

Arriving to the Point of Translation

A Study of the Most Effective and Age-Appropriate Practices in English as a
Second Language

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Capstone for University Honors

Fall 2012

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Abstract

This work is broken down into three parts. It begins with a translation of a selection from Isabel Allende's novel *Mi País Inventado*, followed by an analysis of the text and the translation process. The study that follows sought to find out what role translation had in the language acquisition process of English Language Learners; was the pedagogy more focused on explicit learning, such as direct word-for-word translation, or a more gradual, communicative process? In addition, the study examined the differences in children vs. adult pedagogy in the field of English as a Second Language (ESL) to see if age had any determining factor on the more effective way to teach ESL. Through a series of observational visits to ESL classrooms, personal experiences from in-service ESL teachers, and academic research, the study compiles the practices that are considered the most effective in modern English Language teaching, and how lessons and activities differ depending on the age range of the students. The following terms are defined as used by Douglas Brown in Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy: method: a generalized set of classroom specifications for accomplishing linguistic objectives; methodology: pedagogical practices in general; approach: theoretically well-informed positions and beliefs about the nature of language, the nature of language learning and the applicability of both pedagogical settings.

Mi País Inventado by Isabel Allende
Spanish to English Translation
Selection pages 13-14, 24-28

Translation	Original
If they had asked me not long ago where I am from, I would have replied without giving it much thought, saying nowhere, or Latin America, or maybe Chile at heart. Today, however, I say that I am American, not only because that's what my passport says, or because this word includes both North and South America, or because my husband, my kids, my grandkids, the majority of my friends, my books and my house are in northern California, but also because not long ago a terrorist attack destroyed the twin towers of the World Trade Center, and from that moment on some things have changed. One cannot remain neutral in a crisis. Through this tragedy I was confronted with my sense of identity; I realize that today I am one more in the colorful North American	Si me hubieran preguntado hace poco de dónde soy, habría replicado, sin pensarlo mucho, que de ninguna parte, o latinoamericana, o tal vez chilena de corazón. Hoy, sin embargo, digo que soy americana, no sólo porque así lo atestigua mi pasaporte, o porque esa palabra incluye a América de norte a sur, o porque mi marido, mi hijo, mis nietos, la mayoría de mis amigos, mis libros y mi casa están en el norte de California, sino también porque no hace mucho un atentado terrorista destruyó las torres gemelas del World Trade Center y desde ese instante algunas cosas han cambiado. No se puede permanecer neutral en una crisis. Esta tragedia me ha confrontado con mi sentido de identidad; me doy cuenta que hoy soy una más dentro de la variopinta población norteamericana,

population, just as much as before, I was Chilean. I no longer feel alienated in the United States. Upon seeing the collapse of the towers, I had the sense that I had lived this nightmare almost exactly before. By a chilling coincidence—historic karma—the hijacked planes crashed into their targets on Tuesday, September 11, exactly the same day of the week and month—and almost the same hour of the day—in which the coup d'état in Chile happened in 1973. The latter was a terrorist act orchestrated by the CIA against a democracy. The images of the burning buildings, the smoke, the screams and the panic, are similar in both scenarios. On this Tuesday long ago in 1973 my life fell apart, nothing would be as it was before, I lost my home. This fateful day in 2001 was also a decisive moment, nothing would be as it was before, and I gained a home.

tanto como antes fui chilena. Yo no me siento alienada en Estados Unidos. Al ver el colapso de las torres tuve la sensación de haber vivido esa pesadilla en forma casi idéntica. Por una escalofriante coincidencia—karma histórico—los aviones secuestrados en Estados Unidos se estrellaron contra sus objetivos un martes 11 de septiembre, exactamente el mismo día de la semana y del mes—y casi a la misma hora de la mañana—en que ocurrió el golpe militar de Chile, en 1973. Aquél fue un acto terrorista orquestado por la CIA contra una democracia. Las imágenes de los edificios ardiendo, del humo, las llamas y el pánico, son similares en ambos escenarios. Ese lejano martes de 1973 mi vida partió, nada volvió a ser como antes, perdí a mi país. El martes fatídico de 2001 fue también un momento decisivo, nada volverá a ser como antes y yo gané un país.

