

## **A Study of Target Language Use in the Beginning-Upper level EFL University Classroom**

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Most teachers attempt to look for the “best” method and/or approach to teaching their given subject. Language teachers are no exception. While formal training in applied linguistics and/or language acquisition is not preemptory to teach foreign languages, all teachers have a personal theory as to what is the most effective way to teach language, and this is often supported by anecdotal evidence rather than actual research. This is especially true in regards to the use of the target language (TL) in the second language (SL) and foreign language (FL) classrooms, as seen by the strong beliefs teachers may have regarding use of the TL, with little research for a basis.

When developing their own theory of language teaching, many teachers may refer to the general theories concerning how languages are learned, at times using first language acquisition as a model. The Communicative Approach is based on the L1 model; among other characteristics, it does not emphasize drills on structure and form, as does the Audio-Lingual Method. Instead, effective communication is sought. However, one of the few things that the Audio-Lingual Method and the Communicative Approach have in common is the discouragement of L1 use (Richards and Rodgers, 1986, p. 67).

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Obviously, the primary (overt) objective in language learning is to learn the target language, but whether this means banishing or even limiting the use of the L1 in the classroom is a matter of debate. Both Suggestopedia and Community Language Learning rely heavily on the use of L1. In both approaches, everything is translated at the beginning stages between the languages, and grammar explanations are given in the L1. In these approaches, there is a strong possibility that the L1 is used *more* than the L2 at the early stages. The drawback of both approaches is that they are not very practical (some might suggest impossible) in a multi-lingual class. Therefore, they may not be an effective way to teach in the SL classroom, compared to other methods which use 100% of the TL. These different beliefs have fueled an on-going debate on the use of the target language in the classroom.

### **Debate on target language use in the FL classroom**

One source of the debate on the amount of target language use in the classroom is that FL instructors may teach classes using theories/approaches created for the SL classroom. They do not consider the differences in target language input outside of the classroom or the students' reasons for study. Moreover, the teacher and/or administrator may ignore whether or not the L1 community is monolingual or multi-lingual as well as the importance the community places on the target language. In addition, they may not consider the culture in which the FL language is being taught. A dogmatic "Don't use the L1!" may be more a display of cultural prejudice than pedagogic science. In terms of learning styles, some people learn best by seeing, others by hearing, and still others by moving physically. There is little doubt that learning style is also influenced by culture. Is it lack of context that prevents Arab students from guessing new words, or is it that their preferred modality is hearing the word in their own language before it becomes real in English (Starratt, 1994)? If the students are not immersed in the culture of the TL, should they be expected to adapt to the learning style preferred by the teacher and that culture?

Choosing a method/approach based solely upon its popularity with SL teachers and teacher training institutions may, in fact, be a hindrance to the FL student. In doing so, one may actually be teaching to the minority of students: those who have had previous exposure to the target language, its culture, and/or to that method. Studies have not been done to support that students may adjust to the teaching approach of their current teacher, irrespective of the amount of TL or L1 in the classroom instruction. To justify this theory through research alone is difficult; there are simply too many variables to consider. However, one may conduct a study to examine different approaches in target language use in the FL classroom in order to assess if differences exist in the students' performance of the target language, in order to see if there is a correlation between L2 support and the subjects' language performance. As mentioned previously, some methods (i.e., Suggestopedia and Community Methods) are based on L1 use in the

classroom. A study of the effectiveness of TL versus L1 use in the classroom would provide much needed information on FL instruction which could assist the teacher in deciding which method/approach might best be suitable for his/her classroom.

### **Motivation for research**

As discussed above, there is little research to justify total use of target language in the FL classroom. The research that does exist is usually based on SL classroom situations and/or children learning the language (Atkinson, 1987; Auerbach, 1993; Duff & Polio, 1990; Duff & Polio, 1994; Met & Lorenz, 1997). This present study examines target language use in two basic EFL university courses. Since there is a noticeable gap in research on FL learners at the university level, it will address some of the issues discussed above. It is hoped it will contribute useful information to the literature and encourage other related projects.

### **Previous research on the use of the target language in the classroom**

Classroom language has been studied by applied linguists for decades, especially in the area of SL teaching/learning. Long (1984) makes the following assumption regarding the teacher's role in the language classroom:

In many instances of second language acquisition (SLA) with the aid of formal instruction, including both foreign and second language learning, it is reasonable to assume that what goes on inside the classroom, including the teacher's role in this, is the single most crucial element in determining how students perform (as cited by Duff & Polio, 1994, p. 313).

Clearly, Long's statement applies to both SL and FL classrooms. However, there is little doubt that the importance of input in the FL classroom is extremely high, as students will usually receive little or no input in the L2 outside of the classroom. While there are other factors that affect students' performance in the L2, the amount of input is still regarded as highly important by researchers. Higgs (1982) claims that:

In making the unavailable available, the teacher's role is one of facilitating the active use of the target language in the classroom, presenting the best possible model of the language, providing feedback, guidance, and reinforcement, and making available target-language data in terms of "comprehensible input," that is, the natural unconstrained use of the target language in the classroom (as cited by Duff & Polio, 1994, p. 313).

Schweers (1999) conducted a study on the amount of target language use in several EFL university classrooms in Puerto Rico. His research included surveys to measure attitudes toward L1 use. The results showed that 88.7% of the student subjects felt that Spanish should be used in their English classes and 100% of the

classroom, despite the fact that many researchers insist that FL learners need as much exposure as possible to L2 input during limited class time. They were not queried on why they chose to use the L1.

