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Re-evaluating the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom: students vs. teachers

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Abstract: The present paper examines the effects of the monolingual and the bilingual approach in the second language (L2) classroom. The outcomes of two Likert type questionnaires and classroom observations have been employed to explore teachers' and learners' opinions and actions in order to evaluate how the use of the native language (L1) and the L2 is used by both learners and practitioners. Data analysis shows that there is a place for both languages and, when used in a balanced manner, they can comprise a positive cognitive effect due to the fact that the language learner actively draws in interlanguage development. The present study offers clear direction for further research as there is an evident lack of knowledge of principles of L1 use in similar EFL contexts.

Keywords: L1/L2 use, advanced language learners, questionnaires, classroom observations

1 Introduction

The use of the L1 in the second language classroom has not only attracted a great deal of controversy over the years, but has become an important issue in the field of applied linguistics (Cook 2001; Turnbull 2001; Liu 2008; Varshney & Rolin-Ianziti, 2013; Tsagari & Giannikas, in press). The reason for this controversy is due to the belief that L1 use may potentially have both positive and negative consequences on language learning. It may serve social and cognitive functions, and through collaborative dialogue create the opportunity for language acquisition to take place (Swain & Lapkin 2000; Carless, 2007). However, it seems as if the puzzle is not yet complete as research studies to date have offered a fragmented picture of L1 and L2 use in the language classroom (McMillan & Rivers, 2011; Copland & Neocleous, 2011; Yavuz, 2012). Also, even though there seems to be a unanimous consent about the need to investigate the

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matter further, there is not enough research-based evidence focusing on both the teachers' and learners' perspective. Data collected from both parties could provide the foundations for a rounded and complete theory of the use of L1 and L2 that could inform practice in the field of language pedagogy.

The present paper addresses this gap in the literature. The study undertaken involves both teachers and learners and investigates the use of L1 and L2 in the language classroom. More specifically, the research focuses on:

- teachers' and learners' perspectives and needs of L1 and L2 use;
- how the use of L1 and L2 is handled by learners and their teachers in the L2 classroom and
- the effects of L1 use in language learning

The significance of the study is that it gives a voice to both learners and practitioners, and investigates the reality of the use of the L1 and L2 in the foreign language classroom via participants' interviews and classroom observations.

2 Review of the literature

2.1 International perspective

The issue of whether the L1 should or should not be used in foreign language learning and teaching has dominated classrooms for decades (He, 2012). There are a number of results from empirical investigations (see Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; Brook & Donato, 1994; Ghorbani, 2011) suggesting that in the L2 learning process, the L1 shared among learners can function as a psychological tool. From a sociocultural perspective, Vygotsky (1978) argued that the use of the L1 allows learners to work within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Recent studies support Vygotsky's findings. Morahan (2010), for instance, found that when using the L1 sporadically in pair/group work, it assists learners to cognitively process the activity-at-hand at a higher level (also see Levine, 2014; Wells, 1999).

Additional benefits are associated with the use of the L1 in the L2 classroom, also known as the Bilingual Approach. For instance, McMillan & Rivers (2011) stress that this approach provides learners with additional cognitive support that allows learners to analyze the L2 and produce higher quality work than they would if they were solely restricted to the L2. Researchers who advocate this approach (Macaro, 2001; Widdowson, 2003; Littlewood & Yu, 2011) argue that

the L1 is a powerful source that can be used in the L2 classroom to enhance learning for as long as teachers become aware that L1 is to be used in a principled manner; as stressed by Lagasabaster ‘We need to make headway towards the formulation of some guiding principles for L1 use’ (2013: 16).

Other benefits of L1 use relate to the importance of teacher autonomy. Crump (2013:68) argues that language teachers should be in a position to ‘judge the local environment of the classroom and decide how much L1 they think would be beneficial to the learner’. Additionally, the case of excluding the L1 from a monolingual context is considered by researchers as impractical and likely to deprive learners of an important tool that will facilitate language learning (Macaro, 2001; Karathanos, 2009; Storch & Aldosari, 2010). According to Mukkattash (2003), using the learners’ L1 in second language teaching can systemize comprehension of L2 structures, which would lead to more meaningful learning. Overall, researchers suggest that teachers must develop bilingual learners, whose L1 knowledge complements their increasing L2 knowledge (Cook, 2005; Edstrom, 2006).

On the other hand, proponents of the L2 monolingual approach support the notion that foreign language learning should be based on the way children acquire their native language. Krashen’s (1982) theories proposed that L2 language learning takes place subconsciously through L2 exposure to comprehensible input, with the learner focusing on meaning and not form. In more recent research, the Monolingual Approach, which suggests that the sole use of L2 increases the learning of the foreign language (Bhootah, Azman & Ismail, 2014), rejects the Bilingual Approach on the grounds that it hinders learning (Littlewood & Yu, 2011) and deprives learners from valuable input (Ellis, 1984). Similarly, Ellis (2005: 217) supports that ‘the more exposure they [learners] receive, the more and the faster they will learn’; for this reason, there should be no L1 intrusion in the Target Language (TL) classroom setting. This is believed to prompt language learners to think in the L2 exclusively when in the language classroom (Sharma, 2006). Turnbull (2001) stressed that his learners appreciated the maximum use of the L2 by the end of the academic year in that it made them realize that the L2 could be used for real-life communicative purposes.

Chaudron (1985) also stresses that in a typical language classroom, the fullest competence in the L2 is accomplished by means of the teacher providing a rich L2 environment, e.g. drills, instructions, management, disciplinary and other operations are executed in L2. Peng and Zhang (2009) second this notion after exploring the use of TL in China where the authors found that ‘teachers’ use of the TL becomes an important source for learners to obtain input in the TL’ (Peng & Zhang, 2009: 212) since TL (English) is not used outside the language classroom.

Many researchers have argued that the learners' mother tongue fosters a positive and effective learning environment (Schweers, 1999; Tang, 2002; Carson and Kashihara, 2012). The use of L1 is argued to serve a number of purposes, especially at the early levels in order to ensure that learners fully understand what is being done in the classroom (Atkinson, 1987). Even though the topic has been discussed in the literature, there still remain gaps as the results are inconclusive (Sali, 2014).

