

## MOTHER TONGUE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING TO CHILDREN: TO USE IT OR NOT TO USE IT?

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*RESUMO: O uso da língua materna (L1) no ensino da língua inglesa (L2) sempre foi uma questão controversa para professores e estudiosos na área do ensino de línguas estrangeiras. Quando se trata do ensino de uma língua estrangeira para crianças, a questão é ainda mais complexa, fazendo-se necessária a discussão e a análise desse uso em sala de aula. O objetivo deste artigo, portanto, é investigar os padrões de uso da língua materna (L1) no ensino de inglês (L2) para crianças, por meio da análise de questionários aplicados com professores envolvidos nesse contexto de ensino.*

*PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Língua materna (L1), Ensino de inglês, Inglês para crianças.*

*ABSTRACT: The use of the mother tongue (L1) in English language teaching (L2) has always been a controversial issue for teachers and researchers in the field. When it comes to the English language teaching to children (ELTC) context, the issue becomes even more complex, making it necessary to discuss and analyze its use in the classroom. The objective of this article is to investigate the patterns of use of the mother tongue (L1) in English (L2) teaching for children, through the analysis of questionnaires applied by teachers involved in this teaching context.*

*KEYWORDS: Mother tongue (L1), English teaching, English language teaching to children.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The interest in English language teaching to children (ELTC) in Brazil has grown significantly in recent years (TONELLI, 2005; ROCHA, 2007; SANTOS, 2009; COLOMBO, 2014; AGRA 2016) and, as a consequence the number of research involving this teaching context has reached visibility. Among so many challenges and particularities that surround this teaching context, some still do not receive enough attention, as it is the case of the usage of mother tongue in ELTC what might justify a reduced number of literature published about it. The need of this research arose during the teaching practicum internship of the first author under the co-teaching of the second, in which the patterns of use of the mother tongue led us to think about whether to use it or not in the classroom.

The question “To use or not to use the L1 (mother tongue) in L2 (target language) classrooms?” has always been a controversial topic among teachers and researchers. Mother tongue is the native language that a person has learned from birth. Linguistically speaking, the mother tongue is the language spoken by the care-takers thus, this language is the primary language of the child. The role of the L1 in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classes has been debated among applied linguists and, as pointed out by Cristovão (1997) and Seccato (2010), every teacher during his\her career will question at least once the use of L1 in L2 classes.

The concepts of teaching a foreign language<sup>3</sup> have changed throughout time. According to Brown (2001, p. 18), “For centuries, there were few if any

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<sup>3</sup> In this article, the terms L2 and FL are used interchangeably.

theoretical foundations of language learning upon which to base teaching methodology”. The author explains that

As other languages began to be taught in educational institutions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Classical Method was adopted as the chief means for teaching foreign languages. Little thought was given to teaching someone how to speak the language; after all, languages were not being taught primarily to learn oral/aural communication, but to learn for the sake of being ‘scholarly’ or, in some instances, for gaining a reading proficiency in a foreign language. Since there was little if any theoretical research on second language acquisition in general or on the acquisition of reading proficiency, foreign languages were taught as any other skill was taught (BROWN, 2001, p. 18).

Hence, the teaching was conducted based on translation and the use of the L1 was the same as L2 in the classroom, especially because language teaching placed emphasis on the written word above the spoken word. In the nineteenth century, the Classical Method came to be known as the Grammar Translation Method (BROWN, 2001). The prevalence of this Method led to students' inability to use the EFL fluently. Consequently, the use of the L1 in the EFL classroom started to be seen as uncommunicative, boring, pointless and irrelevant (HARMER, 2002). In other words, this method was challenged for doing "virtually nothing to enhance students' communication ability in the language" (BROWN, 2001, p. 16).