While many argue that the L2 should be the primary language of the FL classroom, some instructors believe the L1 needs to be used in certain situations. Atkinson (1987) listed appropriate uses for the L1 in the L2 classroom. He suggested using it for eliciting language, checking comprehension, giving instructions to basic levels, cooperating in groups, explaining classroom methodology at basic levels, using translation to highlight a recently taught language item, checking for meaning, testing, and developing circumlocution strategies (Atkinson, 1987, pp. 243 - 246). Auerbach (1993) also suggested situations in which to use the L1: record keeping, classroom management, language analysis, presentation of rules governing grammar, phonology/morphology/spelling, assessment of comprehension, explanation of rules, instructions or prompts, scene setting, explanation of errors, and the negotiation of the syllabus.

This belief that the L1 should be used in certain circumstances goes against theories suggested by other researchers. Ellis (1984) argued for TL instruction for both language-related and classroom management functions:

In the ESL classroom . . . the L2 [is] inevitably used for these functions. In the EFL classroom, however, teachers sometimes prefer to use the pupils' L1 to explain and organize a task and to manage behaviour in the belief that this will facilitate the medium-centred [language-related] goals of the lesson. In so doing, however, they deprive the learners of valuable input in the L2 (p. 133).

In sum, most researchers suggest maximum use of TL in FL classes, with the belief that it provides the necessary exposure for second language acquisition that is minimally (if at all) provided outside the classroom. However, as Schweers (1999) discovered, what researchers theorize about and what teachers actually practice may be completely different. This was further supported by scholars such as Auerbach (1993) and Atkinson (1987), who view second language acquisition from a sociolinguistic perspective. Instead of just considering the cognitive processes of language learning, they also examined the sociolinguistic effects on language learning (i.e., amount of TL input available outside of the classroom). However, they represent the minority in favor of L1 use in the FL classroom.

### **Research plan**

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The specific area of research in this study is the use of the target language in the university-level EFL classes. The project is concerned with approaches and strategies used by the teachers to present grammar lessons in either total TL instruction or with use of the L1 in an upper-basic level course.

The main purpose of this study is to document two approaches to instruction: one which implements total TL instruction (as suggested by most researchers) and one which may well be more common (use of the L1 in certain circumstances). It has been conducted within the qualitative paradigm, with some quantitative evidence supplied as a means to establish triangulation. The qualitative information is used as a means to attempt to account for the quantitative data (see Figure 1).

Since all the learners were enrolled in the same English course (different sections), one can assume that they are at the same level of proficiency. In order to verify this, the researcher used the UDLA-P placement exams as a pre-test.

Because little opportunity exists for exposure to the L2 outside the classroom (e.g., a low population of native speakers in the learning environment in Puebla), the *quantity* of L2 input is assumed to be especially important, as it provides a necessary condition for language acquisition. The *quality* of L2 is also greatly important, but that issue is beyond the scope of this study.

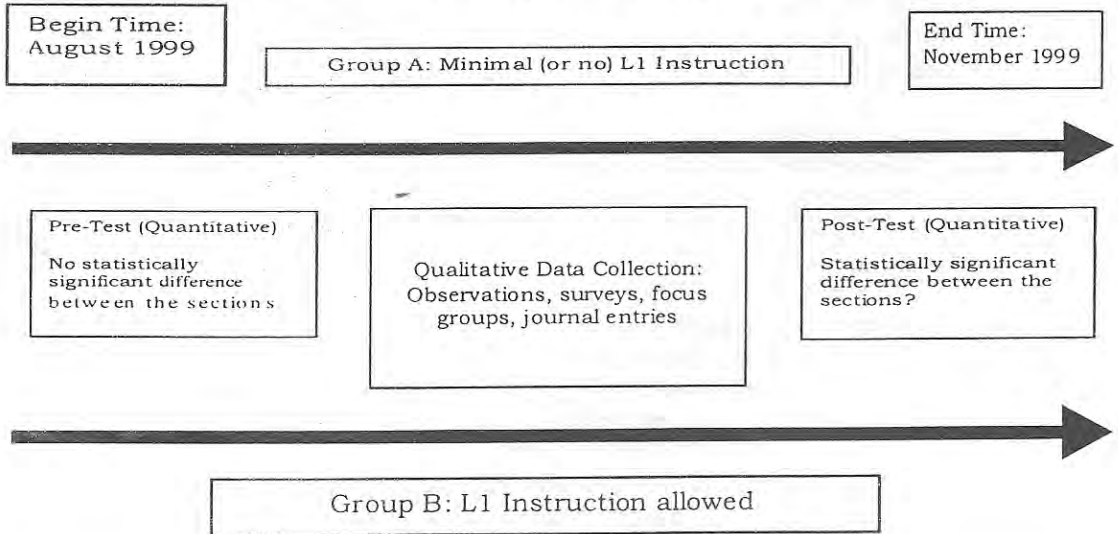


Figure 1: Flow chart illustrating the data collection framework

### **Research questions**

The study focused on finding answers to the following areas of concern. First, are there different strategies used by the teachers in handling the teaching of the same grammar points depending on whether they use TL or L1 in the lesson? Second, are there differences in the post-test scores between the two sections? Third, if differences in post-test scores exist between the two sections, could the amount of TL use in the classroom explain the differences? And finally, do students become accustomed to the teaching approach, irrespective of the amount of the TL or L1? The researcher will attempt to identify a relationship between approaches/strategies and language learning. The researcher is aware that there are other comparisons that could be made; however, the main focus in the study was the comparison between post-test averages of both sections.