3 Context of study

According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) of the Republic of Cyprus, English is a compulsory school subject and it is taught twice a week (45 min per lesson) until the end of secondary school. Given the significance of succeeding in English language learning, parents have been led to try additional sources of the language (Giannikas, 2011). Therefore, apart from learners' exposure to English at state schools, learners also receive English language education from private language institutions known locally as 'frontistiria' (Lamprianou & Afantiti Lamprianou, 2013). These belong to the sector of education, known internationally as 'shadow education' (Bray, 2009), defined as private supplementary education which has as the ultimate and core intention to enhance academic achievement outside the public sector (Mori & Baker, 2010).

Despite the number of frontistiria in the Republic of Cyprus (Xanthou & Pavlou, 2010), little is known about the way languages are taught and even less about the TL exclusivity in the EFL classrooms (Tsagari & Georgiou, 2016; Tsagari & Giannikas, 2017).

From the available research on the issue in the Republic of Cyprus, it has been claimed that English language learning in frontistiria is mainly teacher-centred, as the educators tend to maintain full control of communication and make use of the learners' mother tongue quite frequently (Tsagari, 2009; 2012; 2014). Furthermore, we also know that English language teachers in primary state school classrooms code-switch between L1 and L2, depending on the learners' age groups, their proficiency level and skills (Vassiliou, 2010). Additional factors that influence teachers' choice of language are mentioned by Tsiplakou (2009). In her research, she highlights that primary teachers are not willing to use the TL exclusively as they were forced by the school's headmaster and parents to use the L1, fearing the possibility of isolating the learners from their native language. Equally, teachers in Copland and Neokleous' study (2011) admitted that they reverted

to L1 when the learners faced difficulties in comprehending and understanding complex tasks, though teachers confessed remorse when switching to L1. In their study in secondary state schools, Tzagari & Diakou (2015) found that most of the learners considered that their native language was beneficial in the classroom, e.g. gives them a sense of security and familiarity and helps them understand complicated tasks. However, the teachers' attitudes and perceptions were wide-ranging, based on the learners' competency level and their learning requirements. Neokleous (2016), based on data derived from eight classrooms in four private language schools in Cyprus, challenged the widely held assumption in monolingual EFL settings that learners prefer their teachers to rarely use their L1. On the contrary, the participants perceived that L1 usage in the EFL classroom does not impose a learning constraint while the majority of the teachers highlighted its benefits and admitted the impossibility of alienating it from the classroom.

Tzagari & Georgiou (2016) study focused on teachers' beliefs and practices with regard to the amount and functions for L1 use in EFL private classrooms. Results have shown that although teachers had a positive attitude towards the TL increase in the EFL private classrooms, they made use of the learners' L1 as an aiding 'recourse' (also in Copland & Neokleous, 2011) in order to balance out learners' needs and difficulties in learning. Use of L1 served several functions such as translating unknown vocabulary items, explaining complex grammatical structures, ensuring comprehension and instructing learners. Finally, Tzagari & Giannikas (2017) have also looked at teachers' use of L1 and its impact on the L2 in frontistiria attended by Young Learners (YLS) in the Republic of Cyprus. Their data showed that the L1 has a place in the current language learning context and serves various social and cognitive functions.

The current paper presents findings of the use of L1 and L2 in the Cypriot context, which will contribute to the existing literature. Advanced learners were chosen for this study to investigate whether the mother tongue is used when the learners are already at a high level in their learning of the L2. The study reveals in which cases the L1 was used and how this use was viewed and used by both teachers and learners.

4 Research design and analysis

The focus of this paper is on advanced learners, a level that has been neglected in studies conducted in the L1/L2 debate. The researchers have observed

instances of L1 use in the classroom and the effects it has on the L2 development of the language learner. To achieve the above, the authors have focused on the following research questions:

- How are the L1 and L2 handled and balanced by advanced learners and their teachers?
- What are the learners' perspectives of the teachers' L1 use during their lessons?
- What are the effects of L1 use in the advanced language classroom?

The study employed a mixed method approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) and focused on collecting, analyzing and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies (Stage & Manning, 2015). A mixed-methods design was selected for the current study with the intentions of soliciting a range of data to substantiate findings investigated and viewed from different angles (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007), while the information gathered can be cross-referenced (triangulation). This could lead to plausible assumptions in answering the current research questions (Mertens, 2014). Tuckman (1999), also confirms that the combination of quantitative data and qualitative data provide a more holistic picture by revealing trends and generalization as well as in-depth knowledge of participants' perspectives. The quantitative data were collected and analyzed in a comparative design to answer the primary research questions. The qualitative data were collected to support the quantitative data with the purpose of examining the L1 use in L2 contexts (Mertens, 2014).

4.1 Quantitative design: Questionnaires for teachers and learners

For the purpose of this research two semi-structured questionnaires were used. One questionnaire was distributed to the EFL teachers and the other to the learners. The questionnaires were Likert-type scale and informed by the relevant literature where questionnaires were used to examine learners' views regarding the use of L1 in the L2 classroom (Rolin-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002; Woodrow, 2005; Ahmad & Jusoff, 2009). Both learners' and teachers' questionnaires consisted of three parts. In part A, learners and teachers were asked personal information such as gender, age, nationality and years of learning or teaching English respectively. The second part asked respondents to state the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with a list of statements based on the use of L1 to teach/learn vocabulary, grammar, giving instructions, assessing and making

use of the L2. In Part C, the questionnaires ended in two open-ended questions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the use of L1. Teachers were also requested to answer a series of questions concerning the reasons and the extent to which they use L1.

In terms of analysis, descriptive statistics were calculated as well as an independent t-test to determine whether the stances of the teachers that use the L1 differ from those who follow the monolingual approach. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was also used in order to measure the strength of the relationship between the two variables as we sought to document the extent of similarities and dissimilarities between: 1) age and teaching experience and 2) the use of L1 in teaching grammar and the monolingual approach, as the issue of language use in grammar teaching has been a highly debated one.

