

The Role of L1 in English courses from Algerian EFL University Students' Perspective



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Abstract

It is often felt that advanced learners do not need the use of the mother tongue in EFL sessions. In the Algerian university context, the debate over the use of the mother tongue in EFL university classrooms is utterly avoided. The aim of this small-scale study is to explore the issue from the students' perspective. A total of 9 students enrolled at English department were involved in the study. The data is collected by administering a questionnaire containing 6 statements. The findings indicate that students did not oppose the use of the mother tongue and showed a positive attitude towards it. However, they all agree that only a 'limited' use of it is allowed when needed

Key words: Mother tongue, L1, First language, native language

Introduction

The technological development and the advancement of the internet have increased the need for learning English. However, learning a foreign language is a challenge in itself especially when it is not widely used outside the classroom. This is the case of English in Algeria.

AtENS-Bouzareah (Teacher pre-service training college), teachers and students' use of L1 in EFL classes at the English department contrasts the teaching and learning pedagogy that stipulates that English should be taught through English. It is generally agreed that at the advanced level, the focus is on the principle that language proficiency is attainable through maximizing L2 exposure. Indeed,

generations of foreign language teachers have rejected the mother tongue approach (Macaro, 2001). However, some studies undertaken at the university level are in favor of a 'judicious' use of the mother tongue (Burder, 2001; Schweers, 1999; Tang, 2000).

The issue this paper is going to examine is exploring foreign language students' opinion of the role of the mother tongue in learning a foreign language (English). In fact, many studies have been undertaken investigating the advantages and disadvantages of the use of L1 in L2 setting. Yet, to my knowledge there has been little research carried out in the Algerian context measuring students' beliefs of the inclusion of L1 at the English department.

This paper attempts to gather and measure evidence to answer the following question:

RQ: Do the Algerian foreign language university students believe that L1 is a potential resource in their ?language learning

To avoid any confusion, and due to the fact that this study is

undertaken in Algiers (the capital of Algeria), the 'mother tongue', 'First Language', 'Native Language' and 'L1', are used interchangeably to essentially mean the same: the Algerian Arabic or the dialect.

Literature Review

A historical overview of methods in language teaching

It is important to have a brief look at the issue from a historical view point.

Several hundred years ago, language learning was based on translation. Grammar- Translation Method (which was built up in the 18th century) prevailed. It focused on the manipulation and memorization of the rules of grammar and aimed at developing the students' lexis through the use of translation which was used as a teaching procedure. Therefore the bilingual teaching was adopted giving importance to L1 in learning L2. But in the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, this belief started to change and took a reverse turning. The Direct

method emerged. This method is associated with names like Gouin (1831-1896-), Sauveur (1826-1907) and Palmer (1877-1949-). The principles of this method was based on 'lots of oral interaction, spontaneous use of the language, no translation between the first and second language and little or no analysis of grammatical rules' (Brown, 2001:21). As a matter of fact, the monolingual approach appeared and became much more important in the 20th century. This new pedagogical approach was mainly due to the mass migration of people from Europe to America. Indeed, this migration forced foreign language teachers to use only L2 as the medium of teaching since learners were no longer sharing the same L1 as they were from different backgrounds. This gives rise to the English-only policy in the classroom.

Richard and Rodgers (1986:9-10) summed up the main tenets of the Direct Method:

1- Classroom instruction was conducted exclusively in the target language.

2 - Only everyday vocabulary and sentences were taught.

3 - Oral communication skills were built up in a carefully graded progression, organized around questions and answers exchanges between teachers and students in small, intensive classes.

4 - Grammar was taught inductively.

5 - New teaching points were taught through modeling and practice.

6 - Concrete vocabulary was taught through demonstrations, objects, and pictures, abstract vocabulary was taught by association of idea.

7 - Both speech and listening comprehension were taught.

