

Practical Guidelines for Implementing Translation into the EFL Classroom

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Abstract

The use of languages other than the target one in foreign language teaching (FL) contexts has been interestingly gaining ground recently. A multitude of research has shown that though dogmatically no other language than the target language should be used in the FL classroom, L1 is used by many teachers and learners. It is noteworthy that managing the class and building relationships with the learners are crucial to the success of the lesson; yet they cannot be realized via the target language, especially with less proficient language learners. This article falls into the realm of translation use in foreign language teaching. It attempts primarily to bridge the gap between theory and practice, through suggesting a set of practical guidelines for teachers wishing to implement translation into their classroom. These guidelines are meant to model the judicious use of L1, and thus answer teachers' queries about where to introduce L1 exactly within the lesson procedure, and by means of which tasks. In order to achieve a maximum of teacher-friendliness, the suggested guidelines are designed in reference to a lesson procedure based on the textual approach, with the implementation of translation-based tasks throughout the phases of the lesson, while mentioning the aim behind the use of L1 each time a translation task is introduced.

Keywords: EFL; Translation; Lesson procedure; Guidelines; L1; Mother tongue.

ملخص

إن استخدام لغات أخرى غير اللغة المستهدفة في سياقات تدريس اللغات الأجنبية (FL) قد حقق تقدماً مثيراً للاهتمام في الآونة الأخيرة، فقد أظهرت العديد من الأبحاث أنه على الرغم من المعتقد السائد بأنه لا ينبغي استخدام أي لغة أخرى غير اللغة المستهدفة في حصص اللغة الأجنبية، إلا أن اللغة الأم مستخدمة من قبل العديد من المعلمين والمتعلمين. وفي هذا السياق، يجدر بالذكر أن إدارة الفصل وبناء العلاقات مع المتعلمين أمران بالغا الأهمية لنجاح العملية التعليمية، وأنه لا يمكن تحقيقهما عبر اللغة المستهدفة، خاصة مع متعلمي اللغة المبتدئين. يندرج هذا المقال في سياق استعمال اللغة الأم في تدريس اللغات الأجنبية، ويهدف أساساً إلى سدّ الفجوة بين الجانب النظري والممارسة الفعلية، وذلك من خلال اقتراح مجموعة من الإرشادات العملية للمعلمين الراغبين في إدراج الترجمة في تعليم اللغة الأجنبية، وتأتي هذه الإرشادات في شكل أنموذج تطبيقي لمخطط حصّة تدريسية تعتمد اللغة الأم إلى جانب اللغة المستهدفة، مقدمة بذلك الإجابة على استفسارات المعلمين حول مكان إدراج اللغة الأم بالضبط ضمن مراحل الدرس، وعبر أي نوع من الأنشطة. ولأجل ضمان سهولة استغلال مجموعة الإرشادات المقدمة في هذا المقال، تم تصميمها انطلاقاً من خطة درس تعتمد المنهج النصي، مع تبيان الغرض البيداغوجي من كل نشاط من الأنشطة المدرجة في مخطط الدرس.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية; الترجمة; نموذج خطة الدرس; الإرشادات; اللغة الأولى; اللغة الأم.

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Introduction

Under the umbrella of the grammar translation method that was introduced in the nineteenth century and continued to be used along the twentieth, L2 was predominantly taught via L1, with a focus on linguistic form and grammar (Ghobadi and Ghasemi, 2015).

However, it was gradually displaced by the shift of focus from the written form to the spoken one in the light of newer approaches, such as the direct method, the audio-lingual method, the communicative approach, the natural approach, and the task-based approach. These approaches focus primarily on learners' exposure to the target language through engaging them with authentic materials, rather than relying on explanations in their native language (Shin, Dixon, & Choi, 2019). By the emergence of the communicative approach no room was left for L1 in the FL context, as this approach advocated the use of authentic language in the classroom with a maximum of exposure to the target language, in addition to production possibilities (Bruen and Kelly 2014).

As English preserved its position as lingua franca, it continued to overspread all over the globe. Consequently, related research has multiplied, seeking to comprehend how language is learnt best, and thereby how it can be taught most efficiently. The multilingual aspect characterizing the world today had had an impact on views about how language can be taught best, mainly in terms of introducing languages other than the target one in the classroom. Thereby, what was assumed for decades about the necessity of using the target language solely and never any other one surfaced the debate and gained more advocacy than ever before, backed by scientific evidence.