The current case study (Nabei & Swain, 2002; Mori, 2004) was conducted in 13 private language institutions in Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus. Selection was random and based on availability of schools through personal networks. Participants involved 153 learners (66 boys—43,1% and 87 girls—56,9%) and 50 English teachers (41 females -82% and 9 males -18%). Learners were Greek-Cypriots and shared Greek as their native language with the teachers. The learners were all at an advanced level and between 13–18 years old. The teachers' age ranged from 26–57 years and their teaching experience from 3–32 years.

4.2 Qualitative design: Classroom observations

The inclusion of qualitative data added valuable insight to the study and placed more emphasis on participants' practices and perspectives (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). The qualitative portion in this study involved audio recordings of classroom observations. Classroom observations were conducted in order to support and explain the findings of the questionnaires. Classes were tape-recorded with the permission of the teachers involved in the study and an observation sheet was used to take notes. The learners observed were at C1 level (Council of Europe, 2001). The participating learners and teachers were observed for 6–8 lessons, which lasted 1.5 hours. All participants shared the same L1 (Greek). Other than information about the class (i.e. date, level, aim, etc), the observation sheet was divided into 4 sections collecting information about important aspects of the lessons observed as recommended in the literature (Tzagari & Diakou, 2015; Tzagari & Georgiou, 2016; Tzagari & Giannikas, 2017; Copland and Neokleous, 2011; Neokleous, 2016). Once the data was transcribed, coded thematic analysis was used. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) clarify that 'qualitative analysis begins with coding the data,

dividing the text into small units (phrases, sentences, and paragraphs), and assigning a label to each unit' (p. 131). Therefore, patterns or trends that emerged within responses were identified as well as the common phrases that reflected teachers' and learners' actual use of L1.

The following two sections present the outcomes of the study. Teachers and learners were anonymized and extracts have been translated from Greek to English.

5 Outcomes of the study

5.1 Teachers' and learners' questionnaires

The analysis of teachers' questionnaires, as displayed in Table 1, showed that on average EFL teachers had a positive stance toward the use of both the L1 ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.988$) and L2 in the classroom ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 1.139$). Learners also had a positive attitude toward the use of L1 when being taught grammar ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.154$) and vocabulary ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 0.643$). Table 1 also shows that EFL teachers find the use of the L1 necessary for successful preparation for language examinations ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.039$). Overall, EFL teachers seem to feel confident using both languages and switching from one to the other in an attempt to receive better results and develop learners' awareness of their learning.

Also, as teachers explained in the open-ended questions, the main advantages of using the L1 are that it assists weaker learners to better comprehend what is said in the classroom, and saves time in that it gives teachers the opportunity to offer their learners more input in L2. Among the disadvantages of using the L1 are that learners heavily rely on their L1. As a result, they apply less effort to use the L2, which delays communicative improvement. Table 1 also shows that learners have a positive attitude towards the use of both languages ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.014$ and $M = 2.92$, $SD = 1.195$ respectively). Like their teachers, learners believe that the use of L1 is helpful to them in the domain of grammar ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.163$) and vocabulary learning ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.585$). The learners' attitudes towards the use of L1 in assessment were also positive ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.139$). Learners' responses to the open-ended questions indicated that the main advantage of the use of L1 was that it helped them comprehend the lessons and vocabulary. The main disadvantage was that they rely mostly on their L1, a sensible argument also found in other studies (see Ellis, 1984; Neokleous, 2016; Tsagari & Diakou, 2015; Tsagari & Georgiou, 2016) and a concern that was shared by the teachers participating in this study.

Table 1: Teachers' and Learners' responses.

Part B. Use of L 1 and L2		Mean		SD		SE	
		Ts*	Ls	Ts	Ls	Ts	Ls
L1 use	1. The use of Greek is sometimes necessary	3.70	4.17	1.165	0.909	0.165	0.073
	2. It is natural for a native Greek-speaking teacher to use Greek in the classroom.	3.12	3.97	1.223	0.986	0.173	0.080
	4. I expect that native Greek-speaking English teachers should use Greek in class when needed.	3.96	4.10	0.925	0.944	0.131	0.076
	5. A teacher who uses only the foreign language in class is less approachable (more distant) than one who uses learners' L1 more frequently	3.92	3.52	0.695	1.153	0.098	0.093
	7. Learners feel more at ease when the teacher uses L1	3.52	3.78	0.931	1.077	0.132	0.087
	AVERAGE	3.64	3.91	0.988	1.014	0.140	0.082
L1 in Grammar	9. Learners like explanations in Greek about the grammar of the foreign language	3.42	3.59	1.108	1.161	0.157	0.094
	10. Learners find it easier to understand the grammar of the foreign language when teachers explain it in L1	3.22	3.84	1.200	1.165	0.170	0.094
	AVERAGE	3.32	3.72	1.154	1.163	0.134	0.094
L1 in Vocabulary	6. When the learners do not know a word in the foreign language, it is preferable to explain it in the foreign language	3.54	3.24	0.994	1.283	0.141	0.104
	11. Learners like it when the teacher uses Greek to translate vocabulary items	3.56	3.92	0.812	1.124	0.115	0.091
	17. When teachers translate vocabulary items into Greek, it helps students to learn better (understand the exact meaning of the words)	3.20	3.97	1.010	1.035	0.143	0.084

(continued)

Table 1: (continued)

Part B. Use of L 1 and L2		Mean		SD		SE	
		Ts*	Ls	Ts	Ls	Ts	Ls
	AVERAGE	3.43	3.71	0.643	0.585	0.091	0.047
L1 in	15. Learners use their L1 to help them study for their language exams	3.40	3.12	0.904	1.232	0.128	0.099
Assessment	20. Assessment details should also be given in Greek	2.64	3.24	1.174	1.045	0.166	0.084
	AVERAGE	3.02	3.18	1.039	1.139	0.147	0.092
L2 use	3. Teachers should only use the foreign language in the language classroom	3.32	2.56	1.019	1.191	0.144	0.096
	8. It is confusing when the teacher switches from one language to another during the lesson	3.00	2.71	1.143	1.249	0.162	0.101
	12. To learn another language well, learners should use the foreign language all the time in class	3.76	3.41	0.938	1.121	0.133	0.091
	13. Learners should not use L1 in the foreign language classroom	3.06	2.45	1.346	1.246	0.190	0.101
	14. Learners should only use the foreign language when working together on a task in the classroom	3.66	2.90	0.982	1.185	0.139	0.096
	16. When preparing for exams, learners should only use the foreign language	3.42	3.49	1.263	1.176	0.179	0.095
	18. Translation from a foreign language into L1 is not a good method to learn the foreign language	3.48	2.58	1.147	1.179	0.162	0.095
	19. Teachers should give instructions (about exercises, activities, homework etc.) only in the foreign language	4.00	2.97	1.107	1.141	0.157	0.092
	21. I prefer textbooks written only in the foreign language without Greek notes	3.32	3.18	1.019	1.264	0.144	0.102
	AVERAGE	3.45	2.92	1.139	1.195	0.157	0.097