Chile possesses a small portion of the unknown arctic continent, a world of ice and solitude, of infinite white, where fables are begotten and men are forgotten; we have planted our flag on the South Pole. For a long time nobody saw any worth in Antarctica, but now that we know of all the rich mineral it hides, in addition to being a paradise of marine fauna, there is no country that doesn't have a close eye on it. One can visit it by cruise with relative comfort in the summer, but it's expensive and as of right now the only people who make the trip are rich tourists and poor, but determined, ecologists.

In 1888 we got possession of the mysterious Easter Island, "the bellybutton of the world," or Rapanui, as the natives call it in their language. It is lost in the immensity of the Pacific Ocean, 2500 miles from continental Chile, around 6 hours by plane from

Chile posee un trozo del ignoto continente antártico, un mundo de hielo y soledad, de infinita blancura, donde nacen las fabulas y perecen los hombres; en el polo sur hemos plantado nuestra bandera. Por mucho tiempo nadie le atribuyó valor a la Antártica, pero ahora sabemos cuántas riquezas minerales esconde, además de ser un paraíso de fauna marina, así es que no hay país que no le haya puesto el ojo encima. Un crucero permite visitarla con relativa comodidad en verano, pero cuesta caro y por el momento solo hacen el viaje los turistas ricos y los ecólogos pobres, pero determinados.

En 1888 nos adjudicamos la misteriosa Isla de Pascua, "el ombligo del mundo", o Rapanui, como se llama en el idioma pascuense. Está perdida en la inmensidad del océano Pacífico, a dos mil quinientas millas de distancia del Chile continental, más o menos a seis

Valparaíso or Tahiti. I'm not sure why it belongs to us. In those days it was enough for a ship captain to plant a flag to legally take possession of a piece of the world, even if it's inhabitants, in this case the placid Polynesian race, didn't assent. That's how the European nations did it; Chile couldn't stay behind. For the *pascuences*, as the natives are called, the contact with South America proved fatal. In the middle of the 19th century, the majority of the male population was taken to Peru to work as slaves in *guaneras*; sites that collected and cultivated the richness of marine bird droppings, while Chile shrugged at the misfortune of those forgotten citizens. The terrible treatment of these poor people arose an international protest in Europe, and after a long diplomatic struggle, the last 15 survivors were returned to their families. They had been infected with smallpox and soon the

horas en avión desde Valparaíso o Tahití. No estoy segura de por qué nos pertenece. En esos tiempos bastaba que un capitán de barco plantara una bandera para apoderarse legalmente de una tajada del planeta, aunque sus habitantes en este caso de apacible raza polinésica, no estuvieran de acuerdo. Así lo hacían las naciones europeas; Chile no podía quedarse atrás. Para los pascuenses el contacto con Sudamérica fue fatal. A mediados del siglo XIX la mayor parte de la población masculina fue llevada al Perú a trabajar como esclavos en las guaneras, olvidados ciudadanos. Fue tal el maltrato que recibió esa pobre gente, que en Europa se levantó una protesta internacional y, después de una larga lucha diplomática, los últimos quince sobrevivientes fueron devueltos a sus familias. Iban infectados de viruela y en poco tiempo la enfermedad exterminó al ochenta por

disease had exterminated 80% of the *pascuences* that remained on the island. The fate of those left was not much better. The sheep ate all the vegetation, turning the land into barren rubble of lava, and the dissidence of the authorities—in this case, the Chilean Marines-- plunged the natives into misery. Within the last two decades, tourism and the interest of the scientific community have saved Rapanui.

Spread throughout the island, there are monumental statues made of volcanic rock, some of which weigh more than 20 tons. These *moais* have intrigued experts for centuries. Building them on the slopes of the volcanoes and later dragging them over the uneven land, standing them up on barely accessible platforms and putting hats made of red rock on top was the work of titans. How did they do it? There are no traces of an advanced civilization that explain such

ciento de los pascuenses que quedaba en la isla. El destino de los demás no fue mucho mejor. Las ovejas se comieron las vegetación, convirtiendo el terreno en un pelado cascote de lava, y la desidia de las autoridades—en este caso, la marina chilena—sumió a los habitantes en la miseria. En las últimas dos décadas el turismo y el interés del mundo científico han rescatado a Rapanui.