Later in the 19th century the Direct Method and Audio-lingual Method emerged, defended by B.F. Skinner (1957) and Leonard Bloomfield (1933), among other authors. Such methods emphasized not only the understanding of words but rather the acquisition of structures and patterns that were repeated and tested until the responses given by the students became automatic. These methods also claimed that the use of the L1 should be banned in the EFL

classrooms because, according to them, L1 and L2 are different systems, and must not be linked to avoid learning interference, as defended by Ellis (1997).

From the 60's to now, the communicative approach, which was originally developed by Dell Hymes (1972), has been frequently used in L2 classes. This acquisition-focused approach sees communicative competence progressing through three stages: aural comprehension, early speech production, and speech activities, all fostering "natural" language acquisition, much as a child would learn his/her native tongue. Now the classroom becomes more student-centered with the teacher allowing for students to output the language more often on their own.

Some authors as Krashen (1987), Duff and Polio (1990) as well as Ellis (1997) believe on the importance of the target language use for the L2 acquisition. On the other hand, some researches claim that language classes have witnessed a positive change following the recognition that some learners use the L1 as a communicative strategy to learn and use the L2 (JAMES, 1998; ODLIN, 1989; COOK, 2001). In fact, a relatively new teaching method which deliberately uses the L1 in teaching EFL has appeared. It is the New Concurrent Method which requires teachers to balance the use of the L1 and L2. Here, the use of the L1 might be possible in four areas: introducing concepts, reviewing a previous lesson, capturing learners' attention and praising them.

In summary, it is possible to see that the use of the L1 was from over used in the Grammar-translation Method, to banned in Direct and Audio Lingual approaches and now, in days of communicative learning process, it is still debated. When it comes to the ELTC context, it is even more difficult to know how much of the mother tongue should be used. Taking this in consideration, the objective of this paper is to investigate the patterns of use of L1 in EFL

classrooms for children through the analysis of a qualitative questionnaire, answered anonymously by teachers from the ELTC context, in which they exposed their beliefs and practical uses of the L1 on the learning and teaching process.

First, we present the literature review in which the research was based on, evidencing the different positions of the authors on this controversial teaching topic at the present. Then, we present the methodology used, followed by the analysis and discussion of the data gathered from the participants' answers to the questionnaire. Finally, the paper is concluded by presenting the results obtained and the final considerations.

## **PROS AND CONS OF L1 USE IN EFL CLASSROOMS**

In his article “The mother tongue in the classroom: a neglected resource?”, Atkinson (1987) argues that very little attention is given to the use of the native language in the EFL classrooms and that the gap in methodological literature about it is presumably partly responsible for the uneasiness which many teachers, experienced and inexperienced, feel about using or not using native language in the classroom. Considering the historical of teaching EFL approaches presented in the introduction of this paper, it is possible to notice that there is a pendulous movement when it comes to the use of the mother tongue, passing through the overuse to its prohibition.

Although the pros and cons of using L1 to teach L2 have been neglected and ignored for a long time, in the last decades the interest in studying and researching it has been growing significantly (ATKINSON, 1987; COOK, 2001; CRISTOVÃO, 1996; among others).

The main arguments against using the mother tongue have been that it does not encourage learners to use the foreign language and that when the teacher uses the mother tongue it deprives the learners of input in the target language. According to Ellis (1997) L1 should be avoided in the classroom because of the “transfer”, term that refers to the influence that the mother tongue has on the learning process of L2, for instance the avoidance of structures on L2 that have no equivalent structure on L1. This is what Ellis (1997) calls negative transfer and points that the habits of L1 prevent the students from learning the habits of L2. Another argument for the exclusion of L1 in EFL classrooms is the conception that the first one just can be learned by its exclusive use. This is the idea defended by Krashen (1987) in his second language acquisition theory. According to this author the learner needs to be maximally exposed to L2 in order to the acquisition process be well succeed.