Research works surveying L1 use in foreign language classroom revealed a growing tendency among teachers to use it for many purposes, such as instruction, classroom management, and building relationships in the classroom (Shin, Dixon, & Choi, 2019). Reckoning these advantages, in addition to the effectiveness potential empirical research has shown, we tend to leverage L1 implementation into the FL teaching practice through this article which aims primarily to offer teachers a set of practical guidelines. The latter are presented in a form of an L1-based model lesson plan whose procedure is backed by the textual approach. This lesson plan model samples the introduction of L1-based learning tasks throughout the lesson phases, while noting the aim behind the introduction of L1 in each phase. It is noteworthy, that in this very context translation is used as a scaffolding strategy. Thence, it is meant to fade in the classroom gradually as learners' proficiency level of the target language raises.

1. Review of the literature

Research related to the use of students' native language in foreign language teaching and learning started trending toward its allowance in the early nineties. The change was gradual but steady over time, as backed by certain scholars who took a positive view towards it based on their belief that it can offer a practical contribution to the learning of the target language (Hall and Cook, 2012). As throughout the years, more and more experts were coming around to the idea that a student's first language has a role to play in learning a new one, as long as it is done appropriately. Certainly, it was a slow evolution of thought, but studies and certain teachers' experiences lent support to the view that L1 did not necessarily have to be avoided at all costs as it has been admitted.

In this context, it is worthy to refer to the exhaustive exploration of the related literature conducted by researchers Jee-Young Shin, L. Quentin Dixon & Yunkyeong Choi (2019). The latter reviewed published articles dealing with the use of L1 in foreign language classrooms from 2011 until 2018.

Thereby, their work came as a continuity of the one conducted by Hall and Cook (2012) which covered existing L1 studies until the first half of 2011.

Shin et.al (2019)' study analyzed 55 papers, all of them were categorized in references to their aims into one of the following areas: extent and impact of L1 use, factors influencing mother tongue, second language use, beliefs and attitudes towards mother tongue and second language use, and finally, the effectiveness of mother tongue use on second language skills. The study showed that most of recent research works seem to agree on the fact that using students' first language (L1) is a natural part of foreign language (FL) classrooms at all levels; and that there is growing evidence that intentional and judicious use of L1 can help them acquire their target language. That is to say, the overall outcome of these research works posits that allowing some L1 use is likely to aid the language learning process rather than to hinder it, provided that it is used judiciously enough.

Shin et.al (2019) found out that 44% of studies related to L1 use and which were conducted during the determined period, targeted teachers and students attitudes and beliefs towards L1 use. In this sense, it is noteworthy that Liu and Zeng (2015), Tsagari and Diakou (2015), and Yao (2011), Shin et.al (ibid) state that the majority of the studies showed that the participants, teachers and students, acknowledge the importance of the use of L1 for the purpose of learning the second or foreign language.

Other studies whose results concurred with the previous ones include the one conducted by Chiou (2014). The latter looked specifically at how Taiwanese college students at different English proficiency levels felt about using L1 in class. Having surveyed over 900 students, it was found out that all the groups were open to L1 use; however, the lowest proficiency level students preferred it the most.

These findings were supported by Macaro and Lee (2013)'s results of the study which they conducted with over 300 college students and almost 500 elementary school kids. The latter were asked about their thoughts on incorporating the first language. Both adults and children agreed that L1 is a valuable tool in foreign language learning. The study showed also that the adults were more comfortable than kids were with using the target language only. The researchers suggested that this might be due to the fact that the adults had more experience learning languages and a better mastery, allowing them to handle the classroom situation with the target language only. Nonetheless, adults acknowledged a place for L1.

Overall, all these studies converge on the idea that the students and teachers believe that the use of L1 in the FL classroom benefits the learners. However, the dose of L1 and the way it is incorporated play a pivot role in ensuring its usefulness.

Shin et.al (2019) study covered also studies that investigated the usefulness of L1 in teaching and learning vocabulary, grammar, and writing.

