

Use of Czech in English lessons

Introduction

There have already been a lot of discussions if to use the mother tongue in English lessons or not. Fortunately, it has been agreed that, in some situations, it would not be only practical but even natural. Yet, some English teachers in the Czech Republic feel still slightly guilty about using Czech in their lessons.

Beyond any doubts, teachers' main task is set the English language to be the main language in their lessons. Successful teachers use English most of the time in their class, including beginners' classes.

On top of it, using English as the main classroom language can be a learning opportunity and a challenge for non-native teachers of English as well as for learners.

Factors influencing the usage of Czech in English lessons

There are a few factors that the proportions of the mother tongue and English depend on.

When the teacher starts teaching a new group, he or she needs to spend some time on helping the learners get used to his or her way of doing things. Thus, one of the factors is the stage of the lesson. Another one is the students' previous experience, i.e. to what extent the students have been used to operating the lesson in English. The level of learners' English is also crucial – apparently, the teacher cannot expect beginners providing the same amount of English as intermediate students. And, lastly, there are certain stages of the course when it is more advisable to use the mother tongue instead of English. They are described in detail in the following paragraphs.

Justifiable situations for using Czech in English lessons

Discussing difficult points of grammar should be mentioned as the first situation. That is what many teachers would agree on: it is not only time-saving, but quite often learners do not possess such professional expressions and terminology to be able to understand everything. Consequently, the mother tongue might be used for clarifying students' errors and confusions which frequently arise from dealing with grammar. Similarly, if students are confused with the meaning of some individual words, or if the teacher may not be able to explain some words in English, particularly those of an

abstract meaning, the use of Czech would be highly recommended there.

Other situations where the mother tongue facilitates the interaction between the teacher and the students are, e. g., explaining how to cope with the reading comprehension activities or consolidating the syllabus and the rules that should be kept in the class. The teacher might also “let off steam“ in the classroom, i. e. let students have a short discussion in Czech about something interesting that has happened in their lives, or if they want to say something quickly to their colleagues.

Finally, teachers cannot avoid using the mother tongue when coping with a very bad behaviour, provided phrases like “Don’t do that!“ or “Stop talking!“ are not of any help there. And the author of this essay would recommend not to insist on English in unusual and dangerous situations, e.g. in emergency cases or if a child wants to touch a socket with his wet hands.

Conclusion

It should be stressed again that the aim of an English teacher is to introduce as much English to his or her lessons as possible. In many situations, teachers should prefer using mimes, gestures, drawings, pointing at subjects or repetitions instead of switching into Czech. Working in pairs or groups, having a reason for a conversation and communication and avoiding correcting all learners’ mistakes also support using English in lessons.

Eventually, there are two important points to remember: firstly, teachers cannot prevent students from using their mother tongue as a language for comparison. They will always try to compare English and Czech and translate things from one language into the other. And, secondly, even the occasional bit of inappropriate Czech use does not mean the end of the world.

Sources:

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