Cook (2001) points out that the avoidance of the L1 lies behind many teaching techniques, in fact most of teaching manuals consider this avoidance as so obvious that no classroom use of the L1 is ever mentioned, or if it is mentioned is in the list of problems in the classroom. However, several benefits of using L1 mother tongue have been proposed in literature and many researches as Atkinson (1987), Cook (2001), Cristovão (1996) point the advantages of the use of L1 as a facilitator for learning the L2. Butzkamm (2003) states that the use of L1 helps students to gain reliance and feel a friendly atmosphere in the classroom and Auerbach (1993) affirms that the use of L1 can reduce the affective barrier and alleviate the cultural shock and, consequently, contribute on L2 learning process.

Tang (2002, p. 39) claims that the L1 serves a "supportive and facilitating role in the classroom", and not that it is the primary language of communication.

From the author's point of view, the L1 use also allows students to become more aware of the similarities and differences between cultures and linguistic structures, and thus may improve the accuracy of translations.

According to Harbord (1992) through L1 we learn to think, to communicate and to acquire intuitive knowledge of universal grammar. In accordance with this idea Deller (2003) claims that L1 should be used as a resource to diagnose differences and similarities among two languages; to encourage spontaneity and fluency in order to have a beneficial effect on group dynamics and receive a meaningful feedback from the students.

Duff (1989, p. 6) defends the importance of L1 saying that “We all have a mother tongue, or first language. This shapes our way of thinking and to some extent our use of the foreign language”. Atkinson (1987) affirms that in the moments that the learner cannot express himself using L2, the use of L1 allows him to communicate. Harbord (1992) names these actions as an Affective-humanistic approach and argues that when these approaches are used to teach, it is emphasized the need to reduce anxiety<sup>4</sup> in early stages of language learning by allowing some use of the mother tongue. Bloor (1995) points out that the forms of interaction in the classroom must be seen as a natural process and should not cause tension in order to create a comfortable and safe environment of learning. Thus, it is clear for these researches that the use of L1 allays the language anxiety.

According to Cook (2001), if there is no over-riding obligation to avoid the L1, each use can be looked at on its merits. One factor to consider is efficiency: can something be done more effectively through the L1? A second

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<sup>4</sup> Language anxiety can be defined as the fear or apprehension occurring when a learner is expected to perform in the second or foreign language or the worry and negative emotional reaction when learning or using a second language (MacIntyre 1999).

factor is learning: will L2 learning be helped by using the L1 alongside the L2? The third factor is naturalness: do the participants feel more comfortable about some functions or topics in the first language rather than the second? The fourth factor is external relevance: will use of both languages help the students to master specific L2 uses they may need in the world beyond the classroom?

In fact, the pros and cons arguments presented above are plausible and directly related to the teacher practice, what brings us to a third option that seems more reasonable to our everyday teaching context: the use of L1 as a beneficial resource on teaching learning process, however with important restrictions to its use. The over use of the mother tongue can harm the acquisition of L2, Pacek (2003), believes that the overuse of L1 provokes an error transference of L1 to L2 and constant translation can result in a believe that there is always a perfect equivalence between the two languages and the use of constant translation, for instance is an evidence of problems in communication.

Another point of view is highlighted by Poullisse and Bongaerts (1994) who have studied the reasons for code switching, which is when the teacher switches from L1 to L2 or vice versa during the class. This code switching could happen to fulfill a linguistic need or for social/psychological purposes such as call students' attention, express emotions, change the subject etc.

Cristovão (1996) states that L1 is the language that represents the knowledge of the student about the world, however if the student uses this language without restrictions for unlimited time, he is harming his own learning. Thus, the teacher should have the role to distinguish the circumstances and effects of the L1 use, and in order to do that should become the ethnographer of his/her own work. Cristovão (1996) also points that L1 can co-build L2 not just as a strategy to associate lexical items and structures, but also as an instrument



of conciseness of the teacher on teaching L2 process and the transformations of the social relations in the classroom. For Hawks (2001), the mother tongue use should be selective and not seen as an easy option, and Mello (2004) points out that precautions must be taken because if two languages are being used to teach the same subject, there is a decrease on student's motivation to comprehend what is being taught in L2, after all depending on the teachers' language choice the student creates the believe that he can always appeal to the mother tongue.