Diseminados por la isla, hay monumentales estatuas de piedra volcánica, algunas de más de veinte toneladas de peso. Estos *moais* han intrigado a los expertos por siglos. Tallarlos en las laderas de los volcanes y luego arrastrarlos por un terreno irregular, erguirlos en una plataforma a menudo inaccesible y colocarles encima un sombrero de piedra roja, fue tarea de titanes. ¿Cómo lo hicieron? No hay rastros de una civilización avanzada que expliquen semejante proeza. Dos razas

feats. Two different races inhabited the island, and according to the legend, one of them, the *arikis*, possessed superior mental powers, through which they could levitate the *moais* and make them float to their towering altars without any physical effort. Such a shame that this technique has been lost. In 1940, the Norwegian anthropologist Thor Heyerdahl made a raft, named *Kon Tiki*, with which he navigated from South America to Easter Island, to prove that there had been contact between the Incas and the *pascuences*.

I went to Easter Island in the summer of 1974, when there was only one flight there per week and barely anyone visited. In love with the place, I stayed three weeks more than I had planned, and therefore my trip coincided with the debut of the television and a visit from General Pinochet, who headed the military junta that had replaced the

diferentes poblaron la isla y, según la leyenda, una de ellas, los arikis, poseía poderes mentales superiores, mediante los cuales hacía levitar a los *moais* y los trasladaba flotando sin esfuerzo físico hasta sus empinados altares. Es una lástima que esa técnica se haya perdido. En 1940, el antropólogo noruego Thor Heyerdahl fabricó una balsa, llamada Kon Tiki, con la que navegó desde Sudamérica hasta Isla de Pascua, para probar que existió contacto entre los incas y los pascuences.

Fui a Isla de Pascua en el verano de 1974, cuando sólo había un vuelo semanal y el turismo casi no existía. Enamorada del lugar, me quedé tres semanas más de lo planeado y así coincidí con el estreno de la televisión y una visita del general Pinochet, quien encabezaba la junta militar que había reemplazado a la democracia unos meses antes. La televisión fue recibida

democracy a few months before. The television was received with more enthusiasm than the new dictator. The General's stay was the most picturesque, but this is not the time to go into details. It suffices to say that a mischievous cloud was conveniently placed over his head every time he tried to speak in public, soaking him like a dishcloth. He came with the intention of handing out property titles to the *pascuences*, but no one cared to get them, since everyone had always known what belonged to who and they feared, and rightly so, that this little paper from the government would only serve to complicate things.

Chile also possesses Juan Fernandez Island, where the Scottish sailor Alexander Selkirk was marooned in 1704, which inspired the novel *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe. Selkirk lived on the island for more than four years, without a trained parrot and

con más entusiasmo que el flamante dictador. La estadía del general fue de lo más pintoresca, pero no es ésta la oportunidad de entrar en detalles. Baste decir que una nube traviesa se colocaba estratégicamente encima de su cabeza cada vez que quiso hablar en público, empapándolo como un estropajo. Llevaba el propósito de entregar títulos de propiedad a los pascuences, pero nadie se interesó demasiado por recibirlos, ya que desde tiempos muy antiguos cada uno sabía qué pertenecía a quién y temían, con razón, que ese papelito del gobierno sólo sirviera para complicarles la existencia. Chile también posee la isla de Juan Fernández, donde en 1704 fue abandonado el marinero escocés Alexander Selkirk, quien inspiró la novela de Daniel Defoe *Robinson Crusoe*. Selkirk vivió en la isla más de cuatro años, sin un loro amaestrado y sin la compañía de un nativo llamado

without the company of a native named Friday, as in the book, until another captain rescued him and took him back to England, where, let's just say his future was not much better. The determined tourist, after a bumpy flight in a little plane, or an endless journey by boat, can visit the cave where the Scot survived eating herbs and fish.

The remoteness gives us Chileans the mentality of living on an island, and the magnificent beauty of the terrain makes our head big. We think of ourselves the center of the world—we think that Greenwich should be in Santiago—and we are the backbone of Latin America, always comparing ourselves with Europe. Everything relates back to us; the rest of the world only exists to drink our wine and produce soccer teams that we can beat.