The study covered as research on L1 use in learning vocabulary conducted by Samian, Foo, and Mohebbi (2016). It examined vocabulary learning with 95 Iranian high school students studying English. The students were divided into three groups. The first was asked to provide Persian (L1) translations for new English words from three reading passages using a bilingual dictionary, and were dubbed the "giver group". The second, dubbed the "receiver" group, was asked to read the same passages, but they included the Persian translations added by the giver group. As for the third, they were assigned as the "comparison" group, and were asked to read the passages without any translations. On two time points, two days and four weeks later, the two groups were tested using fill-in-the-blank and translation exercises. The test results showed that both the giver and receiver groups performed significantly better than the comparison group on these post-tests.

Besides, interestingly, the giver group showed the most improvement on the fill-in-the-blank test after four weeks. By generating their own translations, they appeared to form stronger connections between the new English words and their Persian meanings.

As far as L1 use in teaching and learning grammar is concerned, Shin et.al (2019)' study covered two research works, one conducted by McManus and Marsden (2017) and the other by Viakinnou-Brinson et al. (2012). The one conducted by Viakinnou-Brinson et al. (2012) looked at how students learned grammar concepts when taught only in the second language (L2) versus when being taught using both L2 and their first language (L1). The tests showed that the group that just used L2 examples to explain the grammar rules showed more improvement from a pre-test to a post-test on multiple choice grammar questions, while the group that was taught using both L1 and L2 explanations did not do as well on the tests. The researchers argued that this is probably because explaining in the L1 led to less mental engagement with processing the L2. Besides, it caused too much reliance on directly translating example sentences word-for-word. This finding is similar to results from another study conducted by Vosoughi in 2012.

As for McManus and Marsden (2017)' study, it dealt with 50 college students learning French as a second language. The researchers wanted to see how using some of the students' first language, which is English, would affect their understanding of French grammar.

To figure this out, the students were asked to do some online reading comprehension tests and offline sentences-matching exercises. This was meant also to help see how the students would approach the material and apply what they learned. So, the students were split into two groups; one practiced interpreting grammar rules in the second language only, while the other used both English and French explanations, i.e. they used both L1 and the target language.

Comparison of the results showed that the group who used both languages seemed to have grasped the target grammar concepts better, as they could read faster in French and performed more accurately in the sentences-matching task. This outcome indicated that incorporating the first language along with the second language helped the bilingual students understand the grammar points more thoroughly, as it rendered them quicker at reading and more competent at applying what they learned in the practice tasks.

Another study conducted by Lo (2016) dealt with the role of L1 in the development of the writing skill. The study compared the use of translation from L1 to L2 versus L2 only without any translation in writing. The study involved 26 Chinese students who studied English. For the purpose of the study they were divided into groups and given topics about social issues to write about. The writing task consisted of two stages. In the first, one group was asked to translate a Chinese text about the topic into English, while the other group was asked to write directly in English without translation. In the second stage, both groups revised their English writing after seeing sample texts. The findings of the research showed that the translation group's vocabulary and grammar improved more than the L2 direct writing group. Besides, it was found that vocabulary gains were even higher than grammar gains for both.

In general, the inclusion of translation in the writing task seemed to affect the Chinese learners' developing English writing proficiency positively.

Taken all together, as stated by Shin et.al (2019), the majority of studies reported positive results when observing L1 use in completing tasks, except for the studies of Viakinnou-Brinson et al. (2012) and Vosoughi (2012), as theirs showed the opposite.

Based on the aforementioned studies and the driven conclusions, this article comes to offer a set of guidelines for teachers aiming to clarify the positive use of L1 through providing a lesson plan

sample that models L1 judicious use, since modeling has always been a core training material for practitioners across disciplines, let alone educators.

2. Translation implementation guidelines

As stated previously, this article aims to offer teachers guidelines on implementing L1 into the FL teaching practice in a way that enhances learning. Geared by this aim in view, it consists of a model lesson plan that incorporates a set of L1-based learning tasks relating to each phase of the lesson. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the inclusion of the L1-based tasks is limited to situations where L1 is highly expected to favour the achievement of the target learning objectives.

2.1 Lesson procedure

The suggested sample consists of a “Read and Produce” lesson (Belhadia, 2022). As revealed by its label, such a lesson targets two skills: reading and writing. The principle backing the inclusion of two skills within the same lesson is that the reading passage is meant to serve as a model for the written task. In other words, by the end of the lesson the learners are expected to be able to produce a piece of writing similar to the reading passage. In order to achieve this objective, the lesson targets a set of sub-objectives meant to equip the learners gradually with the necessary linguistic resources for the target written production. The sub-objectives are targeted gradually across the different lesson phases.

