive translation from and to the native language hampers greatly the outcomes of the instructional process.

Keywords: mother tongue; foreign language; translation; psycholinguistic processes; accuracy; fluency