### **Description of the subjects and participants**

The classes chosen for the study were two different sections of an upper-basic level English class at the Universidad de las Américas, Puebla. The subjects had been placed in the level based on their performance on the university English placement examination. Due to the importance and prestige placed on learning English, it can safely be assumed that the majority of the students had studied English for a number of years prior to enrollment at the university. This was confirmed by the background information questionnaire that was distributed. Therefore, the subjects represent a special group of learners: false beginners who, for a variety of reasons, have not acquired a higher level of English proficiency. Each class had three students who did not take the UDLA-P placement exam immediately prior to enrollment in their courses. These students were not considered part of the subject pool as a means to attempt to minimize any differences between the two groups at the beginning of the semester.

There were two teachers involved in the study. This was decided for two reasons: first, to ease the amount of outside planning the teacher had to do for his/her classes; second, to ease tensions within the department in case students complained about the same teacher using two different methods for two different sections of the same level.

The first teacher is a native speaker of English. She is a "master teacher," meaning she earned her master's degree in an area related to language teaching. She has been teaching English as a foreign language for approximately 10 years. She teaches her classes using no (or absolute minimal) L1 input in her instruction.

The second teacher is a native Spanish speaker. He is a second-year graduate student at the Universidad de las Américas, Puebla. He has been teaching English as a foreign language for approximately 13 years. He teaches his classes using the L1 for specific purposes.

## **Design**

The study was carried out as a case study of two sections of a second semester basic level university EFL course. As mentioned previously, it consisted mainly of qualitative data, with some quantitative data to establish triangulation

### **Quantitative data**

The quantitative data in the study included a pre-test and a post-test. The tests were two versions of the Universidad de las Américas—Puebla (UDLA-P) placement exam. Both exams consisted of multiple choice questions in three areas: grammar, reading, and listening. The fourth section, writing an essay, was not considered in the current study due to its subjectivity. Both exams have been checked for validity and reliability by the mathematics department of the university.

The students were administered the pre-test upon entering the UDLA-P and prior to enrolling in their courses. The scores were tallied via computer. The post-test was given in the last week of classes during the semester of the study. The researcher was given an answer key and used this to grade the exam.

### **Qualitative data**

#### **Questionnaires**

Three questionnaires were distributed to the subjects throughout the semester. The researcher is proficient in Spanish and designed the questionnaires in Spanish. In order to allow the students to best express themselves and to assist in the validation of the results, a native speaker of Spanish checked the questionnaires to ensure that they were comprehensible to the subjects. The questionnaires were designed to maintain confidentiality, so students were not asked their names or their student ID numbers. The responses were coded by the researcher and, when applicable, three native Spanish speakers. The coders had been trained before beginning the coding process. Items that were open-ended and could be placed on a scale to show range/amount of time and/or percentages were coded. The other items were used as descriptive information.

The first questionnaire was distributed at the beginning of the semester. It consisted of questions that would elicit background information from the subjects, including their heritage, language used at home, number of English courses prior to the semester of this study, and out-of-class activities in which the subject participates that include English. In qualitative studies, it is important that the subjects of the study have the same basic characteristics in order to protect the internal validity of the subject selection process (Hatch & Lazaraton, 1990, p. 34). Since this study was based on an ethnographic approach to data collection and the subjects were chosen by their having enrolled in the course, this questionnaire was utilized in order to assess the basic ecological characteristics of each class. The information was tallied to find percentages of students who were multilingual and/or had been exposed to English for a number of years, and a com-

parison between the two subject groups was made. This was done in an attempt to verify a basic commonality between the subjects at the beginning of the semester, as well as to help explain any differences, or lack thereof, in the quantitative test scores.

The second questionnaire was designed to elicit the informants' knowledge of common classroom phrases in and statements of English to ask/answer questions in class. It consisted of statements (i.e., I understand when the teacher asks me in English to raise my hand) to which the informants were asked to show agreement (yes/no responses). These were tallied and each question was averaged for its corresponding class. These averages were then compared to see if there were any noticeable differences between the classes.

The third questionnaire was administered at the end of the semester; it elicited the subjects' opinions about the use of English in the classroom. It was a modified version of a questionnaire used in a similar study (Schweers, 1999) in Puerto Rico. It was in this questionnaire that subjects were asked to select what percentage of class they believed should be taught in the target language. As with the previous questionnaires, the results were tallied and averaged for each class and a comparison was made to highlight any noticeable differences.

In addition to the subjects, the two teachers were also given the third questionnaire to elicit their attitude toward utilizing the target language in the classroom. This was done with the hope of seeing if their answers correlated with what they actually did in their classrooms.

### **Transcriptions**

The qualitative data collected also consisted of four transcribed class observations. They were recorded (via tape recorder) and transcribed by the researcher. The transcriptions were then checked by the coders to ensure the analysis of the data was not just based on the researcher's opinion, but rather agreed upon by all. The coders consisted of native Spanish speakers. One with an MBA in business, one with an MA in language teaching, and one with a BA in language teaching. They were asked to note when Spanish was used in both classrooms and to decide upon the function for its use (e.g., to explain grammar, to socialize with the students, etc.). Their answers were then checked to see if there were any disagreements and the process was discussed until all answers were agreed upon. Although it is recommendable to observe, record, and transcribe all class sessions of the two groups, the ability to do so was beyond the scope of this project. However, it would be an informative addition to the data, if the current project were to be repeated.

