First language support in adult ESL in Australia

Denise E Murray
Series editor
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Abbreviations

acl Australian Centre for Languages
AMES Adult Multicultural Education Service
AMEP Adult Migrant English Program
BSA Bilingual Student Assistant
CALL Computer-assisted language learning
CLT Communicative language teaching approaches
CPSWE Course in Preliminary Spoken and Written English
CSWE Certificates in Spoken and Written English
DIMIA Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
ESL English as a second language
EFL English as a foreign language
ILC Independent Learning Centre
K-12 Kindergarten to year 12
L1 first, or native language
L2 second language
NCELTR National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research
TAFE Technical and Further Education, Australia
TESOL teaching English as a second or other language
TLOTE teaching languages other than English
Acknowledgments

The research recorded in this volume was conducted as part of the Special Project Research Program at the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) Research Centre, funded by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA), Canberra.

Special thanks are due to the AMEP teachers, bilingual assistants and learners who were involved in the study. All but one of the teachers have contributed chapters that give their perspectives on the use of L1 in their classrooms. Talat Abouzaid was engaged in the project initially, but had to leave Australia and return to his home country because of a family emergency and we acknowledge his contribution to this study. Several bilingual assistants also contributed their perspectives. We acknowledge the support of those who were not able to write reports.

Thanks are also due to the coordinators at each of the research sites - Gordana Tokic from Australian Centre for Languages (acl) and Jacky Springall from Adult Multicultural Education Service (AMES) Victoria. They were invaluable in setting up meetings, providing support for teachers and helping the teachers write their chapters.

Several staff at the AMEP Research Centre have also contributed to this research and volume: Kristine Clarke, Helen Lavery, Rosemary Lloyd, Louise Melov, Stephen Moore and Karen Scott.

The names of the editors of the book, the Introduction, and Chapter 17 are in alphabetical order. Both editors contributed equally.
Series introduction

Teacher research in the field of second language teaching and learning has gained prominence in recent years. Such re-examination of the activity of teaching ‘connects the “doing” of teaching with the “questioning” of research’ (Freeman 1998: ix), a practice that Freeman calls teacher-research. While action research is a popular research methodology used in teacher-research (see for example, Burns 1999; Edge 2001), action research and teacher-research are not synonymous. Action research has a broader focus than teacher-led inquiry, focusing as it does on the action research cycle – the iteration of findings of research that lead to action, which is again analysed, leading to further action. Teacher-research, however, is teachers’ judgements and beliefs, ‘based not simply on experience but on an articulated, disciplined understanding of that experience’ (Freeman 1998: 3), which may or may not involve action research as a methodology for inquiry. The focus, rather, is on inquiry and how inquiry leads teachers to better understand what is happening in their classrooms.

Teaching in Action volumes report on teacher-research – in some cases where action research was a pivotal methodology and in other cases where a variety of research methodologies were employed. The series is designed to present research-based activities that classroom teachers have developed and have trialled in their or others’ classrooms. The goal of the series is to reflect teachers’ experience and points of view, and to illustrate how that point of view or understanding developed as a result of their particular enquiry. Each volume focuses on a specific area of second language teaching and learning. Each volume in the series is divided into two sections. The first provides theoretical perspectives and a brief discussion of previous research findings on the topic. The second section has a practical orientation and illustrates the insights, activities, materials and strategies explored by teachers in their research. Through the chapters in the second section, we hope that teachers’ understanding of their experiences can be shared with readers – teachers who may in turn be encouraged to develop their own inquiry into their practice, and researchers who may be encouraged to develop new ways of approaching their own research and new ways of articulating their theoretical concerns.

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References


Introduction

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While the use of the first language is well researched and documented in K-12 settings, especially in bilingual programs (for example, Genesee 1987; Baker 2001; Thomas and Collier 2003), relatively little research has been conducted with adult learners in immigrant contexts. In a comprehensive review of the uses of bilingual strategies in one large adult ESL program in Australia, Taylor (2000) noted the potential usefulness of L1 strategies for learners for whom the classroom environment, or assumptions about teaching and learning, are new and potentially alienating.

Researching her class of pre-literate Horn of Africa learners with very low levels of English and minimal schooling, Gunn (2003) found that bilingual assistants in the classroom allowed her to go beyond teaching to find out more about her learners’ backgrounds. Their presence enabled her to interact with the learners as adults, to learn about their hopes and their ambitions, and to talk about concepts in a way that would not have been possible without bilingual assistants in the classroom. Although the bilingual assistants were present for only 25 per cent of the time in the class, they provided an important bridge for learners and teacher alike, enabling learners to discuss adult themes despite their lack of linguistic knowledge.