I would advise a traveller to Chile

Viernes, como en el libro, hasta que lo rescató otro capitán, y lo llevó de vuelta a Inglaterra, donde su destino no fue mucho mejor que digamos. El turista empecinado, después de un agitado vuelo en avioneta o una interminable travesía en bote, puede visitar la cueva donde el escocés sobrevivió comiendo hierbas y pescado.

La lejanía nos da a los chilenos una mentalidad insular y la portentosa belleza de la tierra nos hace engreídos. Nos creemos el centro del mundo—consideramos que Greenwich debiera estar en Santiago—y damos la espalda a América Latina, siempre comparándonos con Europa. Somos autorreferentes, el resto del universo sólo existe para consumir nuestros vinos y producir equipos de fútbol a los cuales podemos ganar.

Al visitante le aconsejo no poner

not to doubt the marvels that they hear about the country, it's wine and it's women, because a foreigner isn't allowed to critique; for this there are 15 million natives that do it all the time. If Marco Polo had landed on our shores after 30 years of adventures through Asia, the first thing that they would have told him is that our empanadas are much tastier than all the food in China. (Ah! That's another characteristic of ours; our opinions are baseless, but we say them with such certainty that no one doubts them.) I confess that I also suffer from this chilling chauvinism. The first time that I visited San Francisco and my eyes beheld the smooth golden hills, the majesty of the forests and the green mirror of the bay, my only comment was that it looked like the Chilean coast. Afterwards, I realized that the sweetest fruit, the most delicate wine, and the finest fish were imported from Chile,

en duda las maravillas que oiga sobre el país, su vino y sus mujeres, porque al extranjero no se le permite criticar, para eso hay más de quince millones de nativos que lo hacen todo el tiempo. Si Marco Polo hubiera desembarcado en nuestras costas después de treinta años de aventuras por Asia, lo primero que le habrían dicho es que nuestras empanadas son mucho más sabrosas que toda la cocina del Celeste Imperio. (¡Ah! Ésta es otra característica nuestra: opinamos sin fundamento, pero en un tono de tal certeza, que nadie lo pone en duda.) Confieso que también padezco de ese escalofriante chovinismo. La primera vez que visité San Francisco y tuve ante mis ojos los suaves cerros dorados, la majestad de los bosques y el espejo verde de la bahía, mi único comentario fue que se parecía a la costa chilena. Después comprobé que la fruta más dulce, los vinos más delicados y el

naturally.

To truly see my country with heart, you have to read Pablo Neruda, the national poet who immortalized in his verse the magnificent landscape, the smells and sunrises, the persistent rain and the proud poverty, the stoicism and the hospitality. This is the country of my nostalgia, that which I call on in my loneliness, that which is the backdrop for so many of my stories, that which comes to me in my dreams. There are other faces of Chile, of course: materialistic and arrogant, a face of a tiger that lives counting its stripes and combing its beard; another depressed, crisscrossed by brutal scars of the past; one that smiles to tourists and bankers; another that waits resignedly for the next geological or political catastrophe. Chile has it all.

pescado más fino son importados de Chile, naturalmente.

Para ver a mi país con el corazón hay que leer a Pablo Neruda, el poeta nacional que inmortalizó en sus versos los soberbios paisajes, los aromas y amaneceres, la lluvia tenaz y la pobreza digna, el estoicismo y la hospitalidad. Ése es el país de mis nostalgias, el que invoco en mis soledades, el que aparece como telón de fondo en tantas de mis historias, el que se me aparece en sueños. Hay otras caras de Chile, por supuesto: una materialista y arrogante, cara de tigre, que vive contándose las rayas en peinándose los bigotes; otra deprimida, cruzada por las brutales cicatrices del pasado; una que se le presenta sonriente a turistas y banqueros; aquella que espera resignada el próximo cataclismo geológico o político. Chile da para todo.

Translation Analysis

I chose to translate part of *Mi País Inventado* because of the direct connection it has with Chile. Having studied abroad for six months in Chile, it is the Latin American culture with which I can identify most. A good translation requires the translator to be familiar with both the source culture and the target culture, and I felt that I had that familiarity. When Allende writes of the pride and arrogance that leads Chileans to think of themselves as the “center of the world,” I have seen that pride first hand. When she describes the opinions of Chileans “baseless,” yet impossible to refute, I have heard many of these groundless opinions that are believed to be nothing less than the truth to those who state them. Similarly, I chose the passage in which she describes her trip to Easter Island, because I too have had the opportunity to visit the island, hear about it’s history from the natives and see it’s beauty firsthand. Having these experiences and knowing the country my by own account assisted me greatly in connecting with the text.