8 - Correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasized. (Brown, 2001:21)

The Direct method has had a great influence on the different methods and approaches which were developed later and which all focused on the use of L2 alone. Such methods as Audio-lingualism, the Situational Language teaching, Krashen's Natural approach and also the Communicative language teaching (CLT) in the 1990s.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s teaching a foreign language

was more based on developing and giving more importance to communicative properties of the language through introducing authentic material in the language classroom and presenting 'meaningful tasks' which put learners in real life situation. Thus, there has been a shift from a linguistic-centered approach to a communicative approach (Widdowson, 1990:54). The major purpose in this approach is to help the learner develop competency so as to become communicatively competent. In 1970, Competency-based approach emerged in the United States. Its major concern is what we "know about a language in order to be able to use it" (Thornbury, 2006:38). CBA gives priority to the four skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing). It teaches learners how to become 'competent' in their school and real life settings. In 2003, Algeria adopted this method (CBA) giving thus importance to building the learner's skills. In CBA, the learner becomes an active learner in the learning process.

All these show clearly that in CBA, the teacher is a 'facilitator',

a 'controller', an 'organizer', an 'assessor', a 'participant', a 'resource' and an 'observer' (Dobson, 2003; Hedge, 2000; Chelli, 2010).

Support of the monolingual approach

It is generally agreed among researchers and language teachers that students do translate mentally because they cannot escape the influence of the first language (Wechsler, 1997)

Throughout educational history, there have been different supportive and contrastive theories to the use of the learners' mother tongue in EFL classroom. Cook (2001) advocates that L1 has a positive role in L2 learning. On the same line, Macaro (2001) states that the language teachers are the only ones who can decide about how much the students' mother tongue should be used so as to be effective and fruitful. Aligned with this aspect, Auerbach (1993) encourages the use of the learners' mother tongue and ascertains that "we need to recognize that respect for learners' languages has powerful

social implications” (p. 30). On the same line, Spira (2007) undertook a study in Pakistan. Based on a questionnaire and an interview as qualitative data gathering tools, he concluded that as opposed to the monolingual teachers, the bilingual ones are much better ‘equipped’ with effective teaching tools. More interestingly, and in the Arabic context Khresheh (2012) investigated the use of Arabic in Saudi-Arabian with EFL teachers and learners. The study concluded that beginners’ learners use Arabic because of their low proficiency whereas for the advanced learners the resort to L1 is mainly related to learners ‘cultural norms’. For McMillan and Rivers (2011) the use of L1 “plays important cognitive, communicative, and social function in L2 learning” (p.252). Kafes (2011) also conducted a research with the foreign language university students. The aim of the study was to investigate the effect of using L1 on the students speaking skills. The findings revealed that a limited use of L1 is not detrimental and that a ‘judicious’ and a ‘systematic’ use of learners’ mother tongue

facilitates their learning.

The Algerian context

In Algeria, English is day after day gaining importance that cannot be underestimated. Nowadays, parents want their children to learn a second or foreign language from their early school age. Indeed, almost all children whose parents’ financial state allows it are taken to private schools because they are seen as offering the best for the learning of a foreign language. In most if not all private schools, the school kids start learning French and English from the first year of their primary school.

- Research Methodology and Procedure

Introduction

This part is mainly methodological and discusses the overall design of the study in terms of its aim, subjects, instruments of the data collection, and the data analysis. It demonstrates the research technique used to analyze learners’ beliefs and opinions of

the mother tongue in EFL context at the university level aiming at answering the research question stated in the general introduction.

Instrument

The research question of this small scale study is investigated using the exploratory instruments of a questionnaire. No modifications were made because the participants are advanced learners who did not find difficulties in understanding the sixth statements of the questionnaire.

Participants

Nine participants were engaged in this study. The students surveyed are first and second year university students enrolling in the English department at ENS-Bouzareah (Teacher Pre-Service Training School). The participants are all female chosen randomly and are considered to be to some extent equally competent users of English. They are all supposed to have got good grades in English at the Baccalaureat exam to be admitted at ENS. This suggests

that the participants have to a greater or lesser extent a good level of proficiency. There is no lack of ability of comprehension in the target language.

Data collection

The data were collected through a questionnaire.

Procedure and Data analysis

The main objective of my research was to explore and investigate the participants' opinions and beliefs on the use of L1 in EFL classes at the university. The study is undertaken at ENS-Bouzareah (Teacher pre-service training college) in which English-only policy is adopted. The responses of the participants are collected, analyzed, and discussed.

Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion of the Results

In order to answer the RQ and find out the Algerian students' opinions on the use of L1 in EFL university classes, the participants' responses are calculated and the results are shown as follows:

Statement 1:

I think L1 should be used in English sessions.

Number of- students	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
09	0	4	5	0

Table 3.1 The results of the students' responses for statement 1

This statement is intended to see whether the students participating in this study generally agree on the use of L1 inside the classroom. Based on the following results, we can infer if they have a positive or negative opinion over the L1 use.

As table 3.1 shows, 49/ graduate students state that they 'sometimes' think that the mother tongue should be used in EFL classes and 5 admit that it 'rarely' should. No one states that L1 has to be always used or that it should be completely forbidden in EFL classroom.

As noted, the students seem to agree on the 'limited' use of L1 in the English department which suggests that they have to some extent a positive opinion toward their mother tongue use. This is probably due to the fact that at the advanced level, the overwhelming majority of the students are supposed to have acquired a certain

level of proficiency which make them quite aware of the importance of maximizing the use of L2 but at the same time they seem convinced that learning a foreign language cannot be achieved successfully without relying on their mother tongue.

Statement 2

L1 is favored in the following courses:

- a - Grammar
- b - Civilization
- c - Listening and speaking
- d - Literature
- e - Others

Statement 2 aims to find out in which courses the mother tongue is favored. The participants were given five alternatives and asked to identify the courses (modules) in which they mostly face difficulties and feel the need for the inclusion of L1. Their responses are illustrated in the table below:

Number - of students	Grammar	Civilization	List/ Speak	Literature	Others
09	1	4	4	0	0

Table 3.2 The results of the students' responses for statement 2

As illustrated in the table above, 49/ students stipulate that L1 is favoured in civilization and 4 others claim that it is preferred to be used in listening-speaking course. Only 1 student seems to favor it in grammar. Indeed, all the participants agree on resorting to the mother tongue when a need to it is felt. This need is manifested in lack of comprehension of some courses and/or inability to find the adequate word in the target language to better express their ideas and opinions especially in speaking sessions. Foreign language students resort to L1 when they do not have the metalingual to do so in English. This may lead them to borrow words from their native language and ask for its translation into English. Indeed, it appears that the participants feel the need of L1 assistance in certain courses

(modules). Therefore, L1 is

seen as a lifeline that may save them from a low- achievement of the target language learning by ensuring a better comprehension.

Statement 3

I think it is fruitful to use L1 in the following situations:

- a - Explaining difficult vocabulary
- b - Checking comprehension
- c - Asking how to say a word in English
- d - Others

Situations	Number of students
Explaining difficult vocabulary	3
Checking comprehension	2
Asking how to say a word in English	4
Others	0

Table 3.3 The results of the students' responses for statement 3

Statement 3 aims to find out in which situations the use of the mother tongue is favoured and

deemed necessary by foreign language students. The students were given alternatives to choose from. The results are as follows:

29/ students assert that L1 can be used to check comprehension while 3 claim that it may be used to explain 'difficult' vocabulary. Finally, 4 students admit that it can be used to ask the teacher or peers how to say a word in English. It should be noted that none of the students mentioned the other courses (modules) which suggests that they do not want an excessive use of L1.

Indeed, the students consider the use of the first language of great benefit in handful situations. This suggests that the mother tongue can to some extent be present in the foreign language university classes and that language students are quite aware of the necessity of adjusting it to their needs.

Statement 4

I think L1 should be completely banned from EFL University.

a - Agree

b - Disagree

The purpose of this statement

is to find out students' general opinion on the complete exclusion of L1 in EFL setting at the university and find out if there is a contradiction in their answers between this statement and the previous ones. The results are shown in the following table:

Number- of students	agree	disagree
09	0	9

Table 3.4 The results of the students responses for statement 4

Concerning the fourth statement, a positive opinion on the use of L1 is revealed by all the participants. None say that they agree on the total banishment of the mother tongue which shows clearly that students' mother tongue still plays an important role at the university.