In order to help teachers with this difficult language choice, some authors suggest some moments when the use of L1 is acceptable and can make part of the teaching learning process. Atkinson (1987) suggests that in order to determine the quantity of L1 use in the classroom teacher must consider factors as: the students background (if they are used to L2 in the classroom), level of the language knowledge (higher the level, lower the use of L1), stage of the course (the closer the relationship with the teacher, the easier to conduct the class on L1), the part of the lesson (L1 can be more useful on the beginning of the class, for instance). Cook (2001) considers as appropriate use of L1 when teacher is conveying meaning and organizing the class. Atkinson (1987) agrees and includes: a) To convey meaning; b) Check comprehension; c) Give instructions on basic levels; d) Explain methodology; e) Testing vocabulary; f) Develop periphrastic strategies. Auerbach (1993) points out moments of: a) negotiation of subjects; b) Classroom organization; c) Linguistic analysis, d) Grammar rules explanation; e) Intercultural issues discussions f) Instructions; g) Error clarification.

One interesting fact that research highlight is that although most of teachers see the use of L1 as a threat on EFL classrooms, they do use it. According to Deller (2003) and Gil and Greggio (2005), most of language

teachers relate the use of L1 to translation or grammar based method, but Atkinson (1987) argues that the same teachers that condemn L1, use it in their classes.

## THE USE OF L1 IN ELTC

When the discussion about the L1 usage is related to ELTC context, it becomes even more complex because children learn L2 in different ways and require different analysis of the influence of the use of L1 in the classroom. According to Cameron (2001), some differences in teaching English to very young learners are immediately obvious: children are more enthusiastic and lively learners; however they also lose interest more quickly and are less able to keep themselves motivated on tasks they don't understand or find it difficult. Another characteristic is that children do not have the same access as older learners to meta-language that teachers can use to explain grammar or discourse for instance. Very young learners often seem less embarrassed than adults and this lack of inhibition seems to help them to reproduce a new language.

Rocha (2007) claims that children do not present an uniform manner to learn a language and following this idea, Cameron (2001) and Brown (2001) conclude that teaching English to children transcends a selection of activities to be used in the classroom, it is about a process that requires the development of abilities and specific knowledge of the teacher in order to be able to develop the children's intellectual, take in consideration the short focus that the students have, the affective factors involved and to use the language in a meaningful purpose.

Tonelli and Tutida (2014) present some challenges to be overcome and knowledge to be mastered when teaching English to children. They claim that this is a specific context and requires a special attention. According to Rocha (2007, p. 283)<sup>5</sup> during the teaching/learning process of the ELTC there are important aspects to be taken into consideration, such as

the intellectual development of the child; the adequacy of the process to the child's focus of attention (generally short); the stimulus of all the child's senses during the process; the respect to the affective factors in teaching and, finally, the authentic and significant usage of language.

In the ELTC context it is very important to think about the language choice that teachers make in their classes. In many situations teachers are required to use only foreign language in their classroom, or they feel they should do, but in practice according to Cameron (2001) research and anecdotal evidence suggests that most teachers who share their pupils first language use a mixture of L1 and L2, and it is important to look at this evidence to find patterns of this language choice in order to develop the principle of "deliberate language choice" in which choice is guided by the overarching goal of fostering the children's foreign language learning. The author suggests that "this enable us to move away from the simple but impractical guideline 'use only the target language' to more subtle and helpful principles for language choice" Cameron (2001, p. 199). The same author concludes that teachers should use as much as possible of the target language and ensure that the use of the L1 supports the children's language learning.