In a longitudinal study which followed learners over a one-year period, Wigglesworth (2003) found that the first language not only helped learners to understand difficult concepts, but also allowed them to engage in more cognitively demanding activities than would have been the case in their L2 (English). It was also useful as a quick shorthand for translation of specific words or phrases. Earlier studies have noted that the use of L1 in the adult ESL classroom facilitates the learning of English and also has a positive social effect on learning by reducing anxiety and alienation (O’Grady 1987; Auerbach 1993).

In K-12 settings, the goal of instruction is usually threefold – development of English, maintenance (and sometimes development) of the home language, and access to core, grade-level curriculum content whether via L1 or L2. While the adult studies referred to above called the instruction bilingual, most adult classes, whether taught by a bilingual or monolingual teacher, are multilingual and the goal of instruction is acquisition of English. Therefore it is important to conceptualise such instruction as first language support rather than as bilingual education. This does not deny the very important issue of maintenance of learners’ L1, although with adults, as in the context we discuss here, this is not usually a major concern since their L1 language skills are already established.

The research context

The research reported on in this volume involved fourteen teachers, six bilingual assistants, and a number of bilingual trainees across two states (New South Wales and Victoria) in Australia’s Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP). The AMEP is a
fifty-year-old national program that provides English language instruction with a settlement focus for immigrants and humanitarian entrants to Australia. The program is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA). Immigrants and refugees for whom English is not a first language, and who have been assessed as not having functional English language skills, are entitled to 510 hours of English language instruction. Additional hours are available for certain categories of learners, such as young people with limited previous schooling or those who have survived torture and trauma. The Commonwealth Government, through a competitive tendering process every five years, funds state and territory organisations to provide English language instruction as part of immigrants’ settlement. Classes are provided at various times and places in centres across Australia, and instruction includes a distance-learning program, a home-tutor scheme and independent-learning centres.

English language provision is competency based and uses as the curriculum framework the Certificates in Spoken and Written English (CSWE) at four levels—I, II, III, and IV (NSW AMES 2003). A recent innovation has been the introduction of the Course in Preliminary Spoken and Written English (CPSWE) to cater for the needs of new groups of immigrants with low levels of, or interrupted, prior schooling. These levels correspond at entry to the International Second Language Proficiency ratings (ISLPR) (Wylie and Ingram 1999: 7) as follows:

Pre-CSWE pre-beginner ISLPR 0
CSWE I beginner ISLPR 0
CSWE II post-beginner ISLPR 1
CSWE III intermediate ISLPR 1+
CSWE IV advanced ISLPR 2+

Most AMEP learners are in Pre-CSWE, CSWE I and II, and many learners do not progress past CSWE I even after completing their 510 hours. For purposes of clarity across programs internationally, we have referred throughout the volume to level by terms such as pre-beginner, beginner, intermediate etc., rather than the specific CSWE level.

The CSWE framework uses a text-based approach to curriculum design (Feez 1998), and assesses learner outcomes through the achievement of competencies in all four macro-skills at four different levels, which correspond with the Certificate levels. For example, a learning outcome might be ‘Can conduct a short telephone conversation’ or ‘Can read a short information text’. Learners are evaluated on a number of criteria on a binary scale. In addition, because there is a settlement focus, teachers use content that is relevant to the lives of learners new to Australia, and often new to formal education.

Immigrants to Australia come from a variety of different language and cultural backgrounds. In the 2003–04 financial year, over 100,000 immigrants settled in Australia, almost half of whom came from non-English-speaking backgrounds. In the humanitarian stream, increasing numbers are coming from Africa—especially from the Sudan, although not all are necessarily Sudanese. Many are Ethiopians who have been in refugee camps in Sudan for decades. Other regions from which Australia is accepting immigrants include Iraq, Vietnam, the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the former Yugoslavia and the former USSR. Arrivals from some areas come in under
the family reunion stream and include elderly (classified by learners themselves as 45+) grandparents from PRC and former USSR, who come specifically to support their children in raising their grandchildren. In 2002, the AMEP Program provided tuition to over 32,000 learners drawn from 142 language backgrounds, the major countries of origin being China, Vietnam, Iraq, Lebanon and Sudan.

The project
The two organisations at which the teachers involved in this project worked (ACL in Sydney, New South Wales and its consortium partner, Macquarie Community College, and AMES in Melbourne, Victoria) are large providers in the national AMEP program, with a number of different centres across metropolitan areas in Sydney and Melbourne respectively. The teachers, bilingual assistants and bilingual trainees came from a variety of different centres. Each centre has a slightly different profile. Each teacher provides a brief profile in individual chapters to assist readers to situate the research. Such brief, broad-brush descriptions are not meant to stereotype learners, but rather to provide readers with some insight into the diversity of these particular AMEP classrooms.

