

Functional use of languages, contexts and cultural aspects as a motivational strategy in Spanish as a second language

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Abstract

In this article we present the findings from a qualitative research, based on the case study format and exploratory methodology. The data were collected using participant observation, anecdotal registration record. The description of the case was complemented with the use of instruments such as questionnaires and interviews. The field work was carried out at the Japanese College of Asunción. The article describes the daily life of the classroom of Spanish as a second language and foreign language in the Japanese School of Asunción- Paraguay. Some commonly used techniques with Japanese students are referred to. And the result of the observation of the unconscious processes of use of the languages in contact, within the class, is presented. Through these observations, we were able to identify elements as code switching on languages in contact and the processes of functional use of languages. The importance of teacher preparation as a facilitator and process generator, the importance of motivation and the use of recreational and cultural activities as a means to promote the interest and willingness to learn in the student was confirmed.

Key words: Functional use of languages, code switching, Spanish as a second language, school settings, Japanese school of Paraguay

1. Preliminary words

This article presents the findings on Roque (Roque, 2012) research about teaching Spanish as a second language in school settings. The research topic is related to methodological issues such as the specific characteristics of the school context in which a second language is taught, specifically the teaching–learning process in Spanish as a second language in the Japanese school of Asunción.

2. Literature review

The theoretical base of the research is found in

three disciplines: Philology of the Spanish language, Pedagogy, and Psychology of learning. Spanish Philology, Roque refers to methods, contents and exercises using the language. Pedagogy, refers to actions to teach, evaluate and interact with student in the classrooms. Psychology of learning refers to the mental processes that occur in the brain when learning a second language. The researcher refers that the union of these three disciplines provides the basis for teaching Spanish in school settings.

Roque defends teaching Spanish as a second language in school settings and emphasizes the processes that occur with students on the learning

process and bilingual education. (Roque, 2012)

In reviewing the literature, Stephen Krashen from the University of Southern California, defends that bilingual education is simply the most effective method for fostering the acquisition of English for speakers of different languages (Krashen, 1997). The same is true for second language acquisition in other languages.

Krashen assert that the quality, not the quantity of the second language exposure is the primary factor in language acquisition (Krashen, 1997).

In other hand, Cook, V. (2001, 2006, 2010) and other applied linguists recognizes that the following propositions have strong empirical support, which includes as follows:

- a) Native language instruction does not retard the acquisition of a second language.
- b) Well develop skills in the native language are associated with high levels of academic achievement.
- c) The ultimate goal of any approach is for students to become proficient in the second or foreign language they want to learn.

3. Purpose of the study

The Roque research (Roque, 2012) was focused to describe the pedagogical methods and cultural aspects used, and to find the contexts and functionality of two languages in contact in the case observed “Spanish as a second language at the Asunción Japanese School”.

The study was aimed at identifying the variation in the language use of two contact languages when the Japanese students are migrants in a Spanish speaking context, and how code switching and functional use of languages can enhance the classroom experience.

4. Method

The research realized by Roque (Roque, 2012) was a case study in a Japanese school in Paraguay using a mixed methodology with questionnaires, observations of the class, and interviews.

Through a case study approach, Roque offers a detailed investigation of the individuals in the specific context of this study, an approach considered preferable to theoretical generalizations applied to a specific situation (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007)

The mixed method design provided a common framework for two different sections: quantitative data analysis of survey questionnaire, followed with a qualitative data analysis of data from interviews with the Spanish teacher and students, and anecdotic register from Spanish class.

The rationale for the methodology was that the survey results would provide a part of the general picture of the research purpose and interviews with anecdotic register would provide more specific data leading to deeper interpretation.

Within classroom settings, the emphasis of the anecdotic register was to identify main characteristic of the educational practice in Spanish as a second language, find innovative practices in the use of cultural aspects and games and describe the functional use of languages in class.

5. Two groups of findings

The effect of studying a second language abroad has received much interest in this field of second language acquisition. Some researchers (Yashima & Zenuk-Nishide, 2008) suggest that studying a Second language abroad brings about positive linguistic outcomes with students being more willing to communicative in a second language upon re-

turning to their home country.

Thus in the Roque's research found that the students improve their speaking skills gradually increased, also Roque put the focus also on motivation from a different perspective: the willingness to communicate in Spanish as a second language, and whether studying Spanish as a second language in a Spanish speaking country, even for a short time, increases the student's desires to speak in Spanish.

5. 1 Teaching methods in Spanish class

Roque (Roque,2012) identifies methods in Spanish class: cognitive method, structural and communicative. The researcher found a consistent pattern related to the cognitive method for the inclusion of recreational activities in the classroom. Metered handling of linguistic forms needed to be well performed in a fun and communicative manner in order to increase the student's learning and motivation.

The research also found there was no preference for a specific recreational activity type indicated. The Spanish teacher believed that recreational activity by itself did not give results. Roque (Roque, 2012) found that the teacher instruction is definitively a key for preparing and directing the activities toward success. Also, found evidence about the importance of having experiences in real contexts to improve performance with the language and communicative productions.

About the use of games and other cultural contents in Spanish classes, Roque (Roque, 2012) found almost all the programed activities was applied with specific learning objectives in the classroom. And games were considered important experiences for learning Spanish as a second language. The researcher also found that students enjoy games, knowing that all activities were directed to learning objectives under conditions laid down by the

teacher.

Many students reported having engaged in a variety of communicative activities not typically associated with traditional instruction, but directly connected with use of games and cultural aspects related to the second language. Roque (Roque, 2012) refers the positive experiences of student success with increase motivation and participation. On the other hand, lack of success can generate disinterest and rejection of future opportunities.

Among the factors that favor the application of games and cultural activities, Roque (Roque, 2012) found as positive the teacher experience and the positive perception of use of games and cultural contents in Spanish class as a second language. And the obstacles encountered were the short duration of class and lack of time preparation for the games and cultural activities for Spanish class.

5. 2 Functional languages use in Spanish class

The research found functionally differentiated language use: The use of the Spanish language in class was identified by a standard set by the teacher, and in other hand, the Japanese language (mother tongue) was used in spontaneous communicative situations characterized by solidarity between pairs.

Depending upon the language immersion condition of students they may experience both success and linguistic conflict every day.

Cultural activities in Spanish class as a second language allows students to increase the success of their communicative interactions in class and also outside the class.

Because students use Spanish language also in extracurricular activities, outside the school in real contexts, students also increase the need to contrast the hypotheses of interlanguage formulated in that situations and found in class a good opportu-

nity to find responses. On this context, Spanish class becomes the space where the child contrasts his/her linguistic hypotheses.

Finally, in this environment the student uses the language in context according to the communicative act. The teacher functions as a model and corrects the student so that better understanding and communicative competence is achieved.

6. Conclusions

However, the researcher refers to this study as only a preliminary research conducted with a study case methodology, we consider that the results could be a starting point for new researches in school settings in Japan, and even other academic environments such as high schools or university settings. This study should be replicated with a larger sample to generalize the findings.

The main findings of Roque research (Roque, 2012) were the description of how Spanish as a second language class were conducted in school settings. The methods most used were identified and finally the functional use of languages in Spanish class was clarified.

The research reconfirms the effectiveness of teaching cultural aspects and real contexts as a motivational strategy, and the functional use of language to increase student's interest while teaching Spanish as a second language.

The synthesis of findings from the research indicates that the functional use of language in Spanish as a Second language for Japanese speakers can have a positive impact on motivation and improve the communicative skills of students.

Finally, we consider the conclusions of Roque research (Roque, 2012) also suggest new possibilities for further research in different linguistic contexts, educational contexts and levels.

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