There is a gap between policy and practice around using L2 and some reasons are pointed by Cameron (2001) as the fact that teachers do not feel

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<sup>5</sup> For other perspectives about teaching/learning process of the ELTC see Peixoto & Jaeger (2013).

sufficiently confident or competent to use the foreign language for the full range of functions a class involves. This would have to include a large repertoire of language for classroom management and organization, discipline, feedback, chatting informally etc. And also, asking for foreign language use only places teachers in a continual struggle against natural communication, if the teacher share the same mother tongue as the child, it seems unnatural and even frightening to the students to use only L2.

Pennington (1995) held a research with eight English teachers and came up with some patterns for L1 use in their classes, they are: a) explaining aspects of the foreign language; b) translating words\sentences; c) giving instructions; d) checking understanding; e) eliciting language; f) focusing pupils attention; g) testing ; h) talking about learning; i) giving feedback; j) disciplining control; k) informal talk with pupils. The same author, in her paper makes a distinction between compensatory and strategic uses of the two languages available to teachers. In compensatory use, teachers may adopt L1 in an attempt to compensate problems they perceive with their pupils' language level or ability, or discipline and motivation, and also the teacher's lack of confidence, preparation or language proficiency. The strategic motivations that Pennington suggests are related to creating and maintaining levels of formality and informality in classroom discourse, and structuring and controlling lessons and behaviors.

Cameron argues that the choice of language adds and creates a context in which language is to be learnt. This learning context includes the attitudes and values that pupils are encouraged to take when learning the foreign language and involves interpersonal factors, that according to Graumann (1990) can be divided in to 3 sub factors: a) Alignment – the teacher's choice of language can

convey to pupils a sense of how much their teacher is on their side or wishes to distance himself from the pupil's concerns; b) Emphasis – may serve to emphasize the importance of what is being said or the seriousness of the discipline language; c) Evaluation – a teacher who uses foreign language only for content of a lesson reinforces the idea that L2 is a subject of a study and not a mean of communication.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to investigate the patterns of L1 use in ELTC classrooms it was used an interpretative-qualitative research analyzing the data collected in a questionnaire applied with 18 English teachers who were, at the time, working with children<sup>6</sup> in public and private schools (chart 4) in Londrina-Paraná-Brazil. The data generated was organized and analyzed based on the literature review previously presented.

The profile of the teachers who answered the questionnaire is presented in charts 1, 2, 3, and 4:

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<sup>6</sup> In this research we are considering children students up to 12 years old, according to Children's and Teenagers' Statute (Law 8069/90, Brazil, 1990).

Chart 1: participant's Age

18 to 25 years old	13 teachers
26 to 30 years old	2 teachers
31 to 40 years old	2 teachers
41 to 50 years old	1 teacher

Source: the authors.

Chart 2: participant's Education background

Foundation Degree in Primary Teaching	3 teachers
Letras course	14 teachers
Another graduation course	2 teachers

Source: the authors.

Chart 3: participant's time experience in ELTC context

Less than a year	2 teachers
1 to 5 years	14 teachers
6 to 10 years	1 teacher
More than 20 years	1 teacher

Source: the authors.

Chart 4: participant's teaching context

Municipal school	6 teachers
State school	4 teachers
Regular private school	6 teachers
Language institution	12 teachers
Bilingual school	1 teacher

Source: the authors.

The questions which compose the questionnaire<sup>7</sup> are:

1. What is your opinion about the use of mother tongue (Portuguese) in English classes for children?
  
2. Does the methodology of the institution where you teach defend the predominance of the use of the target language (English) in the classes? Justify.
  
3. Do you use mother tongue in your English classes?
  - 3.1 If you do, with what purpose do you use it?

## DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

The questionnaire was applied between January 4th and January 11th 2016 with eighteen teachers from the ELCT context. The file was sent by email and sent back anonymously by the participants. The data was organized in graphics and analyzed according to the literature review presented.

The first question was related to teachers' opinion about the use of L1 in L2 classes. The opinions given by the teachers are seen by researches as beliefs, that according to Barcelos (2006) are modes of thinking, reality constructions, world perceptions and its phenomena, built in our experiences and resultant of an interactive process of interpretation and constant (re)signification.