Statement 5

I think only a limited use of L1 is needed

a - agree

b - disagree

This statement is intended

to see the participants' opinion on how much of the mother tongue they want. The participants' responses are demonstrated as follows:

Number of- students	agree	disagree
09	9	0

Table 3.5. The results of the students' responses for statement 5

99/ graduate students agree on the 'limited' use of L1. Indeed, all the participants answered positively and seem favorable to the 'judicious' use of the mother tongue. None of them disagree with statement 5. These students seem to agree with Grasso who stipulates that "the use of L1 may offer learners the additional cognitive support they need to analyze language, and work at a higher level than would be possible if they were restricted solely to the use of the target language" (p: 5, 2012)

Statement 6

I think an excessive use of L1 is needed

a - agree

b - disagree

This statement is intended to confirm the participants' opinion over the 'limited' use of L1 in English classes at the university level. The results are shown as follows:

Number of stu-- dents	agree	disagree
09	0	9

Table 3.6 The results of the students' responses for statement 6

All the students surveyed in this study stipulate that they completely disagree with the statement. Their replies confirm their responses for statement 5 in that they do favour a 'limited' use of L1 and disfavor an 'excessive' use of it.

The results of the sixth statements show that foreign language university students think that L1 is deemed necessary only when they feel the need to understand and learn much better. This seems to go in line with Atkinson (1993) who stipulates that L1 should be used only when there is something complicated for

the EFL learners

As a matter of fact, the findings reveal that the overwhelming majority of the participants endorse a positive belief that L1 has a role to play in their process of learning.

Summary of the findings

The study findings reveal that advanced learners disfavor the total banishment of the mother tongue and heavily believe that in order to learn English they need to be exposed solely to it. However, they are quite aware that a limited use of it in specific and handful situations can be of great benefit in their learning process. This has been confirmed in my speaking sessions. Indeed, it has been noticed that from time to time my students asked me how to say in English a word that needs to be used in their speaking. It is quite clear that students want their teacher to translate to English some words whenever they face a communication breakdown.

The findings have also revealed that the students surveyed consider L1 a potential learning resource. They are quite aware of

the importance of incorporating a 'judicious' and 'limited' use of L1 in L2 setting which suggests that they are all against an abundant use of it. This goes in line with Grasso who concluded (in his French immersion program in Canada) that "L1 can be a learning resource for students when they are learning a second language" (2012: 5)

Conclusion

In the Algerian university, a strict English-policy is maintained. However, most EFL participants seem more oriented toward a 'limited' and 'judicious' use of L1. Indeed, Cianflone states that at the university level where language specificity is undoubtedly higher, the mother tongue use "can save time and increase students' motivation" (2009, 3).

It is worth noting that at ENS-Bouzareah (Teacher training college), almost all foreign language university participants favor (though in a very limited context) the interference of L1 in learning L2, and are quite aware that the key to language proficiency is by being intensively

exposed to the foreign language. On the same line of the many research undertaken on the same purpose (and which findings show that learners favour the use of L1 in some situations such as checking comprehension and translating difficult vocabulary), the participants in this study seem disfavoring the English-only policy.

In sum, the use of L1 is only a means to the end of facilitating the target language proficiency. It is used only when necessary to help them in building up their speaking-skill and in improving their learning by enriching their mental lexicon.

It is hoped that these findings will help the policy-makers, language teachers and educators acknowledge the role of the native language in the foreign language classroom. We (Foreign language teachers) need not to forget that students at the advanced level are adult learners and that L1 is part of their identity. It goes without saying that the findings cannot be generalized because this study is undertaken with only nine students. Further studies have

to be undertaken in this area on larger scale with a larger sample of students along with their language teachers. This would definitely yield conclusive results and help develop a better understanding of the role of L1 in supporting L2 at the university.

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Le devenir autre et la création de l'ailleurs dans l'Africain De Jean. Marie Gustave LECLEZIO.