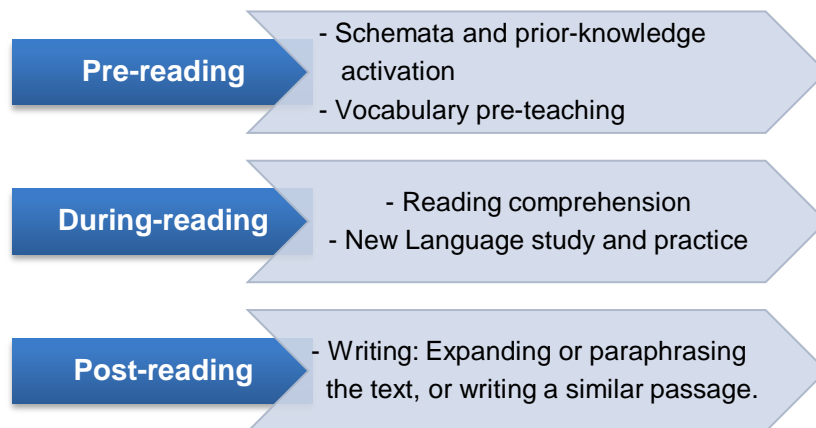
The coming sections will shed light on the phases of the lesson and the objective of each one, so as to clarify the rationale behind the incorporation of the L1-based task in case it occurs. Understanding the objective of the lesson as well as the sub-objectives of each phase is very likely to foster teachers’ reflectiveness when it comes to deciding upon incorporating L1-based tasks or limiting oneself to the target language.

2.2 Phases of the lesson

The lesson whose plan is adopted as the sample for this guiding paper is labeled “Read and Produce”. It is conceived within the PDP framework. The latter refers to “Pre, During, and Post”. Accordingly, the lesson stages are: Pre-reading, During-reading, and Post-reading (Figure1). The following part describes each of these phases.

2.2.1 Pre-reading phase

This phase is considered as the entry phase. It aims at activating the learner’s schemata through introducing the topic of the text. Besides, it aims at pre-teaching key vocabulary of the text. The pre-taught vocabulary are not destined for assisting the learners in understanding the reading passage, but also for reinvestment in the writing phase, which is the ultimate objective of the lesson. In the coming section we will see how L1 can be used to maximize efficiency of this phase, mainly at the level of vocabulary learning.

Figure 1 : Lesson procedure schema

Note. Lesson phases with sub-phases (Created by Belhadia for this paper)

2.2.2 During-reading phase

This phase is divided into two sub-phases, the first is devoted for reading comprehension, while the second for language exploration.

The reading comprehension sub-phase includes a set of comprehension tasks; such as comprehension questions, true and false statements, reference words, and in-context vocabulary activities. The aim of this sub-phase is to train the learners on comprehending a text. The suggested tasks allow the learners to practice reading and deploy his reading strategies, such as guessing and inferencing to decode the text.

The language exploration sub-phase aims at teaching a given language point which is already deployed in the text. Through a set of tasks, the learners are driven to notice the target language point which will be just after that presented to them. After that, this language point isolated, analyzed, and then practiced after the stating the rule.

This phase also offers room for the inclusion of L1 in order to achieve a maximum of text comprehension.

2.2.3 Post-reading phase

During this phase, the learners are meant to produce a piece of writing about the same theme of the text. Thence, they are required to reinvest the resources targeted across the lesson, including the vocabularies and the language point, in addition to their previous knowledge.

In this sense, the learners can be asked to expand the text, paraphrase it, or write a similar passage.

2.3 Integrating L1 into the lesson

In order for the use of L1 in the FL classroom to be judicious, it should affect learning positively in the sense that it guarantees outcomes that the monolingual practice cannot offer. In alignment with this principle, the content of this paper models the integration of L1 within the lesson plan. As each task in the lesson is meant to be purposeful and relate to the lesson's objective, L1-based tasks should be purposeful as well. Besides, the teacher is meant to mention the purpose from using the L1-based task as he or she fills in the tasks' aims colon within the lesson plan template.

2.3.1 Translation-based tasks for the pre-reading phase

The tasks that can be suggested in this phase should serve the aims of the phase. Since the phase aims at activating schemata related to the topic of the text and pre-teaching vocabulary, the L1-based task should serve schemata activation and vocabulary learning. Thence, relating to each objective, we suggest the following tasks:

a. Schemata and prior-knowledge activation

This step of the first phase aims at activating the learners' schemata and prior knowledge in order to favour comprehension of the text. Besides, it aims at involving the learners into the world of the topic and thus motivating them to read the text.