Isabel Allende is an author whose past influences her writing as much as her literary style does. As the niece of former Chilean president Salvador Allende, who committed suicide during the military coup of 1973, she left the country for obvious political reasons and has since lived in the United States. In her book *Mi País Inventado*, she speaks of her experiences and memories of her life in Chile and how they have shaped who she is, despite not having lived there for almost 40 years. Her writing is descriptive, autobiographical, rich, and at times humorous. The genre of the book is obviously literary, which I would pair with an autobiographical classification. An autobiography gives the author some freedom, because while they

are writing about actual events, they can also write about their feelings and emotions attached to those events; something another person would not be able to authentically replicate. Allende is known for the beauty in her language, which is one thing I wanted to maintain in the translation, in addition to the meaning of the words. Because of her distinctive past, her writing, especially when it pertains to those events, is highly emotional and driven by those experiences. Without knowing her history, the reader could lose some of the strong emotions behind her passages.

The beginning section of the translation is about the very end of Allende's time in Chile; the military coup that forced her to leave the country. In this event, she says, "perdí a mi país"; literally, 'I lost my country.'" However, I chose to translate this as "I lost my home" for two reasons; due to the personal *a* she uses, it indicates that she has a personal and intimate connection with the country, but also because it was not just that she had to leave her country. She had to leave behind her friends and the life she had always known, the security and familiarity that she had in Chile. I believe that the word *home* encompasses this idea of leaving behind an entire life than *country* does. Similarly, when she writes that in a moment of national tragedy she finally identified herself as a North American, she says "gané un país," in which I also translated *país* as *home*. In this situation, it has taken her almost 30 years to find a place where she can see spending the rest of her life, where she has rebuilt a life for herself and her family. It is not just that she identifies with the concrete idea of citizenship or residency, but that this is finally her home.

When speaking of Antarctica, Allende highlights the solitude and ice that define it. She describes it as a place where "nacen las fabulas y perecen los

hombres.” At first I thought to translate it relatively literally, “fables are born and men perish,” but the English version did not carry the same grammatical rhythm that it had in the original. In Spanish, the phrase carries a structure of verb-article-subject, verb-article-subject. This fluidity in the original is a characteristic of the ease of Allende’s writing, and therefore I wanted to maintain this feature. I chose to translate it as “fables are begotten and men are forgotten” to keep the same repetitive grammar structure that the original had. Despite the fact that *forgotten* does not have the exact same meaning as *perish*, the same idea is conveyed, in addition to the original sound of the text being conveyed.

In terms of exoticism and domestication, I wanted the text to have a foreign aspect to it, since Allende is describing places that the majority of people have not been, but I also wanted the audience to be able to understand the places and things she described. Therefore, in most cases, I chose to utilize a qualifying exoticism, in which I kept the original word in Spanish, but added a descriptive phrase explaining what the word meant. An example of this is the “*guaneras*; sites that collected and cultivated the richness of the marine bird droppings.” I did not add qualifying statements to the *moai* because the text gives a description of them itself. With the case of Rapanui, I chose to leave it as is when Allende referred to it as such, but translate her use of *Isla de Pascua* as Easter Island, because this is a geographical location known to English speakers. Rapanui is a word in the indigenous language, so when she did not translate it, neither did I. This also applies to the reference to the character “Friday” in the book *Robinson Crusoe*. Allende refers to him as *Viernes*,

the Spanish word for Friday. However, since his name in the English version of the book is Friday, it would be illogical to leave it as the Spanish counterpart.