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<sup>7</sup> It is important to highlight that although this paper is written in English the questions and their answers are in Portuguese in order to facilitate and create a comfortable environment for the participants.

The data showed us that 68% of the participants related that the mother tongue can be used in EFL classes in specific situations, 26% believe that L1 should be used by the teacher as the last resource, 5% declare that native language can be used in any teaching situation. None of the participants chose the option which said that L1 never should be used in the classroom.

When questioned about the institutions position about the use of L1 – second question - 84% of the teachers stated that the institution where they work, requires the exclusive use of L2 in the classroom, idea that can be grounded on the immersion approach that most of institutions offer in their language classes and as Krashen (1981), Duff and Polio (1990), Ellis (1997) argue that must be taken in consideration the importance of the target language use for the second language acquisition and any reduction of the target language would then be seen as a waste of opportunity for valuable input.

When asked to justify the institution position, most of the teachers used the discourse of immersion, maximum exposure to L2, input offer, and how the use of L1 is considered unnecessary on learning process as we can see on the excerpts: “Total immersion in English, using Portuguese as the last option and if extremely necessary and always by the intern, never by the teacher” (Participant A, bilingual school teacher). “The school believes that is not necessary to use Portuguese in classes. They say we have different tools available what makes Portuguese unnecessary” (Participant B, language institution teacher). “The more exposed the student is, better he\she learns” (Participant C, municipal school teacher).



These excerpts show the idea of a monolingual approach, commonly spread in language institutions in Brazil, which usually offer to learners this immersion environment for learning and require teachers to speak only L2 in the classroom, fact that according to Cameron (2001) places teachers in a continual struggle against natural communication.

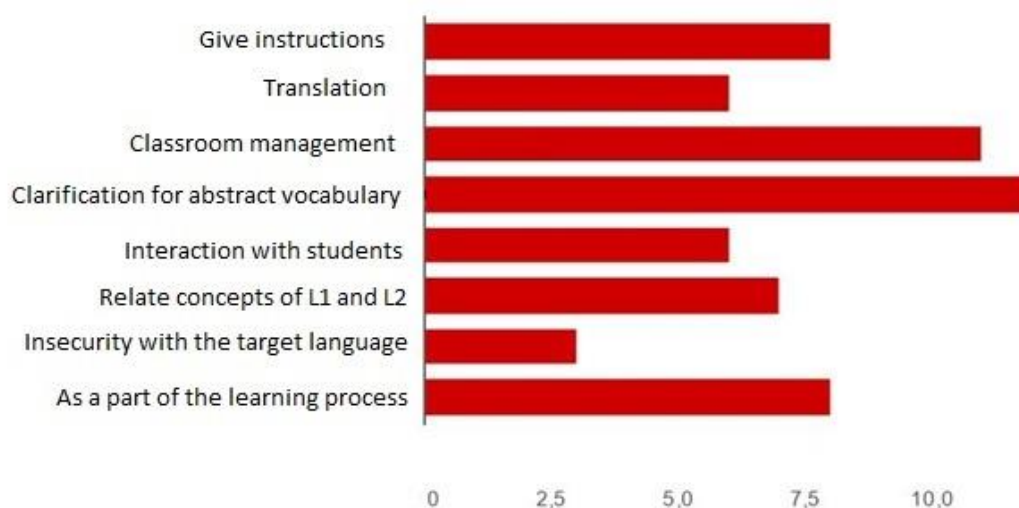
Only 15% of the participants observed that the institution they work for does not require the use of L2 in the classroom, and their justification falls in the indifference of the institution about the topic, as we can see in these excerpts: “There is no definition about the subject in my teaching context” (Participant D, state school teacher); “They never encouraged its use” (Participant E, state school teacher).