Task

The teacher uses a visual aid, such as a poster or a video, related to the topic of the text, and asks the learners discuss its content in L1 for about 5 minutes.

Aim

Since prior knowledge and schemata are shaped by the different life and learning experiences and their activation aims to involve the learners into the topic of the text, and get them ready to interpret the text the most successfully possible, then their activation can be done in L1 first, before switching to the target language.

b. Key vocabulary pre-teaching

This step aims at introducing the key vocabulary of the text to the learners so as to facilitate their understanding of the text. During the schemata and prior-knowledge activation process, the teacher elicits key vocabulary from the learners. While eliciting key words, the teacher asks the learners for the translation of each one and invites them to note down these words onto their "personal bilingual dictionaries", knowing that they are going to reinvest them in the writing phase.

Task

The teacher elicits the key words and asks the students to supply their equivalents in the target language. Once confirmed by the teacher, the learners are asked to copy them down onto their personal dictionaries.

Aim

Presenting the equivalent of new words and concepts in L1 guarantees their appropriation by the learners. It also enables the learners to develop their own bilingual dictionaries and use dictionaries.

2.3.2 L1-based tasks for the during-reading phase

a. Comprehension sub-phase

This step is devoted to the practice of reading for the purpose of comprehending the text. It consists of true and false statements, comprehension questions, and reference words. In order to maximize learners' involvement in the task, L1 can be used to get sure the statements, questions and instructions of the tasks are grasped.

Task1

Translate the following statements/questions into L1 (Individually, in pairs or groups).

Task2

Read the text and do the following:

1. Say if the statements are true or false;
2. Answer the questions/ 3. Say what or who do the underlined words refer to in the text.

Aim

The translation process is meant to ensure learners understanding of the task content, thus limiting the comprehension challenge to the text. Besides, dealing with ambiguities surfacing in the translation process of the task content upgrades learners' language.

b. Grammar study sub-phase

This step of the during-reading phase is devoted for grammar study. It deals with the key grammar points deployed in the text so as to enable the learners to accomplish the writing task properly.

L1 is likely to help learners grasp grammatical concepts rapidly, as it allows contrasting rules of L1 and the target language, and thence make facilitate grasping the target concepts. In this part of the lesson, the learners are invited to notice the target grammar point in the text, and then it is isolated for analysis. In order to deepen the analysis the learners are invited to translate the sentences containing the structure, and then they are invited to find the equivalent form in the L1.

Task

1. What is the equivalent of the word "tense" in L1? What are the tenses that you know in L1? When is each of them used? What is the equivalent of each of these tenses in English?
2. Sort out from the first paragraph sentences containing verbs in the past simple?
3. Translate those sentences into L1.

Aim

Grammar is meant to realize successful communication, and the most trustworthy indicator of its mastery is accuracy of the language. Thence, identifying the equivalent of the grammar point in the L1 indicates clearly the learners' ability to mobilize this grammar point properly in the target language. Such a series of tasks are likely to use L1 as a scaffold to install the new concept in the target language, and thence enabling the learner to find the adequate equivalent structure in TL to formulate what is aimed to be expressed.

2.3.3 L1-based tasks for the post-reading phase

This phase is devoted for writing, as stated previously, herein the learners are asked to paraphrase the text, expand it, or write a similar text suing the resources targeted throughout the lesson, including new vocabulary and the lesson's target language point.

Task1

Translate into L1 the following topic (Individually, in pairs, or in groups).