In addition to the class observations, the researcher also recorded (via tape recorder) and transcribed a focus group interview with both classes. A na-



tive Spanish speaker performed the function of group facilitator while the researcher sat in the back of the room and recorded the comments on a tape recorder. Each group consisted of eight students that were chosen randomly through a name draw. The focus group interview was done at the end of the semester; the subjects were then told the purpose of the study and were asked specific questions in relation to their preferences concerning the amount of target language use in the classroom. They were asked about previous classes that they have had and how much the target language was used. They were then asked about the English class in which they were currently enrolled and the use of the target language (when and how often) as well as their own preferences. In order to provide a sense of security for the subjects, they were informed that their names would not be recorded and that their teachers would not listen to the cassette recording.

### **Journal entries**

It was decided to ask the subjects to write two focused journal entries with the hope that this task would elicit more information about the subjects' opinions regarding TL use in the classroom by the instructor as well as obtain more information regarding exposure to the TL outside of the classroom. On two different days, the students were instructed by their respective teachers to write an entry in Spanish or English focusing on the following questions (one per day). First, they were asked to reflect on the lesson of the day and the use of English in that day's lesson. They were asked to note how they felt about the instructor's choice in language use during the lesson. This would be a reflection on the TL use during that day's lesson. Second, they were asked to reflect on when and where they are exposed to or use English outside of the classroom. This was done in an attempt to record more information on the frequency and type of TL input outside of the class. For both entries students were instructed not to include their names or student identification numbers with the hope that they would feel more secure in writing their responses.

### **Data analysis**

The majority of the data collected was qualitative. When possible, the researcher analyzed the data and placed it on charts (e.g., tallying yes and no responses). However, some data required the assistance of coders in an attempt to ensure the correct analysis of the data. This was mainly done with the transcriptions and journal entries, where the analysis may be subjective, and therefore open to some interpretation. The coders were asked to help consider various interpretations of the data and to decide on the most common and most likely interpretation.

The researcher is aware that some studies opt to provide inter-coder reliability scores as a means of establishing validity and reliability to the data that was coded. However, because the items that were coded did not offer a high degree of variance for inference, it was decided not to calculate the inter-coder reliability score. The studies most related to this current study (Duff & Polio, 1993; Schweers, 1999) also did not calculate their inter-coder reliability.

The results of the pre-test and post-test were tabulated using t-tests. T-tests are normally used with groups where there is a low level of variance between the means of the two subject populations. In the subject population of the current study, many variables could not be controlled, per se, but were rather monitored and accounted for via the qualitative data collected. Again, the study is based on an ethnographic approach with the quantitative data added as a means of triangulation.

#### **Findings for the qualitative section**

The total number of subjects for both groups combined was 42. As described in Table 1, Group A (the subjects who had L2 immersion in the classroom) consisted of 21 participants, or 50% of the sample. The subjects in Group B (those who experienced the L1 in the teacher's explanations) consisted of 21 participants or 50% of the subject sample. The two groups were exactly the same size.

Table 1  
Description of subject groups A and B

<b>Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Percentage of subject sample</b>
A (L2 immersion)	21	50
B (L1 allowed)	21	50

To review briefly the methodology, the pre-tests and post-tests generated scores of participants' performance on two versions of the UDLA-P placement exam that was administered before and at the end of the semester-long study. Both exams were multiple choice and had sections which focused on grammar, reading, and listening. There were a total of 56 questions on both exams. The number of correct responses was divided by 56 in order to calculate the average. The average of each class was then calculated to find the mean (Table 2). A t-test was administered on the results of both exams in an attempt to find any statistically significant difference between the two sections.

Table 2

Table 2

Group information for the pre-test

<b>Group</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Variance</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Std. Err.</b>
A (immersion)	21	45.667	15.833	3.979	.868
B (L1 allowed)	21	46.857	15.629	3.953	.863

The table illustrates a breakdown of information per subject group. The number of subjects, mean, variance, standard deviation, and standard error of mean are given. The unpaired t-test results for the pre-test are followed in Table 3.

Table 3

Unpaired t-test for the pre-test

<b>Group</b>	<b>Mean Diff.</b>	<b>DF</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>P-value</b>
A, B	-1.190	40	-.973	.3366

The critical value required in a one-tail hypothesis with the established level of significance of .05 is 1.684. The t-value of the pre-test for both groups was -.973. Through comparison with the critical value, one can assume that there is no significant difference between the two subject groups, and therefore that they were at similar levels of proficiency at the beginning of the study.

Table 4

Group information for the post-test

<b>Group</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Variance</b>	<b>Std. Dev.</b>	<b>Std. Err.</b>
A (Immersion)	21	43.667	150.833	12.82	12.680
B (L1 allowed)	21	45.333	87.733	9.367	2.044

The table illustrates a breakdown of information per subject group. The number of subjects, mean, variance, standard deviation, and standard error of mean are given. The unpaired t-test results for the post-test are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5  
Unpaired t-test for the post-test

Group Value	Mean Diff.	DF	t-Value	P-
A, B	-1.667	40	-.494	.6237

The critical value required in a one-tail hypothesis with the established level of significance of .05 is 1.684. The t-value of the post-test for both groups was -.494. Through comparison with the critical value, one can assume that there is no significant difference between the two subject groups, and therefore the two subject groups were at similar levels of proficiency at the end of the semester.