*Teachers' statements (Teachers' N size = 50) **Learners' statements (Learners' N size = 153).

Table 2: The Independent t-test.

	Use of L1	N	Mean	SD	Mean Difference	T	Sig.
Use both languages	Yes	41	3.64	0.526	0.995	5.017	0.000
	No	9	2.64	0.598			
Grammar	Yes	41	3.56	0.831	1.339	4.551	0.000
	No	9	2.22	0.618			
Vocabulary	Yes	41	3.59	0.476	0.845	4.103	0.000
	No	9	2.74	0.862			
Use only target Language	Yes	41	3.37	0.510	-0.935	-5.044	0.000
	No	9	4.31	0.471			

To further investigate whether the opinions of the teachers who use L1 differed from the non-users an *independent sample t-test* (see Table 2) was applied. The results show that the teachers who use the L1 are more positive toward the bilingual approach and the use of the L1 in teaching grammar [$t(41)=4.551$, $p<0.000$] and vocabulary [$t(41)=4.103$, $p<0.000$]. On the other hand, the teachers who do not use the L1 in their classes are more positive toward the monolingual approach [$t(41)=-5.004$, $p<0.000$].

Pearson r correlation factor was applied to investigate whether there is a correlation between the age of teachers and the years of teaching experience with regard to their views on the use of L1 and L2 (Table 3). The results showed negative low correlation between the age of the teachers and their beliefs about the use of L1 in grammar teaching [$r(48)=-0.323$, $p=0.022$]. Thus, the older the teacher, the less L1 was used to teach grammar. The results also revealed positive moderate correlation between the age of the teachers and their beliefs about the use of only the target language [$r(48)=0.481$, $p<0.001$]. Respectively, negative low correlation was found between teachers' experience and their beliefs about the use of L1 in grammar [$r(48)=-0.290$, $p=0.041$] and positive moderate correlation was found between

Table 3: Pearson r Correlation.

		Age	Teaching experience
Grammar	Pearson Correlation	-0.323	-0.290
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.022	0.041
	N	50	50
Use only target language	Pearson Correlation	0.481	0.420
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.002
	N	50	50

teachers' experience and their beliefs about the use of only the target language [$r(48) = 0.420$, $p = 0.002$].

Descriptive statistics (see Table 4) showed that the majority of teachers (82%) claimed to use the native language during their lessons. Nine teachers stated that they do not use the L1 in their classes at all, adopting an 'English Only' approach in their communication in the classroom. A surprisingly small percentage of 2.4% of teachers stated that they always use the L1, and 7.3% claim to use it 'very often'. A percentage of 75.6% claim to 'sometimes' use the L1 and 14.6% state to 'hardly ever' use it. Based on the data, the teachers who use the L1 use it more at the beginning of the school year (56.1%) and less as the school year progresses.

Teachers also tend to use L1 mostly for clarification, grammatical and vocabulary instruction where the L1 is frequently used as a medium of communication in order to deliver the lesson in a manner that is believed to be effective and enhance language comprehension (Table 4). Furthermore, the main reasons of using the L1 is to help weak learners in mixed-ability classes, encourage the learners and make them feel less inhibited and save time (Table 4). Also, results show that a high percentage of teachers (66%) believe that learners feel more comfortable using the L1. However, a fairly high percentage is more willing to participate when the L1 is used in the classroom (40%).

Finally, Table 4 presents the reasons of avoiding using the L1 in the language classroom. These seem to derive from the teachers' experience in the classroom and the reactions the learners have had towards the use of L1. The highest percentage, and coincidentally the teachers' greatest concern, is with the amount of language input learners are exposed to. Furthermore, teachers are concerned with the negative effect L1 may have on the learners' communicative skills and development. Nonetheless, the data shows that the L2 used in the classroom was not authentic language, but structured and mostly based on course books. However, teachers contradict learners' responses. While students were recorded to support the idea that the L1 assists them in learning the foreign language, the data (Table 4) showed that teachers did not believe this was accurate, raising the concern that many valuable opportunities for learning would be missed. The effort that the learners made, according to the teachers, would be minimized as the use of the L1 would simplify the process.

The use of L1 as a safety net for learners created controversy among teachers. Learners claimed to appreciate the use of the L1 in the classroom as it helped them trigger their meaning system and comprehend unfamiliar grounds of the L2. Although the majority of teachers used the bilingual approach in the classroom, there were teachers who supported the 'English Only'

Table 4: Part C – Teachers' Questionnaire.