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ملخص

يمثل جان ماري لوكليزيو في هذا العمل «الإفريقي» ، الكاتب الذي يبحث عن صوت الآخر سعيا إلى رفض أساطير العالم الغربي الزائفة، المدمرة والهابط من معطياتها وشروطها. «الإفريقي» هي رواية مستوحاة من السيرة الذاتية للأديب لوكليزيو وتدور أحداثها حول التطواف والاعتراف بالشخصية التي أراد الاستعمار تهميشها والقضاء عليها خاصة في هذه المنطقة، جنوب إفريقيا حيث لم يعد للسكان أي قيمة أو اعتراف بهم كبشر لهم الحق في أبسط الأشياء. طريقة سرد هذه الأحداث تصبح بحث عن الوجودية واكتشاف الآخر. ترسم هذه الرواية صورة حياة متناغمة وفردوسية حيث تقف الذاكرة كمأخذه إتهام ضد تفاهة وسخافة الحرب من جهة وضد تنميط الآخر من جهة أخرى.

Mots clés : exil- altérité- reconnaissance- ailleurs.

« *Ecrire pour faire le relevé typographique de ce morceau du monde [...]* Tout ce qui est là [...] Tout a son importance. »¹

« *La littérature, en fin de compte, ça doit être quelque chose comme l'ultime possibilité de jeu offerte, la dernière chance de fuite* »²

Publié en 2004 au Mercure de France, L'Africain de J.M.G Le Clezio se présente comme un fragment autobiographique, mais

décousu parce qu'il ne suit pas un enchainement chronologique dans la narration, mais plutôt logique : la narration des faits respecte la disposition des photos prises par le père lors de son voyage en Afrique. Il raconte l'histoire d'un exil et d'une quête identitaire qui initie le sujet, par les nombreuses découvertes, à un devenir autre, qui reconnaît en l'individu son étrangeté et sa différence. A côté de l'histoire d'exil, se trouve l'histoire d'une déshumanisation, d'un

vol, d'un viol et d'une discrimination raciale de la quelle étaient victimes les Africains. Une prise de position politique et sociale est nettement affichée par les éléments spatiotemporels.

L'objectif de ce travail est de réfléchir sur la représentation de l'autre, à ce qui fait altérité radicale et relative, et d'essayer de voir quelles sont les techniques déployées par Leclezio pour mettre en scène une vision à la fois réaliste et utopique de l'autre ; favoriser davantage le dialogue avec un groupe humain qui a été longtemps objet de préjugés raciaux. Par ailleurs, il s'agit pour nous de mettre au jour les mécanismes de création d'un univers presque « utopique », dans ce récit, mais où la réalité ne sera pas brouillée, et dessinera comme noir sur blanc la nature des relations humaines, et l'impact des dimensions sociopolitiques dans l'institution de ces dernières.

L'Africain est un livre exceptionnel, un roman peut-être, même si son auteur, Leclezio, refuse cette désignation pour l'ensemble de ses œuvres romanesques. Son refus émane d'une fuite manifestée pour l'organisation supposée comme objective et à laquelle tend le roman. Et il supplée à cette intrigue artificielle,

une écriture sans fioritures, faite par des prouesses de l'imagination, comme celle des conteurs qui noient leurs récits dans un fleuve d'images exubérantes.

L'histoire dans l'Africain est racontée sous forme d'un monologue dialogique « intime » où l'auteur-narrateur parle de sa vie ainsi que celle de son père en Afrique du Sud, pays où ce dernier a décidé de s'exiler pour mener, à l'instar d'un héros mythique, sa quête existentielle. Vient se superposer à cette première aventure, la quête du narrateur-auteur, lui-même, qui se trouve confronté, plusieurs années après, à sa propre étrangeté, et tentera de faire ce retour en arrière pour avoir des réponses sur l'ambiguïté qui plane sur sa vie. La narration est faite de retrouvailles, de déception, de réconciliation et de renaissance des personnages³ (l'auteur et son père) dans un pays où la nature est le seul et unique souverain.

L'exil, voyage initiatique.

A la première lecture de l'Africain, le lecteur se heurte à une composition hétéroclite : des chapitres différents mais dont l'harmonie tient de l'engouement de l'auteur pour l'autre et pour la