Thus, for the pre-test and post-test, it is clear that, at both the beginning and the end of the semester, there was no significant difference between the two subject groups. Therefore, one can assume that, in this study, there is no significant difference in the proficiency level of the students who received instruction using the L2 primarily and those who were instructed using both the L1 and L2.

It is interesting to note that the means of both groups were lower on the post-test than the pre-test. There are a couple of possibilities that may explain this difference. First, although both exams were tested for validity and reliability by the mathematics department of the university, they were designed at separate times. Therefore, there is a possibility that the items are not equal in "difficulty." Second, the post-test was administered at the end of the semester, when the subjects were pre-occupied with final projects and exams. The high amount of stress at this time of the semester may also have contributed to the low scores. Finally, the subjects were told that their scores on the exams would not negatively affect their grades in the class. This may have placed their priority on simply completing the exam and not necessarily on completing it successfully (i.e., with a high score). It is possible, therefore, to assume that the cause of the lower post-test mean is either a difference in the exams, the motivation of the students, or a combination of both. Since the focus for the quantitative data was a comparison between the two sections' scores on the post-test, any further examination on the different scores between the pre-test and post-test is beyond the scope of this study.

### Qualitative section

The qualitative data collected consists of responses to three student questionnaires, responses to one teacher questionnaire, transcripts of class observations, transcripts of focus group discussions, and journal entries. Throughout the study, Group A refers to the subject group which received all (or most) instruction in English; Group B refers to the subject group that received instruction in both the L1 and L2. An explanation of the results immediately follows Table 8.

Table 6

#### Questionnaire 1: Background information (administered at the beginning of the semester.

		<b>Group A</b>	<b>Group B</b>
Which language do you speak at home?		(English Immersion)	(L1 allowed)
	Spanish	100%	100%
	English	0%	0%
	Other	0%	0%
	Two or more of the above	0%	0%
Indicate the nationality of:		<b>Group A</b>	<b>Group B</b>
Father	Mexican	100%	100%
	Other	0%	0%
Mother	Mexican	100%	100%
	Other	0%	0%
Paternal Grandparents	Mexican	98%	98%
	Other	2%(Spanish)	2% (French)
Maternal Grandparents	Mexican	98%	98%
	Other	2%(Spanish)	2% (French)
Siblings	Mexican	100%	100%
Servants	Mexican	100%	100%
How long have you studied English?		<b>Group A</b>	<b>Group B</b>
	Primary +	0%	0%
	Middle School+	5%	0%
	High School+	13%	14%
	University	82%	86%
What is your motive for studying English?		<b>Group A</b>	<b>Group B</b>
	Personal	27%	33%
	Required class in the program	32%	24%
	Future employment	41%	43%

In what situations do you use English (e.g., with your friends, in special ceremonies, etc.)?

Friends	18%	14%
Foreigners	56%	24%
Job	4%	0%
Entertainment (movies)	13%	14%
Class only	9%	48%

Which study aids/materials do you use to study English at home?

None	9%	18%
Books	77%	80%
Magazines	27%	25%
TV	50%	43%
Cassettes	41%	40%
Newspapers	9%	0%
Music	13%	0%

Table 7

**Questionnaire 2: Beliefs on TL comprehension and production (administered at the end of the semester).**

	<b>Group A</b>	<b>Group B</b>
I can understand when the teacher asks me in English to:		
Repeat something	100%	100%
Raise my hand	87%	83%
Listen	100%	96%
Find a partner	87%	96%
Get out my book	100%	100%
I can understand when the teacher asks in English:		
If I am ready	83%	87%
If I have finished	96%	100%
If I have understood	93%	96%
I can say in English when:		
I don't understand	93%	83%
I don't know the answer	87%	61%
I don't know how to say something	74%	61%
I want something repeated	94%	91%
In English, I am able to:		
Say if I like something	96%	96%
Say if I don't like something	87%	96%
Say if I am pleased	93%	96%
Congratulate someone	83%	91%

	Group A	Group B
Attract the teacher's attention	78%	70%
I have used the language to:		
Work with a partner	57%	78%
Work in a group	43%	70%
Play a game	39%	70%
Work on the computer	87%	87%
-I listen hard and try to understand what is said.	96%	65%
-I can understand the words for most of the things in the classroom.	83%	87%
-I understand short simple instructions.	100%	100%
-There are lots of words and phrases the teacher uses which I understand.	78%	87%
-I usually manage to understand what the teacher says even though I don't know every word.	96%	96%
-I know the words for some classroom objects.	57%	78%
-I know a few simple phrases and I use them whenever possible.	93%	87%
-I can use a lot of short simple phrases.	100%	96%
-If I don't know how to name something, I can find out.	93%	83%
-I can usually manage to make myself understood, even if I don't know the correct expressions.	61%	61%
-I can change the expression I have learned in order to say something different.	78%	52%
I can use a lot of phrases without having to think about it.	48%	35%
I can usually work out how to say what I want to.	70%	74%

Table 8

Questionnaire 3: Attitudes toward use of L1. Administered at the end of the semester

Should Spanish be used in the classroom?

**Group A (English immersion)**

Yes 37% No 63%

**Group B (L1 allowed)**

Yes 63% No 37%

Do you like your teacher to use Spanish in class?