Overall, *Mi País Inventado* is inherently riddled with cultural references. The text in its original Spanish is directed towards Chileans who also identify with this culture or other Spanish-speakers who are at least familiar with the ideas. In English, the text reaches a different audience who may not be aware of how life is in South America, or the characteristics of the Chilean people. With mentions of Rapanui, colonialism, Pablo Neruda and the 1973 military coup, the text could be hard to completely comprehend without background information. For this reason, I tried to explain as much as I could without completely changing the text, but the historical background of Chile and of the author would most appropriately be given in an Introduction or Preface by the translator. In addition to the cultural identity, I wanted to maintain the fluidity and rhythm of Allende's original words. She is such an accomplished author and the selection of her words is so precise that I wanted to convey not only the meaning of the words, but also the sound of how they flow together.

Translation in the Process of English Language Learning

Introduction

Translation is the process by which people convert thoughts and texts from one language to another. Whether it is mental or written translation, the process is similar. Within the field of translation, there is always the decision to make between translating something more literally to preserve the vocabulary and grammatical structure of the original text, or whether to translate in a more free way, capturing the essence and underlying meaning of the text. In the field of Second Language Acquisition, specifically English as a Second Language (ESL), there is a similar debate. There are camps that believe that explicit grammar and vocabulary teaching is considered to be the best way to learn a second language, while others believe that a more rounded, communicative approach that focuses on fluency over accuracy is the more effective route. While there are teachers and professionals who believe that a more explicit, translation-based method is the best approach, the literature and general consensus in modern ESL teaching is that a communicative methodology is the most effective way to teach English. However, methods must be altered depending on the age of the students; after a certain point in development, usually around the age of puberty, learning styles change and therefore methodology must be altered depending on if students are children or adults. Through a series of classroom observations, as well as speaking with current ESL teachers, it is clear to see that an effective ESL class must be communicative in nature, but also malleable and based on the needs and abilities of the students, their skills, and age range.

History of ELT Methodology

The field of English Language Teaching (ELT) is a constantly changing arena, as new methods are conceived, old methods are thrown out, and more information is discovered about learning processes. ELT became considered as a field beginning in the late 1800's. At first, language was seen as an encompassment of many sets of rules, irregularities and conversions. In order to learn a new language, one had to memorize verb tenses, vocabulary words and individual characteristics about the language. One of the first widely accepted methods that strayed from this idea was the Direct Method, which attempted to simulate the natural way that children learn a language as they learn their mother tongue; constant interaction in that language, lots of oral stimulation, and little explicit teaching of grammar (Brown 21). It was this method that was the most popular at the turn of the century, widely used throughout private schools and language institutes. However, this method declined in popularity at the beginning of the 20th century, and explicit grammatical teaching was reintroduced for a brief period.

In the mid-1900's, the Audiolingual Method arose as the preferred method. This method was centered on listening to the target language and reproducing what the learners heard. Activities included simulated dialogues, mimicry, and the memorization and repetition of rote phrases (Brown 23). While proper pronunciation was enforced so that students could sound like native speakers, they were unable to create spontaneous language on their own; they were limited to the words and phrases they had already learned. In the 1950s and 60s, an academic focus on linguistics arose, and shaped the language methods in the decades to come.

Methods such as Community Language Learning, which treated a class not as individuals but as one group entity learning together, Suggestopedia, which taught language in a therapy-like setting, and The Silent Way, in which the teacher remained silent throughout class while the students had to do the speaking for him, were all methods that were inspired by this linguistically conscious era (Brown 29). While these methods are not sufficient to base an entire syllabus or curriculum on, they still exist as activities to incorporate into lessons in English Language classes today. In the 1980's, respected linguist Stephen Krashen focused on SLA devised the Natural Approach. Similar to the Direct Method, the Natural Approach attempted to mimic the way a child learns a first language. There is no pressure put on the learners to produce the language, but rather they are encouraged to wait until speech naturally emerges. The classroom setting should be as relaxed and stress-free as possible, and conversation topics are based on things that learners would find in daily life instead of academic topics that are not applicable in the real world.

This idea of real-life applicability is one of the main features that has remained constant and characterize ELT methods today. A communicative approach, as it has come to be known, focuses on the ability for the learner to communicate in the target language; this does not require grammatical perfection nor the exactly write vocabulary words, but rather the ability to negotiate and have one's needs met. This is one of the defining characteristics of the Task-Based Learning Technique (TBLT), which is generally regarded as the most effective modern teaching method in the 21st century. In TBLT classrooms, students use language to complete a series of tasks, whether it be finding out information, putting

together pieces of information to complete a story, ask for or follow directions, play out a simulated scenario, or solve some sort of mystery. The lesson is structured in three parts; pre-task, in which the teacher goes over key phrases or words to assist the students in completing the task, the task itself, and the post-task, in which the teacher goes over the information from the task, deepening the students knowledge about the subject.