C1. Use of L1	Frequency	Percentage
a. Yes	41	82
b. No	9	18
C2. Type of L1		
a. Standard Modern Greek	24	58.5
b. Greek Cypriot Dialect	17	41.5
C3. How often L1 is used during the lesson		
a. Always	1	2.4
b. Very often	3	7.3
c. Sometimes	31	75.6
d. Hardly ever	6	14.6
C4. Amount of using L1 throughout the year		
a. Same amount	16	39
b. More at the beginning of the year	23	56.1
c. More at the end of the year	2	4.9
C5. Purposes of using L1		
a. Grammatical instruction;	32	64
b. Vocabulary instruction	25	50
c. Clarification	34	68
d. Ensure that the material taught is understood by all	19	38
e. Classroom management	16	32
f. Cultural issues	15	30
g. Interaction with the learners	6	12
C6. Reasons/Motivations of using L1		
a. Encourage the learners/make them feel less inhibited	23	46
b. Make learning process faster/save time	20	40
c. Create a pleasant environment	7	14
d. Give opportunity to learners to share knowledge	11	22
e. Helps understanding and learning of the foreign language	17	34
f. To help weak learners in teach mixed-ability classes	36	72
C7. Results of using L1		
a. Learners feel more relaxed and comfortable	33	66
b. Learners are more willing to participate	20	40
c. Some learners do not seem to like it	2	4
d. Some learners find it confusing	4	8
C8. Reasons for not using L1		
a. It has a negative effect on the communicative skills in the foreign language	25	50
b. It deprives learners of valuable foreign language input	26	52
c. It does not help learners learn the foreign language	19	38
d. It gives learners the impression that they can rely on Greek as well	27	54
e. It prevents learners from trying hard to understand the input	29	58
f. The time learners are exposed to the foreign language is limited and so we must make the most of it	30	60

approach, avoiding the L1 as it was believed to damage L2 development. However, the fact that there were teachers who used the L1 does not indicate a balance between the L1 and the L2 in the language classroom.

6 Classroom observations

The classroom observations recorded the use of L1 during EFL lessons, where the focus was on both the teacher and the advanced language learners. The observations aimed to investigate the reality of the language classroom and illustrate why and how learners or teachers use their L1 and on what occasions. As observations progressed the following themes emerged and will be presented in the following sections: 1) Vocabulary, 2) Grammar and 3) Social Interaction. The sections will present the teachers' perspective and examples and then the students'.

6.1 Teachers: Learning of new vocabulary

Within the specific context, the language teachers were observed applying interlingual strategies when teaching new vocabulary, i.e. they provided language learners with the L1 equivalents of L2 vocabulary. This was either done immediately or after their learners were asked whether they knew the meaning of the word or not. For example, in Extract 1 below, T1 chose an approach where she presented new vocabulary to the learners before they did a listening task. She begins with writing some unfamiliar words on the board and prompts the learners to guess the meaning in their L1. According to Liu (2008), this is a simple and effective technique for learners to learn the meaning of words. Having this knowledge is an important first step for strengthening the form-meaning connection and maintaining new vocabulary long term.

Extract 1

T1: 7, Ok, I want to tell you a few more words that you will hear in the listening. OK? 'Preserve?' (Writes on board)

S4: Προσπαθώ;

The learner translates the word 'try'

- T1: No, σημαίνει διατηρώ, φυλάω, με *The teacher translates the meaning of*
αυτή την έννοια, preserve the *the word 'preserve' in the learners' L1*
environment.
- S3: Κυρία που εν τούτο? [Miss, where is *The learner looks for the word in the*
this word] *text*
- T1: In the listening text. 'Learn the *The teacher translates the meaning of*
ropes'. It is an expression and *the phrase in the L1 immediately,*
means μαθαίνω, μαθαίνω τα κόλπα. *anticipating that none of the learners*
It is an idiom, ιδιωματισμός, 'learn *would be familiar with the phrase L1*
the ropes'. Replace? *for the word 'idiom'*
- S5: Κυρία, το ξαναπαίζω? (Miss, play it
again?)
- T1: Όχι 'replay', 'replace', αντικαθιστώ
(not replay, replace)
- S6: Μετακομίζω; ('Moving?')
- T1: No 'replace', αντικαθιστώ, ε ... [L1 for *The teacher illustrates the meaning*
'replace'], this is Fofi's pen. I will *for the learners*
replace it with this one.

In Extract 2, T3 asks for the meaning of unknown vocabulary and provides learners with the L1 equivalents immediately, without eliciting meaning.

Extract2

- S3: Oppo-, opportunity
- T3: Opportunity ... chance, ευκαιρία [L1 *The teacher first provides learners*
for 'chance'] *with a synonym and then the meaning*
of the word in their L1
- S2: Responsibility?
- T3: Take responsibility ... αναλαμβάνω
ευθύνη [L1 for 'take responsibility']
- S4: Explore?
- T3: Explore small islands?
- S2: Εξερευνώ; [Explore?]
- S5: Freedom εν η ελευθερία; [is that *The learner verifies the meaning of the*
'ελευθερία'? [L1 for 'freedom'] *word 'freedom' in the L1*

- T3: Freedom, yes. Erm, ‘plenty of facilities’? Πολλές ευκολίες [many facilities]
- S2: Δηλαδή; [Which means?]
- T3: Restaurants, bars ... challenging, *The teacher gives the L1 to the learners directly, without eliciting the meaning from them*
 πρόκληση, κάτι που προκαλεί [L1 for ‘challenging’] This should not be an unknown word and please raise your hands so I know who speaks.
- S6: Luxury-luxurious?
- T3: Luxurious, lux, δεν ξέρετε το *The teacher tries to explain the meaning of the word ‘luxurious’ by comparing it with a well-known brand of cosmetics*
 σαπούνι Lux; [don’t you know Lux soap?]
- SS: Ναι [yes]
- T3: ... αυτό είναι [that’s it]. Πολυτέλεια [luxury], very expensive.
- S1: Comfortable?
- T3: Comfortable, uncomfortable, άνετο, άβολο [L1 for ‘comfortable, uncomfortable’]
- S4: Κυρία τι σημαίνει το accommodation; [Miss, what does the word ‘accommodation’ mean?]
- T3: Accommodation, anyone? Διαμονή [L1 for ‘accommodation’] where we go in the hotel ok is a private accommodation, where we do holiday, hotels rooms
- S5: Exciting?
- T3: Exciting, είναι το συναρπαστικό [L1 for the word ‘exciting’]

Extracts 1 and 2 illustrate that the EFL teachers rely on their L1 to teach new vocabulary. In the first case, the teacher elicits the meaning of unknown words, encouraging learners to work out the possible meaning; this is likely to help learners develop their language learning skills and facilitates their long-term memory, as mentioned above. However, in the second case the teacher delivers the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary without prompting learners to

think about the word, its origin, or make sense of it in its context. While the L1 is useful when teaching vocabulary (Lo, 2014), it needs to be presented in a specific form to have a positive effect on the learners' learning. The use of L1 seems to attract learners' attention and teachers are able to avoid the risk of misinterpretation. Nonetheless, the use of L1 in this manner does not seem to have triggered effective functions in learning new vocabulary as learners are given explanations in L1 on a word level rather than exemplifying, contextualizing in sentences or practicing new words.