		<b>Group A</b>	
<b>Group B</b>	Not at all	5%	0%
	A little	48%	21%
	Sometimes	42%	63%
	A lot	5%	16%

When do you think it's appropriate to use Spanish in English class?

		<b>Group A</b>	
<b>Group B</b>	To explain difficult concepts	89%	100%
	To introduce new material	48%	50%
	To summarize material already covered	5%	21%
	To test	11%	25%
	To joke around with students	11%	8%
	To help students feel more comfortable and confident	21%	38%
	To check for comprehension	26%	38%
	To carry out small-group work	11%	13%
	To explain the relationship between English and Spanish	42%	54%
	To define new vocabulary items	74%	88%

What percent of the time do you think Spanish should be used?

<b>Time</b>	<b>Group A</b>	<b>Group B</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Group A</b>	<b>Group B</b>
0%	0%	0%	50%	0%	21%
10%	59%	4%	60%	0%	4%
20%	5%	8%	70%	0%	0%
30%	26%	38%	80%	5%	4%
40%	5%	21%	90%	0%	0%
			100%	0%	0%



If you prefer the use of Spanish in your class, why?

	<b>Group A</b>	<b>Group B</b>
It's more comfortable	30%	22%
I am less tense	10%	17%
I feel less lost	20%	39%
Other	40%	22%
Items listed under "other"	Instructions New concept Vocabulary clarification	For a difficult concept Grammar explanation

Do you believe using Spanish in the classroom helps you learn this language?

	<b>Group A</b>	<b>Group B</b>
No	21%	17%
A little	58%	17%
Somewhat	0%	33%
A lot	0%	4%
Yes (always)	21%	29%

The results for each questionnaire were tabulated and calculated into percentages. This was done as a means to highlight similarities and differences between the two subject groups in their responses. The decision to use percentages was based on previous studies (Duff & Polio, 1993; Schweers, 1999) that used a similar method with their questionnaire results.

Questionnaire 1 (Table 6) was designed to provide background information on the subjects. It reveals that 100% of the subjects in both groups do not practice the TL in the home. Moreover, it shows that none of the subjects have relatives or servants who are native speakers of the TL. The majority of subjects in both groups have recently started studying EFL. This, in turn, explains their low proficiency in the TL. There is no great variance in the response to the motivation for learning English. Both groups had the highest percentage of responses in relation to learning the TL for use in a future job opportunity. In regards to what situations the subjects use English, striking differences lie in the use with foreigners (56% in Group A versus 24% in Group B) and only in class (9% in Group A versus 48% in Group B). This suggests that, at least at the beginning of the semester, the subjects of Group A may have been more inclined to using the TL outside of the classroom. This is further supported by the differences in responses regarding which study aids/materials the subjects used to study English at home. Only 9% of the subjects of Group A responded "none," compared to 18% in Group B. Moreover, there was a greater percentage of responses in Group A for newspapers (9%) and music (13%) than in Group B (0% in both items). This, again, may suggest a higher motivation to use the L2 outside of the classroom for

the subjects in Group A. This is an interesting difference, considering that the students randomly were assigned into their sections via the registration process (enrollment).

Questionnaire 2 (Table 7) was designed to elicit the comfort level in expressing oneself and understanding the TL in the classroom. It was distributed at the end of the semester in order to assess if there were differences between the subject groups in their beliefs of their comprehension and performance of the TL in the classroom environment. Basically, there were few salient differences between the groups. The differences that do exist mainly involve using the TL as part of in-class activities. While the percentages for using the language to work in a group and to play a game for Group A were 43% and 39%, respectively, Group B responded with 70% for both items. This suggests that the teacher for Group B may have provided more opportunity for the subjects to use the TL through group activities in-class. This theory was confirmed through class observation. One must note that these two items do not ask whether the subjects *can* use the language in these situations, but rather *if* they have.

The third questionnaire was designed to elicit the beliefs of the subjects in regard to the use of the TL in the classroom. There were striking differences in the responses between the two subject groups. When asked whether Spanish should be used in the classroom, the responses between the two groups were opposites. Group A responded 63% against using the L1 in the classroom, while Group B had 63% respond in favor of L1 use. This same difference is further seen when asked what percentage of time Spanish should be used. The majority of responses for Group A (59%) were in favor of 10% of the time, while those of Group B were more evenly distributed, with the most common response (38%) in support of utilizing the L1 30% of the time.

One possible reason for the difference in beliefs about the L1 use in the classroom may stem from the subjects' experiences throughout the semester. It is possible that they became accustomed to the teaching approach in their respective class. A second possibility is that the subjects in each group responded the way that they felt the instructor or researcher may have desired. One may deem this the "eager to please" syndrome, where the subjects anticipate the response for which the administrator (teacher or researcher) is hoping. As a result, it is difficult to know for certain whether the responses truly reflect the subjects' beliefs.

Table 9

Teachers' responses to the questionnaire on beliefs in L1 use in the classroom  
Should Spanish be used in the classroom?

**Teacher A:** yes**Teacher B:** yes

How often should one use Spanish in the EFL classroom?

**Teacher A:** sometimes**Teacher B:** sometimes

When is it appropriate to use Spanish in the class?

**Teacher A** **Teacher B**

To explain difficult concepts

yes

yes

To introduce new material

To summarize material already covered

To test

To joke around with the students

To help students feel more comfortable and confident

To check for comprehension

yes

yes

To carry out small-group work

To explain the relationship between English and Spanish

yes

yes

To define new vocabulary items

yes

What percentage of the class do you believe one should use Spanish?