As mentioned before, Cook (2001) points out that in teaching training, institutions usually ask teachers to avoid using L1 or do not even mention this aspect because this avoidance is considered obvious. Thus, the use of L1 as claimed by Atkinson (1987) can be seen as a neglected resource. Despite the fact that 84% of the participants have mentioned that the institution where they work requires the predominance of L2 in the classroom, in the following question 31% of the teachers admitted using L1 constantly during their classes, and 57% recognized that the use of L1 is present in part of their classes (that will be presented later in this paper). Cameron (2001) argues that there is a gap between policy and practice around using L2 and evidence presented by the same author suggests that most teachers who share their pupils first language use a mixture of L1 and L2 in the classroom, however most of teachers are afraid of admitting the L1 use because it can be seen as a failure in their teaching skills, that is the reason why Cameron (2001) claims that is important to look at this

evidences to find patterns of the teacher's language choice to enable us to move away from the impractical guideline 'use only the target language' to more subtle and helpful principles for language choice.

To make it possible for us to create patterns for the use of L1 in the classroom, the participants who confirmed its use in their practice were asked to point out the purpose of this use. The graphic below represents the patterns mentioned by the teachers participants:

Graphic 1: purposes for using L1 in English classes



Source: the authors.

The purposes for using L1 mentioned by the teachers were divided by us in three groups: classroom management, teaching resources and social\individual motivation.

## Classroom management

The first group of actions denominated as classroom management was mentioned by several authors as an important role of the mother

tongue in EFL classrooms, Cook (2001), Atkinson (1987), Auerbach (1993), these authors suggest that teachers can use L1 when students have to understand what is being required specially when is related to discipline, tasks and behavior. Cameron (2001) points out that the choice of first or foreign language may serve to emphasize the importance of what is being said. The use of L1 in these cases can underline the seriousness of the teacher's speech, being more significant to the pupils. Most of teachers in ELTC context use L1 to set up rules with the students and to discuss behavior issues. In our survey, 11 teachers mentioned the use of L1 in classroom management in aspects such as to call pupils attention, to correct bad behaviors, to solve disagreements between students, to set up rules.

## **Teaching resources**

From the answers obtained it is also clear that most of the teachers involved in the research use L1 as a teaching resource. Twelve teachers pointed L1 as a useful tool to translate or relate a difficult or abstract vocabulary in the classroom. One participant affirmed this use: "When I cannot continue the class because of one word" (Participant F, private school teacher), Cook (2001) argues that in some situations, all other resources have been used to provide the meaning of a word or sentence however the students were not able to understand it the teacher can offer it in L1. Another aspect related to the use of L1 as a teaching resource is to relate concepts of the mother tongue with the foreign language, seven teachers have mentioned this on the questionnaire and Deller (2003) claims that L1 should be used as a resource to diagnose differences and

similarities among two languages; to encourage spontaneity and fluency in order to have a beneficial effect on group dynamics and receive a meaningful feedback from the students.

Eight teachers mentioned giving instructions as a significant use of L1, idea supported by Atkinson (1987) that argues that sometimes explaining an activity in the target language can be complicated in early levels what may lead teachers to appeal to L1, but again the author reinforce that the teacher should always try to give the instructions in the target language first and use L1 as a facilitator only.

Some participants did not specify an aspect of L1 use but mentioned it as a part of the teaching\learning process, for instance one participant declared “I use the mother tongue according to the learning needs of the students, it is part of the process” (Participant G, private school teacher), this attitude is taken from those who see the use of L1 as a facilitator of the learning process, as defended by Cook (2001) if there is no over-riding obligation to avoid the L1, each use can be looked at on its merits. The same author affirms that the teacher must to identify if the use of L1 is a facilitator in his\her classes and in order to do that some factors must be taken in consideration. One factor to consider is efficiency: can something be done more effectively through the L1? A second factor is learning: will L2 learning be helped by using the L1 alongside the L2? The third factor is naturalness: do the participants feel more comfortable about some functions or topics in the first language rather than the second? The fourth factor is external relevance: will use of both languages help the students to master specific L2 uses they may need in the world beyond the classroom?

