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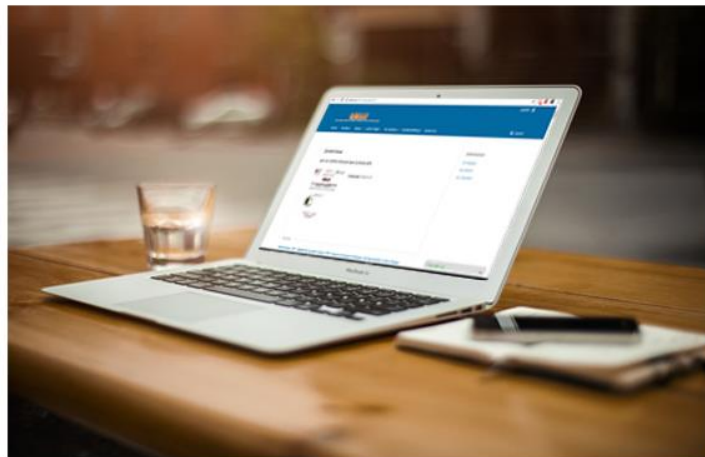


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Gap in Learning: Readdressing L1 as a means of Instruction in ESL classroom at
Tertiary Level

Abstract

Many language professionals and theorist of second language acquisition have believed and propped up that the use of first language or mother tongue L1 has an indispensable role and facilitates the learning process of second or foreign language L2. Though, there is a common maxim that second/foreign language should be taught only in that language which is also considered as an ideal approach to teaching the language, on the other hand, there is an endless debate over the usage of L1 in the L2 class for centuries in the field of English Language Teaching. However, we cannot dissociate ourselves from the limited English proficient students or English language learners (ELLs) who are in the beginning stage of learning the second language in this case, is English only always retained? Even if the student cannot understand the concept or difficult meaning or phrases and vocabulary etc. Hence, this paper will attempt to examine the 'judicious' usage of L1 in the L2 class for giving instruction and checking out the comprehension of the student and translation activities that the teacher can give in the ESL/EFL class. It concludes that there is always a necessity of L1 in the L2 class at the tertiary level and to what extent L1 can be used in the ESL class and their limitations with the support of theories and literature.

Keywords: English as a Second Language (ESL); English Language Learner's (ELLs); English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Bilingual

“If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head,
If you talk to him in his own language that goes to his heart.”

-Nelson Mandela

Why should instruction be only in English in the ESL/EFL classroom? Why cannot the teacher should use L1 in the L2 class? In fact, the crucial role of L1 in the L2 class is lowering the *affective filters* that are faced by Limited English Proficient student (LEP) or English Language Learners (ELLs) in the beginning level accompanied with lack of exposure to the language. However, there is a general view which influences some ESL teachers that L2 class should be a monolingual manner when it comes to language teaching considering first language or mother tongue L1 as a hindrance to learning a second language. Recently, there is a surge for using L1 in the L2 class or the inclusion of L1 in the ESL class because L1 serves as a ‘supporting and facilitating role in the classroom’ (Tang, 2002).

There is an article in “The Hindu” about ‘Language barrier puts students from Tamil medium in a fix’ wherein we could find Engineering and medical colleges do not help students those who comes from Tamil medium background, cope with the subjects that are mostly taught in English language as a result they suffer to clear their exams, moreover comprehending the subject becomes a question here, accordance with the data almost fifty percent of the class be made of students from Tamil medium schools. Startlingly, most students face difficulties in not only understanding the English language but other subjects too; mathematics, physics etc in fact, those who speak English fail in mathematics due to lack of comprehending the concepts and theorems, one of the second-year students from Anna University, Guidy has given voice in the article, “I often don't even understand the question in an examination. I have memorized all these programs but I will forget them in a week,” says the computer engineering student. His notebook is filled with questions which have cross marks next to them — ‘write a program that creates a palindrome’ or ‘create a graphic with a pendulum that strikes after an hour's interval and says, ‘Hello!’ He plans to ask friends for their meaning. “I topped in English in my

school. But here, there are no 'paper patterns' or important questions. Teachers help you if you approach them, but I can't do that every day.”¹

Teaching English is quite challenging for ESL teachers when it comes to Limited English proficient students due to their lack of exposure to language and familiarization of language. The majority of the students who are come from non-English medium or limited English proficient student when joining Engineering course face difficulties in understanding the subject that would result in their poor academic performance. Generally, there is a statement that ESL students should use English to the full in order to obtain the language whereas, in reality, it doesn't work at all times. According to Stephen Krashen, Natural Approach to language acquisition theory advocated that students learn the second language considerably same way as they learn their first language. Therefore usage of L1 in the ESL classroom cannot be a hindrance but can act as a tool to achieve the second language learning. When the first language is used in the ESL class, experts, researchers and learners incessantly report positive stroke only. Rivera (1990) sketches various purpose of inclusion of L1 instruction in the L2 class with initial literacy and Bilingual instruction (two languages are used in one class) this might be useful of limited or low English proficient students at the beginning level, secondly benefit of L1 in the L2 class is that it reduces the affective barriers of the students to learn the language and it endorses the learning progress as well in or to ESL.