**Teacher A:** 10%**Teacher B:** 30%

In Table 9, one can see the responses that the teachers of the subjects gave, reflecting their beliefs in whether the L1 should be used in the classroom. Interestingly, both teachers believe that the L1 should be used to some degree in the classroom. The times the teachers consider L1 use to be appropriate are nearly identical, with the exception of using Spanish to define new vocabulary items (favored by Teacher A). This may be due to similar experiences the teachers had while learning their respective L2 or to a mutual comfort level in proficiency of both English and Spanish. The only noticeable difference is in regards to the percentage of the class time that one should use the L1, as will be discussed in the next section. While Teacher A responded 10%, Teacher B favored 30%. These differences are highlighted in their classroom use of L1. Therefore, one can see a correlation between the teachers' beliefs towards L1 use in the classroom and their behavior.

### **Classroom observations**

Over the period of the semester, the researcher recorded and transcribed four lessons in each group. Since two of the lessons were very similar in teaching style and content, the researcher chose to discuss only three based on their occur-

rence during the semester (the beginning, middle, and end). Table 10 illustrates the instances in which the L1 was used.

Table 10

Categories of L1 use in the classroom

Category	Teacher A	Teacher B
To explain difficult grammatical concepts	yes	yes
To introduce something new	no	yes
To summarize material already covered	no	yes
To test	no	no
To joke around with the students	no	yes
To check for comprehension	no	yes
To assign small-group work	no	yes
To define new vocabulary items	no	yes

As is evident in Table 10, Teacher A conducted the majority of the lesson in the TL. She decided to use the L1 only when it was necessary to assist in the explanation of difficult grammatical concepts. Instead of relying on translation, she repeated questions, simplified vocabulary, and drew on the blackboard or used gestures to help the students' comprehension. Teacher B, on the other hand, consistently used the L1 for most of the categories. These data support the idea that the teachers used different teaching strategies regarding L1 use.

### Focus group

Randomly selected participants (10 in each group) from the classes were chosen to participate in focus group interviews (one per class). It was found that, similar to the results of questionnaire 3 (Table 6), the subjects' beliefs about the use of the L1 in the classroom correlated with the teaching approach of the teacher. Since both teachers did not meta-communicate about their approaches to their students, the responses given appear to reflect the beliefs the students formed during the semester. Those in Group A repeatedly mentioned the importance of hearing the TL and guessing meanings. Subjects in Group B consistently remarked about the importance of understanding the meaning behind the word or concept through L1 translation. Neither group reflected much on the opposite approach to which they were exposed in their current class (i.e., Group A did not stress the benefits of translation in the lesson). Again, this could be due to being accustomed to the teaching approach of their current FL teacher or because they said what they felt was what the teacher, researcher, or interviewer expected. Moreover, the focus groups' responses to the question of percentage of TL use in the classroom correlated with what was observed by the researcher and preferred by the teachers. The data acted as a means to further verify and validate that the

teachers consistently used the same TL approach throughout the semester.

Interestingly, the responses in both groups showed that the language used by the teacher does not affect the teacher-student relationship. Both subject groups claimed not to have felt "closer" to the teacher who used Spanish in the classroom.

The focus groups' responses did not strongly favor either TL teaching approach. Therefore, one may assume that in this study the amount of TL in the classroom had little, if any, effect on the beliefs (and possibly the L2 proficiency) of the students.

### Journal entries

Two focused journal entries were assigned at the end of the semester in order to elicit responses regarding (1) exposure to English outside of the classroom (via materials, friends, etc (see Table 11), and (2) attitudes toward the use of the TL during that day's lesson. In order to help elicit more honest responses from the students, they were told not to put their name or identification number on the entries.

Table 11  
Exposure to English outside of the FL classroom

Activity	Group A	Group B
Internet	23%	45%
CAL (Self-access learning center on campus)	41%	50%
Television/Cable	11%	30%
Music	88%	35%
Books	11%	30%
Magazines	11%	10%
Foreigners	52%	10%
Family	5%	15%
Homework	11%	20%
Movies	41%	40%
Newspaper	5%	5%

In the table, one may notice that there is a noticeable difference between the number of students who participate in L2 activities outside of the classroom. Group B appears to participate in these activities more often than Group A. This is in stark contrast to the beginning of the semester, where Group A partook in L2 activities outside of the classroom more often than Group B (see Table 6). There may be a relationship between the amount of TL in the classroom and the number of activities involving the TL outside of the classroom. Perhaps the subjects in

Group B sought out more TL activities outside of the classroom as a means to compensate for the amount of TL input from their teacher (approximately 50%).

The second journal entry consisted of subjects' reflections on the use of the TL during that day's lesson. As previously seen in Questionnaire 3 (Table 6) and the focus groups' responses, the subjects tended to respond in a positive way to how their respective lessons were taught. As in the focus groups, the responses correlated directly with the amount of TL use in the classroom. Again, this may show either their having become accustomed to the teaching approach or a desire to write what might be expected from the teacher or researcher. There were no responses from either subject group that showed discontent with the amount of TL in the classroom.