## Social/individual motivations

The third reason to use L1 identified on teachers' answers was related to social\individual motivations. Some teachers mentioned the use of L1 in situations which apparently there is a lack of language. Three teachers pointed the use of mother tongue when they feel insecure with vocabulary or structure of the target language, situation that happens with most of teachers during their career but it must be seen with caution to not become a recurrent strategy, as it was presented in this paper, the use of L1 should be a language choice made with a purpose and Mello (2004) argues that this attitude from the teacher can give the students the sensation that there is no need to use L2 since they can always appeal to L1 just like their teacher does.

Atkinson (1987) suggests that teacher must take into consideration some aspects to make the language choice: the students background (if they are used to L2 in the classroom), level of the language knowledge (higher the level, lower the use of L1), stage of the course (the closer the relationship with the teacher, the easier to conduct the class on L1), the part of the lesson (L1 can be more useful on the beginning of the class, for instance). Another pattern mentioned in this group is the interaction with students, which can be related to the affective function of learning process. Atkinson (1987) affirms that in the moments that the learner cannot express himself using L2, the use of L1 allows him to communicate. Harbord (1992) names this actions as Affective-humanistic approach and argues that when this approach is used to teach, it is emphasized the need to reduce anxiety in early stages of language learning by allowing some use of the

mother tongue. Language anxiety is aroused when pupils have communication anxiety, fear of negative social evaluation, or academic evaluation and it has a strong effective influence on second language acquisition. Bloor (1995) points out that the forms of interaction in the classroom must be seen as natural and should not cause tension in order to create a comfortable and safe environment of learning. Thus, it is clear for this researches that the use of L1 allays the language anxiety.

The feedback is also considered as an interaction between teachers and students and Cook (2001) highlight that despite the fact that most of teachers try to provide feedback in English, they feel that it is more effective to do it in L1, because it becomes more real and meaningful to the pupil who will probably feel comfortable to participate and get involved. It is important to remember that when it is related to the context of teaching a foreign language to children, the environment takes an significant role on learning because as exposed before in this paper, children must to feel safe and comfortable in the classroom what may lead the teacher to take a special attention to language choice.

In this section we described the data collected and our analysis based on the authors mentioned in the literature review of this paper. Some conclusions can be stated: a) the majority of teachers who participated use L1 in their classes and believe that it is a facilitator on the learning process; b) Language institutions require teachers to use only L2, approach that can impede a dialogue about the subject; c) teachers have different patterns and conceptions for the use of L1 in the classroom. The L1 and/or L2 usage was identified in this article as: classroom management, teaching resources and social\individual motivations.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The process of teaching a foreign language involves different concepts that should not be taken as immutable. The use of L1 in L2 classes has always been a controversial topic among researchers and it still is a difficult aspect for teachers to evaluate its role in teaching a foreign language. When it comes to ELTC context with all its singularities, it becomes even more complex to determine the amount of L1 that should be used with the pupils. The data collected in this research showed that most of teachers involved believe that L1 can be used as a facilitator in the classroom and although the majority of institutions require the use of L2 only, the participants stated that they do use L1 in their classes. It was observed that although the participants have not received instructions about the usage or the amount of L1, they created some patterns for its use in their classes, patterns that were classified by us into three groups: classroom management, teaching resources and social\individual motivations.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that the teaching context, i.e., public, private, bilingual school, as well as the children's age might influence the teacher's decision whether to use mother tongue in the ELTC or not. Hence, establishing a rule whether to use L1 or not can be as dangerous as stating that childhood is the best age to learn another language. In accordance to Cameron (2001) who argues that if there is no over-riding obligation to avoid the L1, each use can be looked at on its merits, we believe that the results of this data suggest that the use of the

mother tongue must be discussed to expand horizons of the teachers and enable them to use this resource as a facilitator creating patterns for their language choices in the classroom.

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