

Using Mother Tongue (L1) judiciously in the Foreign Language (L2) Classroom

Mario Rinvoluceri, Pilgrims, UK

Mario: *Good Morning, Mr U* ■■■

long pause, while U ■■■ *mentally turns Mario's gush of English noises into "Ohio gozaimas, Ueda San"*

Continued long pause while U ■■■ *mentally prepares and carries through the reverse process and then says:*

Ue ■■■ **Good morning Mr Mario.**

Conversation with Mr U ■■■, a Japanese engineer I taught one-to-one at the Pilgrims Executive English School in Canterbury, UK, was a process marked by long inner translation pauses on his part, during which I was able to observe clear signs of high energy work going on behind those eyes and behind that brow. By the end of each lesson the guy was exhausted.

One of the techniques I used to try and force U ■■■ to think directly in English was to ask him to take me for a "blind walk" round the narrow streets of Canterbury. I kept my eyes firmly shut and he guided me, holding my elbow. I asked him to tell me about all the little dangers he could foresee as we walked and to give me clear help like:

"we're going to cross the road"

"There's big puddle, we're going round it" etc....

This and other exercises put U ■■■ in situations where he had no time to do inner translation and so gradually he came to throw away the crutch of his mother tongue.

The U ■■■ case is a direct result of the Japanese Secondary School's sad and awful use of the **Grammar Translation Method**, where everything the kids learn in English is through translation from their mother tongue, and where English is never treated as an autonomous meaning system. It is only allowed to have meaning via mother tongue. This naturally produces tens of thousand U ■■■ San's.

No return to the dead horror of Grammar-Translation

In our new book, **Using the Mother Tongue, Making the most of the Learner's Language**, Sheelagh Deller and I are proposing a modification the excesses of the **Direct Method**, where classically a teacher will say *"Not a word of mother tongue in my English classroom"*

Sheelagh and I feel that this position is as foolish and extremist as that of those who taught poor Mr Ueda. By proposing judicious use of MT we wish to steer a course between the rock of Grammar Translation and the hard place of fierce Direct Method.

Judicious use of the mother tongue, especially with beginners, is a matter of common sense and those methods innovators who do not come from a language teaching background took reference to mother tongue, with beginners, for granted.

In Suggestopaedia, Georgy Lozanov, presents beginners with a longish dialogue in the target language and with the mother tongue version of the same text on a facing page.

In Charles Curran's Community Language Learning, the teacher acts as a roving interpreter, thus enabling beginners to have a slow conversation with each other in the target language.

Curran came from the world of Rogerian Counselling while Lozanov was deep in psychology and neither of them were concerned with any conflict between Grammar Translation and Direct Method. They were free from the "theological disputes" of language teaching.

Mother Tongue used to launch the student in L2

Time for an example of the use of mother tongue with beginners. You are now going to be beginners in Modern Greek and I am assuming your mother tongue is Portuguese (though I am aware that many other languages are spoken in homes across your continental country)

Maldita Guerra

*Terras do norte de Angola... Em pleno mato. Zona de isolamento e de **polemo**. Maldita **polemo**. **Polemo** de armas e de nervos... Acampamentos **stratitotikes**, rodeados de arame farpado, como se fossem campos de concentracao. Sao Salvador, a historica **polis** do Congo, ficava a mais de sesenta **chilometra** por picadas **yemata** de po e de perigos. Duas **fores** a semana se fazia este percurso para o correio e reabastecimento de viveres. Eram dias **I opies** cortavam a densa **monotonia** da vida no mato.*

(Angola : As Brumas do Mato, Manuel Leal Fernandes Livraria Telos Editora, Porto)

I suggest you read the text a couple of times, allowing your eyes to get used to the strange sight of the Greek words.

You will almost certainly be able to guess that the Greek words are guerra, militares, cidade, quilometros, cheias, vezes, que and the last one is the same in Greek and Portuguese!

Do you see how quickly and relatively smoothly you are beginning to slip into Greek from the power and clarity of an interesting, well-written mother tongue text? You see how I can present you, an adult learner, with stuff you may want to read while getting the text to serve my technical purpose: to help you glide into Greek.

This sandwich technique is at its most effective when a teacher of small children tells them a story 90% in Portuguese and 10% in English, then a couple of days later 80% in mother tongue and 20% in English. After, say, six or seven tellings, the kids

are able to understand everything in the target language.... which at first feels like a miracle, but is simply sensible teaching.

I hope you have enough to react to in these screens. The purpose of this short text is to set the ball rolling and to get you contributing your own thoughts to the chatroom

I am all ears, through my eyes!

(I work for Pilgrims, one of the better known teacher Training Centres in UK, and I edit our webzine for language teachers which you can find at www.hltmag.co.uk
Some of my books are:

Using the Mother Tongue with Sheelagh Deller, Etp-Delta, 2002

Humanising your Coursebook, Etp-Delta, 2002

Ways of Doing, with Davis and Garside, Cambridge 1999

Letters, with Burbidge, Levy and Gray, Oxford, 1995

More Grammar Games, with Davis, Cambridge, 1995

Grammar Games, Cambridge, 1985

Video, with Cooper and Lavery, Oxford, 1990

Dictation, with Davis, Cambridge, 1989

The Confidence Book, with Davis, Pilgrims-Longman, 1990

The O Book, with Morgan, Longman, 1988

Vocabulary, with Morgan, Oxford, 1986

Once Upon a time, with Morgan, Cambridge, 1984

In the year 2000, Clarity in Hongkong brought out my first CD Rom, **Mindgame**, with Fletcher de Tellez

I am a frequent contributor to **The Teacher Trainer**, our (paper) journal for trainers)