Moreover, L1 reduces anxiety and enriches the affective environs for learning. The question may arise, why ESL teacher should use L1 in the class; students from non-English medium and limited English proficient students are the ones who suffer a lot in the ESL class when it comes to comprehension and utterance in L2. Furthermore, comprehension is prominence role, without it learner cannot reproduce anything, knowledge without comprehension is futile beyond this English is not their native language to comprehend and produce well utterance in that language, therefore, recently many research has proved that the judicious use of L1 by teacher and students upsurges comprehension and learning of second language (Cook, 2001; Tang, 2002; Wells, 1999).

Use of L1 in the ESL Class

¹ <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/language-barrier-puts-students-from-tamil-medium-in-a-fix/article3338014.ece>

The teacher can use L1 in the L2 class with the limited or judicious use of L1 at the beginning and intermediate class to:

- Giving instruction
- Checking comprehension
- Explaining difficult words, phrases and meanings
- Explain complex ideas and concept
- Limited English proficient students have a problem with reading comprehension.

Many researchers and teachers find that use of L1 provides profusely improves L2 practice because of comprehension is achieved quickly. Thus, this has to be handling with similarities and dissimilarities of languages which are interlinked in the students' mind. Appropriate use of L1 by the teacher does not ruin the environment of teaching English but it just facilitates the teaching English in a better way.

In bilingual method teacher just uses the first language or the mother tongue (L1) keeping in mind the end goal to clarify the implications of the difficult word or the substance and the students make utilization of it. This strategy is established in the standard of similarity and contrast between the two languages which might be of structure, circumstance, vocabulary and so on when the teacher and the student comprehends the distinction then the learning of the objective language is ease recognizably. At the point when the youngster is taking in his first language, he end up being comfortable with the circumstances and structures the idea as a top priority which makes the tyke obtains the language effortlessly and suitably, comparative circumstances or situations are made while taking in the foreign or second language keeping in mind the end goal to influence the student to learn effectively by giving mother tongue language proportionate without duplicating the circumstance. Numerous scholars trust that the L1 helps both instructing and learning in proper way. For example, as Balosa (2006) states that "sensible utilization of the L1 can construct an air of certainty and companionship in the classroom". A similar way Cook (2002) and Temple (2005) states that L1 spares showing time and makes input substantially less demanding to get it. Auerbach (1993) put accentuation on that "beginning with the L1 gives a conviction that all is good and approves the students' lived involvement, enabling them to convey what needs be. The student is then

ready to test and go out on a limb with English" (p. 29). There have been numerous hypothetical contentions both for and against the utilization of L1 in the L2 classroom; however, explores are less than completed to gauge the correct impacts of L1 use in the classroom. Estimating and evaluating is something troublesome and confused one. Subsequently, it is conceivable from a socio-proficient point of view that L1 in the EFL/ESL classroom empowers the two educators and students to accomplish the scholarly destinations. Furthermore, as Malakoff and Hakutta (1991) utilization of L1 in the L2 class can develop understudies' energy for interpretation most likely prompting professions in interpretation. Accordingly this paper tries to take a gander at things from students/understudies' perspective.

Atkinson (1987) suggests the following "judicious" use of L1 in the classroom of L2 can be eliciting language, checking comprehension, giving instruction and talking about language, comparing the L1 and L2, translating, using compensatory strategies and saving time.

Nevertheless, evidence from both research and practice suggest that L1 may be an effective resource than interference. L1 use in a written task helps to clarify the content, understand and build the meaning and vocabulary learning, would be meaningful classroom engagement or learning. It enables the learner to clarify their content and communication with the teachers and peers through reevaluating themselves, as Cook mentioned in her article 'Using the first language in the classroom' (2001), 'L1 provides scaffolding for the students to help each other'.

It concludes that L1 allows learners to think radically and develops their critical thinking as well. Furthermore, the careful use of L1 in the class can help students to develop their Metacognitive skills; it can be used as a facilitator than interference to overcome the conventions made by the first language (Yamamoto-Wilson, 1997). Norman (2008) suggests that 'Students are often unresponsive, inattentive, and unwilling to speak in class.' Though, he detects that the occasional use of the L1 in class with the same students makes an opposite thing. Therefore, the use of L1 in the L2 class by both teachers and students can be beneficial in the process of language learning and necessary for the comprehension of the second language by the English

Language Learners. When a suitable sense of balance is achieved, the use of L1 will improve L2 classroom.

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