6.2 Teaching of grammatical phenomena

The use of the L1 to explain a grammatical phenomenon is a frequent teaching approach in the current monolingual context employed on the basis of ensuring effective understanding. Furthermore, as will be seen in Extract 3 below, the EFL teacher draws learners' attention to grammar tenses and presents various parts of the grammatical phenomenon in both the L1 and L2.

Extract3

- | | |
|---|--|
| T2: OK what are you doing now? | <i>Spontaneous use of the L1 with an immediate and controlled use of L2</i> |
| S2: Study! | |
| S3: Study! | |
| T2: What are you doing now? | <i>Use of L2 to prompt the correct tense from the learners</i> |
| S4: We are listening! | |
| T2: You are listening OK, I hope so, what else S4? | <i>L2 use to confirm that the correct tense has been used</i> |
| S4: We are looking. | |
| T2: At me or at the board! OK? You are listening, you are looking at the board! OK? Και άμα θέλουμε να κάνουμε το Present Continuous; [And how will you say that at school this year we are working on the Present Continuous?] | <i>The teacher repeats the full answers in the L2, she then switches to the L1 to ask learners for the more complicated use of the tense</i> |

S5: In this year in school we ... πως εν το
 ‘μαθαίνουμε’; [how do we say ‘learn’?]

T2: Learning.

S5: Yeah present continuous.

T2: ok, μπορούμε να το πούμε και πιο γενικά τι κάνουμε αυτή τη περίοδο. Δεν το λέμε για τώρα αλλά και για γενικά γ’αυτό και στα keywords έχουμε now, today, this year, ok; Μπορεί να είναι και γενικά όταν κάτι αλλάζει το περιβάλλον, η μόδα, σ’αυτά που κάνουν οι άνθρωποι, ok. Απ’ αυτή την στιγμή, μέχρι σήμερα, μέχρι φέτος, μέχρι αυτή την εποχή. Τι υπάρχει σε εξέλιξη. Έχει μια εξέλιξη. So, αυτά τα λέμε για ένα λόγο. Τα συζητάμε για να μπορέσετε να συνειδητοποιήσετε, να το χωνέψετε και στις ασκήσεις να καταλάβετε τι θέλει να πει η πρόταση μας τι εννοεί. [Ok, we can also say what we are generally doing at this period of time. Are keywords for these are ‘now’, ‘today’, ‘this year’, ok? You can use it when something changes in the environment, in fashion, in things people do, ok. From this moment on, until today, until this year, until this season, what is in progress. Something is in progress. So we use these phrases for a reason. We are discussing these so we can understand how to do the tasks and what the phrases mean].

The teacher uses the L1 to explain the grammatical point in depth. The teacher falls back on the L1 to communicate the execution of the grammatical phenomenon.

Extract 3 shows that the teacher separates the use of the L2 to present the praxis of the grammatical phenomenon and the L1 to present the theory behind it. This method is a common feature of traditional grammar instruction (Howatt & Smith, 2014) as most teachers in the context believe that the L1 is a

necessary means of explaining rules and structure. The lack of code-switching in this case could have a negative outcome on the learners' progress. Even though the teacher verifies that there is a complete understanding of the phenomenon, the learners are spoon-fed the use and functions of Present Continuous, which may have an effect on their long-term memory. This approach deprives language learners of techniques that could help them develop valuable input and output in L2. According to Cook (2001), it is important not to prevent learners from using their L1 but to encourage them to use the L2 in as many situations as possible and to find out when and why code-switching should occur.

6.3 Social interaction with learners

Teachers engaged their learners into talking about topics, such as their extra-curricular activities, by using the L2 but often ended up using the L1. Extract 4 displays utterances of learners' who seem more willing to participate in the discussion carried out in their L1. This is widely used when learners are involved in a social interaction that prompts them to express their own perspective they would tend to use L1 because that is what makes them more comfortable and, more importantly, allows them to be themselves. This can be seen when learners' immediate response was in the L1 even though the initial question was asked in the L2.

Extract 4

- | | |
|---|---|
| T6: What did you do last Saturday
George? | <i>The teacher starts with the L2 to prompt discussion with the learners</i> |
| S2: Επήα club. [I went to a club] | <i>The learners replies in the L1</i> |
| T6: Σε ποιο? [Which one?] | <i>The teacher continues the entire conversation in the L1 even though the discussion was initiated in the L2</i> |
| S2: Σε ένα που άνοιξε πρόσφατα. [To a new one that opened recently] | <i>The discussion continues in the L1 and the L2 is not used at all. The learners do not acknowledge the teacher's effort to have a conversation in the L2.</i> |
| T6: Άρεσε σου; [Did you like it?] | <i>The teacher gives up on the use of L2 and continues to converse in the L1, even though the language she is now using is</i> |

very simple and would still prompt an L2 discussion from the learner

S2: Ναι, επέρασα τέλεια. [Yes, I had a great time]

S4: Εννα πάμε μαζί την επόμενη φορά! [We should go together next time] *The conversation finishes in the L1.*

Extract 4 displays an example of social interaction, where the learners are prompted to discuss a topic they are interested in. In the current sample, even though the teacher first sets the tone of the conversation in the L2, the student spontaneously responds in the L1 as it came naturally. One could argue that learners see social interaction, either between their peers or their teachers, as an L1 function, carrying out a discussion in the L2 may seem unnatural and rehearsed. Based on the data collected and displayed in the Tables and Extracts here, interaction in the classroom is highly structured and supports IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback) (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975). Learners are not accustomed to interactive spontaneity being transferred to the foreign language. However, this is an issue the teacher would need to gradually introduce in the classroom and raise learners' awareness, not only about the forms and structures of the L2, but of its every-day real-life usage. Instead, the teacher seems to have accepted the fact that learners view the foreign language as another subject they are studying, instead of a communicative tool (Giannikas, 2013).

