

Teacher's behaviour, Use of Mother Tongue and Target Language

Based on Jeremy Harmer: How to teach English, Longman 2007

The teacher has a clear effect on the management of the class. Pupils and the atmosphere in the classroom is affected by the teacher's appearance, by the way s/he moves and stands, by the way s/he uses gestures and facial expressions. The success of the lesson may often depend on how the teacher responds to what happens in class, how empathetic and flexible s/he is. There are hardly any two teachers who are the same in their behaviour (not mentioning the appearance). We take our own physical characteristics and habits into the classroom. They cannot be much changed. Anyway, there are things that can be learnt and taught:

Proximity. This means how close the teacher is to his/her pupils. There are pupils who do not like the teacher standing or sitting very close to them. They do not feel comfortable. On the other hand if we are too far, the distance may be felt as coldness. The teacher should choose the right distance knowing his/her pupils and assessing the concrete situation in the lesson.

Appropriacy. It is the general way the teacher stands or sits, or even crouches down in the classroom. The teacher chooses the appropriate way of behaviour. Some teachers are even happy sitting on the floor among the pupils. There are classes where sitting on the edge of the desk would be more appropriate and during monitoring the teacher walks around the classroom listening to the pupils or watching what they are producing. The distance mentioned above should be respected. We always try to behave the way which is appropriate to the pupils we are teaching and the relationship we want to create with them.

Movement. Motionless teachers can bore pupils. On the other hand teachers walking all the time from side to side can make pupils nervous. Naturally we move. Where is our place? Sometimes we stand in front of the class, sometimes in the middle or on the side, sometimes among the pupils. It depends on the activity we are doing and on the aim of the action done. It also depends on our personal style, where we feel most comfortable for the management of the class. The best teachers move around the classroom to some reasonable extent.

Awareness. The teacher has to be aware of what the pupils are doing and how they are feeling. Awareness means assessing the learners' behaviour and results and responding appropriately. We should be as conscious as possible of what is going on in the students' heads and be flexible. We also should be self-aware and anticipate what our own behaviour and words can cause.

The voice

Our voice is one of the teacher's most important instruments. Therefore we should take care of our voice and use it in an appropriate way in the lessons. There are three things to think about when we talk about the voice in the classroom:

Audibility. Good quality voice is a gift. The voice that sounds sharp or too loud may irritate the pupils. Anyway, we do not have to shout to be audible in the classroom. Good voice projection is better than volume.

Variety. The same level of the sound as well as the same level of your voice may bore the pupils. The teacher should change the volume, the speed of the speech and the quality of the voice. It depends on the activity in the lesson and the type of the lesson itself. The teachers often shout when they want the pupils to be quiet forgetting that there are other possibilities to calm pupils down (clapping hands, ringing your keys, using an agreed watchword or even whispering instead of shouting). The *occasional* shouted interjection can sometimes be beneficial, too.

Conservation. It has been mentioned at the beginning that we should take care of our voice. We should conserve our vocal energy. Therefore we should avoid shouting wherever possible, vary our voice during the lesson, breathe properly and be relaxed.

Talking to pupils

The teacher needs a good rapport with pupils. We want the pupils to understand well. Therefore we adapt the language to the circumstances. We have to speak at a level, which is appropriate. The language used with pupils is mostly simplified. We do not use so many complex sentences and we choose words we suppose they understand or may guess from the context. This is what the teachers do subconsciously thanks to empathy. They are aware of three basic things:

The kind of language that the pupils are likely to understand,
What the teacher wishes to say to the pupils and how the thing can be said in the best way,
The manner they will speak (intonation, speed, tone of voice ...).
When talking to pupils we should not forget our body language, gestures, and facial expressions. The teachers often quite exaggerate, which is OK. Especially younger learners need things or words to be mimed and demonstrated with gestures.

Giving instructions

The instructions given to pupils must be as simple as possible and logical. If more information is given the right sequence should be used. After the information is given the teacher checks whether the pupils understand. S/he can ask one pupil to explain the activity after the teacher. S/he can ask someone to show the rest of the class how the exercise works. S/he can ask someone to translate the instruction. The best explanation or instruction is based on demonstration.

Talking in the lesson

The amount of talking can be divided into two parts: Teacher talking time (TTT) and Student talking time (STT). The more the teacher talks the less chance there is for pupils to practise the language. They need the practice not the teacher. The best lessons are ones where STT is maximized. The teacher just summarizes and uses his/her common sense and experience to balance the TTT and STT. The teacher can engage the pupils with his/her stories and make the lesson more amusing. This helps the learners to acquire the language by listening. Especially learners beginning to study the language tend to translate everything what the teacher says into their **mother tongue** (L1 – language one). It is a natural process of learning a foreign language. On the other hand there should be as much English as possible in the lesson. There should also be an English environment and atmosphere. Mother tongue is usually used when:

Complicated instructions need translation,
Complicated explanation needs good understanding,
We talk to learners individually to help them or encourage them,
We talk about grammar and comparison of both languages is a benefit (this is not a step backwards to a traditional Grammar-translation method).

English should be dominant in an English lesson because it is English the learners are learning, not their mother tongue.