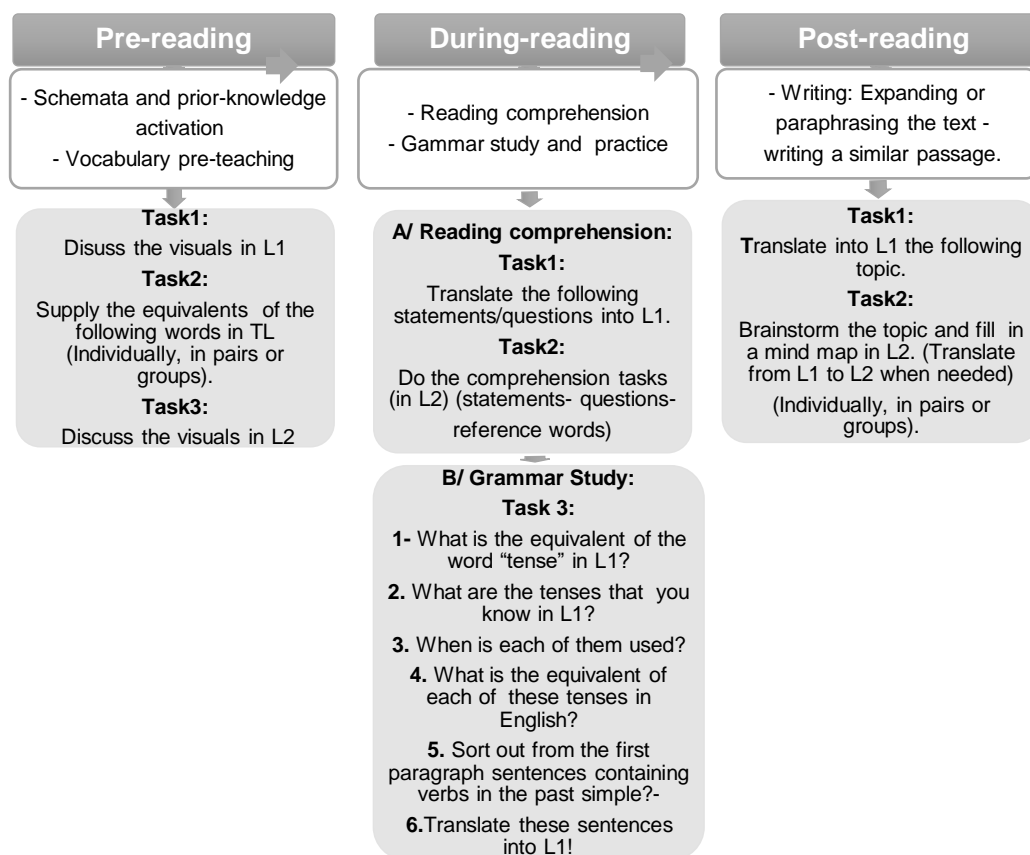
Aim

The translation process is expected to surface some language deficiencies that are likely to be treated with thee teachers or the peers in case the task is a pair or group work.

Task2

The learners are invited to brainstorm the topic and fill in a mind map. For that purpose, learners are encouraged to use the target language while allowed to use L1 if necessary. So, they are encouraged to jot down any ideas they judge valuable. After that, they are asked to use the dictionary and their peers' assistance to translate the ideas suggested in L1 into L2.

Figure 2 :Schema of the lesson procedure with the integration of translation tasks



Note. Schema of the lesson procedure with the integration of translation tasks (Created by Belhadia for this paper)

Aim

The use of L1 in this case allows the learners to consider all the ideas that may pop up. The translation process is likely to unveil the language lack they have and thence treat it so as to accomplish the writing task.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the judicious use of students' mother tongue can be beneficial in facilitating foreign language learning, especially in the early stages. Thence, rather than banning L1 completely, it is preferable to integrate it in a limited and structured way, all along with a maximum of exposure and practice of L2.

The L1 integration lesson procedure suggested in this article is meant to guide teachers willing to make use of L1 from a scaffolding perspective. That is to say, using L1 to assist learners to learn their additional language, until they master it well enough to pursue learning without getting recourse to L1.

In nutshell, this model suggests using L1 for introducing the lesson objectives, key vocabulary, and instructions, then, switching to target language for practice and linguistic resources investment in the production phase. The model advocates explicit openness to the use of L1 also for compensation and repair purposes in case of language barriers.

Recommendations

Regarding the important amount of research works in favour of the use of L1 in foreign and second language teaching, we recommend the following;

1. Encouraging teachers to target language proficiency through efficient strategies among which translation and language transfer;
2. Highlighting the importance of learner's exposure to the target language even though adopting translation; and causing L1 use to fade gradually as learners develop more proficiency in the target language.
3. Providing teachers with translation-based tasks and strategies so as to enable them to implement L1 safely and efficiently;
4. Conducting inter-languages analyses to sort out differences and similarities between languages in order to favour learners' conscious use of their whole linguistic repertoire.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that he has no conflict of interest.

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