In Extract 5 below, T5 is trying to encourage the language learners to engage in a discussion about their interests. The topic presents itself through a task the learners and teacher were working on.

Extract 5

T5: Yes, the text. We have a text and the picture, the picture says everything. *The teacher uses the L2 to elicit information from the learners*

What else do we have? Ντάξει; [ok?]

Now we're going to talk about the kinds of stories there are. What kind of stories do we have?

S5: Comedies.

T5: Comedies, yes, funny stories. What else?

S6: Adventures, hero stories.

T5: Yes, do you like stories? You look a bit “What is she talking about?” You want to say something S8?

S8: Όι απλά, ο κάθε άνθρωπος έχει δικά του ενδιαφέροντα [No, it’s just that every person has his/her own interests]

T5: Of course. Speak in English.

The teacher demands that the learner uses the L2, which does not prompt spontaneous social interaction

S3: Some people like fantasy or adventure.

T5: Yes, it depends on the likes or the dislikes of each person. Let me tell you that this is a famous story, used in high schools in Australia.

S5: Isn’t it for babies?

T5: No, no! These are books for pleasure. Not for babies! Στα ελληνικά δεν διαβάζετε βιβλία; [Don’t you read books in Greek?]

The spontaneous question was in the L1

S6: Ναι [Yes]

Learners continue in the L1

T5: Ε γιατί τα διαβάζετε; [Why do you read them?]

The teacher follows the conversation in the L1

S4: Επειδή αρέσκει μας η πλοκή. [Because we like the plot]

T5: Ok, so, the story might be interesting. Ok? Alright, now, turn to page 75. This is the genre. Ok. Let’s get started. What kind of stories do you like best?

When the teacher wants to go back to the controlled conversation as part of the lesson they switch to L2

S4: I like adventure stories.

T5: You like adventure stories. Why?

S4: ... because ... you always want to know what will come next.

The above Extract shows the teacher engaging in social interaction with the learners, however, the discussion is controlled in the sense that the learners’

first attempt was to respond in the L1. The teacher asked the learners to carry out the conversation in the L2, as they did, but it was integrated as part of the lesson rather than have a discussion flow. This form of interaction between learners and the teacher holds little authenticity as other steps for spontaneous L2 discussions must occur first in order to reach the level of conversation the teacher is asking of her learners.

6.4 Learners: Learning of new vocabulary

When learning new vocabulary, the learners were observed to ask for the L1 equivalent of new vocabulary. Translation gave them a sense of security and understanding of the vocabulary. In Extract 4, the teacher is observed to satisfy the learners' need for translation and a more extensive use of the L1 for vocabulary development.

Extract 7

- T4: What does 'exaggerate' mean? *Simple questions that prompt immediate answers with no perspective for L2 discussion*
- S1: Υπερβάλλω *L1 meaning*
- T4: Good, 'request'?
- S2: Εε ... ζητώ. *L1 meaning*
- T4: Andreas, how about 'regret'?
- S3: Εε ... ένι ξερω κυρία. [I don't know Miss]
- S1: Μετανιώνω. *L1 meaning*
- S3: Α,ναι. [Oh, yes]

In this case, the technique applied in the above Extract is used as a facilitator for both learners and teachers. A language learner of a monolingual context, such as the one investigated, is likely to short-cut the process of observing a new word and its function since mapping the word directly onto the L1 is easier and less time-consuming. The L1 equivalence is made explicit at the outset, as when a learner may ask 'What's the English for the word ...?'. Moreover, advanced language learners already have a well-established conceptual and lexical system, and most L2 words have a correspondent

concept and translation in their L1. Thus, there is very little need for learners in the specific context to learn new concepts or meanings while learning L2 words.

6.5 Learners' perspective: Social interaction

Learners very often use their L1 to talk about their interests. In the following Extract, a conversation between the learners and the teacher is observed. The teacher asks the learners questions about what they did during the weekend by using the L2, learners very frequently use their L1 to answer. This, most probably, happens because learners are more comfortable expressing themselves in the L1 and feel less relaxed using the L2 when it comes to social interaction.

Extract 8

S1: I had souvlaki on Sunday.

T7: Oh, very good. You like σουβλάκια?
[plural for the word 'souvlaki' – a local dish]

S1: Mmmm

S3: Εγώ έφαα τζαι Παρασκευή τζαι Σάββατο τζαι Κυριακή. [I had souvlaki on Friday, on Saturday and on Sunday]

T7: You had when? On Friday? Saturday? *The teacher is trying to prompt the learner to use the L2*

S3: No, Friday, and Saturday, Sunday ... *The learner replies in L2 at first and then quickly switches to her L1. The learner used the L1 to make a joke in class.*
Πάλε σουβλάκια έφαα. Αφού στην μάππα εν είχε τίποτε άλλο να φάω. [I had souvlakia again. There was nothing else to eat when I went to see the football game]
(Everyone laughed).

Since the conversation had a social, out-of-the-coursebook, interactive nature, the learners did not hesitate to solely use their L1 in order to communicate their weekend activities. Learners seem to have associated their L1 to

discussions that are stress-free and comfortable. It is, therefore, natural for them to even ignore the teacher's effort to keep them on an L2 track and converse in the L1, believing that since the interaction was of a friendlier nature, it would not be disappointing to their teacher and would not affect their overall performance.

The following Extract displays a different form of social conversing as the entire conversation is carried out in the L1.