### **Overall findings**

The goal of the current study has been to document two approaches to EFL instruction: one which implements total (or nearly total) TL instruction and one which utilizes the L1 (approximately 50%). Three research questions were addressed through the data collection process. First, were there differences in the strategies between the teachers? Second, were there differences in the post-test score averages of the two subject groups? Third, if differences in post-test scores exist between the two sections, could the amount of TL use in the classroom explain them? The data collection consisted of mainly ethnographic evidence with quantitative data added as a means of establishing triangulation. The ethnographic data was transcribed (when applicable), tallied and coded (when necessary), and organized into percentages, as had been done in similar previous studies (Duff & Polio, 1993; Schweers, 1999). The quantitative data was analyzed using t-tests to check for any statistically significant difference between the two subject groups' test scores. Each of the three research questions will now be reviewed in context of the findings that were found.

With regards to the first research question, there were different approaches and strategies used by the teachers in the classroom. The teacher of Group A (immersion) chose to use English as a means of communicating with the learners in her class. The only exception was for grammatical or lexical concepts that were too complex for the students to comprehend in the TL. Spanish was only used as a means of explaining something after the teacher unsuccessfully tried several times to explain the concept in English. As a means of assisting in student comprehension, the teacher tended to repeat the word or phrase several times, use gestures, and even use the blackboard to illustrate the meaning.

The teacher for Group B, on the other hand, used Spanish in the classroom for several reasons. First, he used it to give directions to the students for activities. Second, he used translation as a means of establishing the meaning of the concept/term as well as to review whether the subjects understood the concept.

Third, he used the L1 as a means to establish rapport with the subjects, joking with them in an attempt to make them feel an emotional bond in class. Unlike the teacher for Group A, his instruction relied less on physical movements and illustrations and instead he focused on translation.

Regarding the second research question, even though the teaching approaches were different between the subject groups, there was no significant difference between the groups on their post-test scores. This suggests that the amount of TL in the classroom may not play as significant a role in language acquisition as previously thought. Instead, the strategy used by the teacher in order to explain the meaning of a difficult concept (e.g., translation versus gesturing) may not be an important factor in the successful L2 language acquisition, but rather a choice of the teacher used in order to ease the process of explanation.

In relation to the third research questions, since there was no significant difference in the post-test scores of the two subject groups, the study will not address whether or not the teaching approach was related to the difference. Rather, the data suggests that both teaching approaches can prove to be successful in developing the proficiency level of the students.

And finally, regarding the fourth research question, it is suggested that students may, in fact, adjust their preferences as they become accustomed to the teaching approach of their current teacher. More research would need to be done into the area, however, before any solid inference can be based. Perhaps by creating a study on the teacher's personality along with the his/her teaching approach and focusing on the students' perceptions of the class throughout the semester.

### **Implications of the findings**

The findings of the current study have suggested that there is not a significant relationship between the teaching approach (immersion versus L1 use) and proficiency in the L1, as previously argued by theorists in applied linguistics. Instead, the subjects seemed to adjust their study approaches (i.e., seeking more TL activities outside of class) in order to compensate for the amount of L1 in the classroom. This, in turn, may have reflected positively on their post-test scores, thus narrowing the gap of overall TL input between the groups.

The results of the student questionnaires showed that, in EFL classes in a Mexican university, Spanish should be used to some degree. Students in both subject groups felt that there were clear categories where Spanish assisted their comprehension of what was happening in class. Moreover, the majority of subjects agreed that the use of the L1 to some degree helps them to learn English.

It is sometimes believed that the required (or "best") means of teaching an EFL course is through total classroom immersion in the target language. The present study has resulted in bringing that belief into question. One may consider that in learning environments like that of the study, either approach appears to generate similar results in developing TL proficiency. Considering that both subject groups and their teachers preferred to use the L1 to some degree, inclusion of the L1 may help clarify complex concepts in a more comfortable manner.

The findings of this study are useful to foreign language teachers with students who have similar characteristics to those in this project. It provides teachers with an overall analysis of students' beliefs toward the use of the target language in the FL classroom. Administrators could use this information to make more informed decisions about curriculum design, especially considering that the subjects of Group B opted to do more activities outside of class involving the TL. This suggests that, in situations where the L1 is used to some degree in the FL classroom, one might consider developing a self-access learning center in their program, as well as developing a listening course. This would provide the TL input that would otherwise be part of the class. Students may then feel more comfortable in the language learning process as they are allowed explanations in their L1 and can still receive comprehensible input in the TL.

### **Suggestions for further research**

As stated in previous chapters, there is little research in the area of the use of target language in the EFL university classroom. This study suggests two directions for further research. The first would be a more detailed qualitative study of one or more teachers over a longer period of time. Since generalizing across classes is difficult, a more in-depth case study might better explain conditions under which the TL is used, its effects on teacher-student interaction, teachers' and students' perceptions of issues related to classroom L1/L2 use, and how and why the practice or perceptions evolve over time. This information might be gathered through action research with a willing FL teacher.

The other direction would be research of a more experimental nature on the measurable effects of using varying proportions of the TL and L1 for different purposes. Perhaps one could observe the time it takes to use the TL to express a point that could be expressed more efficiently in the L1. Another suggestion is a study of which language is used to convey meta-linguistic information.



### **Concluding remarks**

Within this young field of observing target language use in the foreign language classroom there is much room for growth and further research. The potential implications of future research in this field are astounding. Studies of second language acquisition and its relationship to teaching SL/FL can contribute to assisting the language acquisition in the classroom as well as assisting in the design of new curriculum (e.g., including more listening classes or providing a self-access center). The world is becoming a global village; as more and more people are forced to learn a second, third, or fourth language, the knowledge of the affects of TL in the FLA environment will prove beneficial for all who are involved in the foreign language learning process.

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