In TBLT there is little room for translation; the focus is on a rounded knowledge of the language, being able to apply it to appropriate situations, and knowing how to navigate one's way around any issues that may arise. The goal is not the ability to know a direct correlation word-for-word, but rather to have a general knowledge of the language and be able to use it in real-life situations. While applied in slightly different ways, most professionals agree that this method is most effective in teaching both children and adults English. How the method is put into practice, however, varies depending on the age of the student.

Observational Findings

A series of classroom observations at different language institutes in the DC metro area led to general findings about how classes are being structured and what types of activities and methodologies modern teachers are using. In a class at an Arlington language institute, the teacher structured her class so that it was entirely student-centered, never speaking for more than five minutes at a time. In the observed class period, the students were working on conversation and interview skills, with an objective of being able to ask and answer appropriate questions during an interview. This is clearly a communicative task, with both a linguistic and

non-linguistic outcome. While this type of task could be used in a classroom setting with children, the setting would have to be changed to be one that would be more age-appropriate, as it is less likely that younger students would be faced with a job interview.

This specific institution uses a natural approach to teaching language; helping adults learn a second language by returning to how they originally learned their native tongue. Each class is based around a different theme, in which the students participate in small group and whole class activities to bridge an information gap and achieve the objective. The students of the observed class were at a fairly advanced level, but still volunteered to speak in class even if their answers were not perfect English. It is this focus on fluency rather than accuracy that is considered to be most valuable in modern ESL classes.

However, there are some teachers that prefer not to adopt modern techniques of teaching. There is often a belief that if a method of teaching has been proven to get results, there is no use in changing it to a more modern technique that has not withstood the test of time. These teachers tend to lead more teacher-centered classes, with a model based on Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP), which involves the teacher presenting a new topic or theme, the students engaging in activities or worksheets in which they use the theme, and then show that they can use it correctly. While this type of class does have a place in ELT, curriculum that are based on this model often end up focusing on accuracy, and the students are less likely to be able to apply what they have learned to real life situations. It is in these classrooms that students have a greater tendency to translate between languages

instead of gaining an implicit knowledge of the target second language. According to Cynthia Hatch, a current ESL teacher at a local Community College, if students are “translating back, it’s going to take a moment to get to the acquired language.”

Especially in higher-level classes, students should not be at the point where they still feel the need to do a mental translation in order to produce speech in the target language. In earlier, more basic levels it is at times necessary because the students have not yet acquired the implicit knowledge of the second language, but the goal of the teacher should be to eliminate situations in which translation is necessary as much as possible.

One of the main differences noted during observational visits and speaking with in-service ESL teachers is how to design the class based on what the students want from it. In a class in which the students are adults, they have often just moved to the United States, or are in the country for a specific purpose such as completing a degree or working. For those who are at a more basic level, their main objective is to be able to complete simple tasks; ask where to find something, how to get somewhere, or hold a simple conversation. In these cases, their focus is on learning specific pre-planned phrases, which in turn they translate from their native language and memorize. They have an idea of simple sentence structure, but just need the vocabulary to fill in the blanks. For this reason, adult students often focus on questions such as “how do you say---?” instead of trying to understand the true workings of the language. Unless a certain visa program mandates it, most adult learners also choose by their own will to take English lessons. This distinction in motivation also accounts for how teachers should prepare their lessons. Younger

students, on the other hand, are often given ESL classes as part of their school day and therefore do not choose to take lessons. Children tend to have more exposure to English than adults do, so they have a greater need to understand the language as a whole, since they are immersed in it in many different situations and occasions.

Academic Findings

Many people treat the field of ESL as one general camp, making generalizations for all ELLs as a group. However, professionals and academics who research and practice in the field realize that great differences lie in the teaching methods that should be practiced with adults versus children, and even younger children versus older children. Because each group is in different stages of development, which affects cognitive and intellectual skills, it is necessary to understand how to cater lessons to each respective age group in order to ensure the most effective and comprehensive learning process.