Extract 9

- T8: S5 αρέσκει σου να πηγαίνεις στο γήπεδο; [S5 do you like going to football games?] *The teacher uses the L1 to socialize with the learners*
- S5: Καλό κυρία! Πηγαίνω κάθε σαββατοκυριακό! [Of course, Miss! I go every weekend] *The learners continue to socialize in the L1 and very willingly answer the teacher's question*
- S3: Όι, εγώ βαρκούμαι τη μάππα. Παν ούλλοι τζαι φωνάζουν όπως τους πελλούς. [No, I get bored with football. Everyone goes and yells like crazy] *Although the language used to carry out the conversation is not advanced, the learners do not use the L2 to socialize. The teacher does not prompt learners to switch to the L2 and continues to engage in the conversation using the L1.*
- T8: Εσένα τι σου αρέσκει να κάμνεις S3; [What do you like doing S3?]
- S3: Να χορέφκω. Πηγαίνω χορούς, λάτιν. Εν τέλεια. [I like dancing. I take Latin dance classes. It's wonderful] *Discussing one's hobbies and interests are topics traditionally taught in lower level EFL classes., Therefore, the advanced learners in the present context should be able to carry out the conversation displayed in this extract in the L2.*
- T8: Ωραία. [Great] Very interesting. Now open your book on page 65. *When the teacher ends the conversation she switches to L2 to give instructions regarding the lesson*

Extract 9 displays an example of full use of the L1 in the conversation the learners and the teacher engaged in. This overreliance of the L1 may have not

been an issue when the discussion occurred. However, it could have long-term negative effects on the learners. The learners are not encouraged to make any effort to interact in the L2. As a result, they seem to miss important L2 input they may not be given the opportunity to come across in their coursebooks. The conversation above is not planned and does not facilitate L2 learning. On the contrary, it reinforces the link of L2 with the coursebook and the L1 with friendly, relaxing conversations.

7 Conclusion

The present study explored the effect of the use of L1 and the perception learners and teachers have of the role of the L1 and the L2 in the EFL classroom. Although findings from this small scale study cannot be generalized to other situations, our exploration made the complexity of language use evident. The data analysis of the observations showed that there was a need for a balance between the L1 and the L2, amongst both learners and teachers. Due to limited professional guidance in the field of L1/L2 use, the choice of using one or both of the two languages are left to the teacher's better judgment, meaning that there is lack of knowledge of principles of L1 use in the specific EFL context. There is a need for a balanced and flexible view of L1 use in the advanced learners' language classroom as data has shown that the use of L2 is currently inadequate.

The outcomes of the present study verify that there is a misconception as far as the use of L1 in the language classroom is concerned. A number of teachers admit that the native language plays a significant part in the language classroom; nonetheless, there is still a sense of guilt when the L1 is used. Language teachers tend to feel that their professional ability is compromised when they use the L1 and are undermined in the eyes of their learners and perhaps the parents of their learners. The lack of awareness could have a serious impact on the language lessons conducted and the L2 development of the students. In the specific context a high use of L2 is automatically viewed as effective language teaching without pedagogical approaches to accompany it. The data has shown that attitudes between teachers and learners clashed at times. The advanced language learners appreciated the use of the L1 in the classroom as it not only gave them a sense of security, but it also helped them make sense of the L2 and its functions. This is not something that was taken under consideration, especially when introducing an 'English Only' approach. According to the outcomes, the choice of language was not planned according to the learners' needs, which

indicates that the use, or rather non-use, of the L1 was based on policy and for reasons outside the language classroom. Due to their years of experience and beliefs of their professional community, teachers viewed the use of L1 as a sign of pedagogical and linguistic weakness. However, the issue was not the use of L1, but a balance between the two languages that would benefit the learners and how the languages could be used to tailor the needs of the language learner. It is essential that language teachers of the specific context are provided with training on the issue of L1/L2 use. In agreement with Carless (2007: 336):

It would be useful if teacher educators could provide more concrete guidance to teachers as to when student use of the Mother Tongue (MT) may be beneficial. Is it possible, for example, to distinguish between communicative tasks (when TL use is mandatory) and language analysis tasks where the use of MT is accepted or even encouraged? Are there certain types of task when engaging with TL material through the MT is recommended?

On the other hand, the learners realize that they should be exposed to the maximum use of the L2; however, they admit feeling ‘linguistically safer’ in an environment where they are permitted to ask and receive an answer in the L1. Advanced language learners are aware of the fact that they must not over-rely on their L1, however, it seems to assist them in various cases, as revealed in this paper. The teachers neglect to see that the learners have this need and fail to deliver a balanced use of the two languages that could work in their learners’ favor. According to the data, teachers are unaware of the fact that learners realize that there must be a limit to the use of L1 in order for them to benefit from the L1 but not be deprived of important L2 input. It is, therefore, time to listen to the learners, acknowledge the elephant in the room and accept the role that L1 plays in the monolingual language classroom for both parties. Even in the advanced learners’ classroom L1 is needed and used, as observed in the current study. Learners clearly display this need to their teachers and expect them to deliver in order for the lesson to progress in a successful manner. Nonetheless, learners must be exposed to interactive L2 tasks from an early age, which would eventually lead them to an advanced level of interaction in the L2 and give them the confidence to do so.

In order to bring about the positive aspects of communication in the language classroom more research in similar contexts is needed with a focus on pedagogical and learning implications of the use of L1. Language teachers have been guided to avoid the use of L1 with their learners as it is seen as damaging and a weakness on their part, therefore, integrating the L1 in the EFL classroom could make teachers feel guilty. Nonetheless, if L1 is balanced with the L2 and presented communicatively, it can work as a facilitative tool. The use of the native language in EFL classrooms is justified; however, none

of its supporters endorse its unlimited use. Many advocates of the L1 (Atkinson, 1987; Cook 2001; Swain & Lapkin, 2000) warn against excessive use of the L1, and instead propose that the L1 be used optimally and sensibly. It is encouraged that the L1 should only be used to help construct knowledge in the L2, facilitate interpersonal interactions, and increase efficiency. In no way must the L1 be accorded the same status as the L2 in the classroom. EFL practitioners must assist their learners and guide them in how to take advantage of their existing L1, in order to facilitate their learning and development of the L2. The L1 can and should be viewed not only as an efficient learning tool, but also a useful teaching method if pedagogical activities that are well designed. Further research is necessary as the use and balance of the L1 and L2 in the language classroom are an ever debated issue. Finally, further focus on needs analysis with learners and teachers' decisions on integrating the L1 in their lessons is necessary. More specifically, it is important to see future studies concentrating on how learners and teachers reflect on their own conscious or unconscious theories about what constitutes successful learning. It has been documented in many cases that advanced learners (admittedly, especially adult learners), when asked by their teachers, consciously prefer the use of metalinguistic markers, which would frequently include the use of their L1.

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