Young children, before the age of puberty, are the most affective age group because they are still developmentally malleable. Children are generally considered to have a greater aptitude for learning languages, but this varies depending on the stage of the learning process. In the beginning stages of language learning, younger children often have difficulties due to the abstract nature of consciously learning a language (Gordon 167). Once they progress in the process, however, they do find greater facility in learning language than adults at this stage. Older children experience an opposite effect; more ease in the beginning stages, and more difficulties as the language gets more extensive (ibid). Academics believe this difference to be due to adults being much further removed from the time when they

learned their first language (L1), while a child's brain is still in a developmentally similar stage as when it acquired the L1. Therefore an adult is "not aided by their language instinct" (49) when learning a second language.

Due to their continuing intellectual development, it is important to use shorter, interactive activities so as to maintain the students' attention (Brown 102). Children also require more sensory input, such as physical movement, to help them retain material (103). In fact, one of the reasons it is assumed that children learn languages with greater ease is because "it is synchronized with physical movement in real play situations, whereas the adult learns language in nonplay situations" (Krashen 13). Activities that include the senses, such as associating vocabulary words with smell, or being able to build something and then learn about it, helping children in their language acquisition process.

Teenage learners differ from children learners in that they have passed the "critical point" in the language acquisition process. Studies have shown that students who learn a language before puberty have a much easier time, and have a much greater chance of developing a natural, native accent in the second language (L2) (Krashen 14). After this critical point, the "performance of grammaticality judgment tasks" of tested language learners "was erratic and inconsistent" (Gordon 50). In this way, they become more similar to adult learners than to children learners. However, teenagers are very susceptible to social pressures and therefore the teacher must conduct the classroom in a way in which to maintain the students' self-esteem, encourage risk taking without the risk of being ridiculed, and promoting a positive self-image (Brown 106).

For both children and teenage English language learners, however, it is both important and effective to teach English through content. Many of these students are the children of immigrants, and therefore are put in a school system as part of the education system, but they do not yet speak English. Therefore in order to accomplish both tasks, ESL teachers must incorporate English language lessons into content lessons, which also helps learners see the language in a real-life context, and give them an outlet for language production.

In a classroom with adult learners, it is more important to focus on intellectual factors over physical characteristics of the lessons. Adult language learners have a much different mindset than children learners do, and therefore it is crucial to give them a sense of autonomy in the classroom, and treat them with respect and as adults (Brown 105). A greater focus can be placed on linguistic elements of the language due to the adults abstract thinking abilities, which also changes the tone of the lessons. Adults are at risk for experiencing a phenomenon called “fossilization,” in which they get stuck at a proficiency plateau and are unable to grasp certain concepts or move forward in their progress (Gordon 51). There are some aspects of language, however, in which adults out-perform children. Adults tend to have a greater ability for vocabulary retention (Krashen 116), and perform better in tasks related to listening comprehension (ibid). Despite this, “there is an aspect of second language learning where children inevitably outdo adults” (Gordon 50). In spite of their differences, there are many aspects of language learning that remain constant no matter what the age group. With both children and adults, activities should be kept short so as to maintain the attention span of the students,

and the language used and learned should always be meaningful and authentic.

Language learning should have a communicative aim so that students not only learn the theory behind the language, but also how to use it in real life situations, and how to negotiate in a world that speaks the L2.

Conclusion

Although there are many beliefs on how to best teach English as a Second Language, modern studies show that a communicative approach that allows students to practice language as they would use it in the real world is the most effective. This approach involves a deep knowledge of the language and situational contexts, and not just the memorization of rote phrases. While a direct translation is effective in converting a text from one language to another by someone who is already fluent in both languages, mental translation should be kept to a minimum for those learning a second language. Through site visits, speaking with in-service ESL teachers and academic research, this study compiles not only the best overall practices, but also how to cater lessons to the age group of the students. Younger children who are still developmentally active must have a variety of stimulation in the classroom, while teenagers and adults who are past the critical point of language learning can partake in more abstract thinking and activities. However, no matter the age of the student, lessons should always have the same general purpose; to aid the student in achieving an outcome by way of using the language in an applicable, relevant situation that will help them meet whatever their language needs may be.

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