Project goals
The project set out to investigate:

- the role of L1 in classrooms with the following different approaches to its provision:
  - teachers instructing bilingually
  - teaching with bilingual assistants
  - use of L1 to support settlement needs.

- the different strategies for which the L1 was used in:
  - classroom interaction
  - learning strategies
  - content
  - language.

Project methodology
The project was coordinated by two researchers from the AMEP Research Centre. A variety of research methodologies were used, including collaborative action-research approaches; questionnaires; interviews with teachers, bilingual assistants, and bilingual trainees; focus-group interviews with groups of learners; and classroom observations. This volume reports on the action research and findings of the project.

The teachers in the project followed a collaborative action-research cycle (Burns 1999) over one or two terms, in the following phases:

- Teachers came together at the beginning of the project to discuss their particular class, and how they anticipated using L1 to support the learning of English.

- In the first term, teachers and bilingual assistants who were included in the project observed and took notes on their classes.

- At the end of the first term teachers and bilingual assistants came together to report to each other on their class and learner profiles, their management
of L1 in their classrooms and emerging issues, any problems or difficulties which had arisen, and ways in which they might change their approach in the second term.

• During the end-of-term reporting session, teachers discussed with each other strategies that learners found useful and that supported language learning and settlement.

• If they taught for a second term, teachers adapted their strategies based on their own observations, input from fellow teachers, and the profiles of the learners in their classes.

• Teachers at each site came together to report on their findings at the end of the project.

• Teachers and bilingual assistants prepared their written reports.

Overview of classes
Fourteen classes participated in the study; however, this is misleading since the project ran over two terms and enrolments in the AMEP continue into the term. As a result, class profiles are averages and approximations. Most teachers describe the class profile in their second term, after they had completed one cycle of action research and had made changes to instruction based on the first term’s reflections. Jacky (Chapter 13) describes the class profile in general terms and so numbers for that class are not included in some of the data below. As can be seen from the summary below, the classes were varied in terms of their structure.

• Five of the participating classes were pre-beginners, eight were beginners and one was a citizenship class with mixed levels.

• Of the bilingual classes, one was at pre-beginner level, one at beginner level, one was a class that was half pre-beginners and half beginners, and the fourth class was the citizenship class.

• Of the classes with bilingual assistants or bilingual input sessions, two were pre-beginner classes, four were beginner classes and one a mixed pre-beginner and beginner class.

• Nine were full-time (15–20 hours per week) classes and five were part-time. All bilingual classes were part-time.

The majority of learners (72 per cent) were female, while 28 per cent were male. In the AMEP overall, the majority of learners are female – 65 per cent in the 2004–5 financial year. Therefore, there were proportionally more female learners in the study than in the general population. Thirty-four languages were spoken by the learners across all 14 classes, with the largest numbers being speakers of Chinese (Mandarin or Cantonese), Vietnamese, Sudanese languages, Farsi/Dari, Arabic and Russian.

Bilingual classes
In the four bilingual classes (Chapters 3–6), teachers and learners shared a common L1 and the course was taught bilingually. These classes, however, provided a variety of
different bilingual contexts, including intensive 3-hour classes in the evening and classes which taught citizenship content.

Teaching with first language support

Teachers who did not share a language in common with all learners in the classroom used different strategies to provide L1 support for their learners; that is, bilingual assistants (Chapters 7–13), and bilingual input sessions (Chapters 14–16). For the latter, learners attended sessions focusing on settlement issues and were grouped according to their L1; wherever possible, L1 support was provided for each L1 group.

Bilingual assistants

Bilingual assistants were available in six of the classes; however, in each class, there were learners for whom no bilingual assistant was available. Since this research was focused on L1 support, teachers have commented primarily on how the L1 was managed by them and their bilingual assistants. In several cases, teachers also shared a language with some of the learners. Teachers were, however, very mindful of the fact that some learners did not have this support and to compensate used various other strategies for these learners. The classes with bilingual assistants (Chapters 7–12) include reports by both teachers and bilingual assistants, thus providing perspectives from both.

Bilingual trainees

Chapter 13 describes a class that had bilingual trainees. These trainees were either volunteers from higher level classes, or were in the process of completing traineeships for certification in education, and they participated in the class for several hours each week.

Bilingual input sessions

The bilingual input sessions, reported in Chapters 14–16, were used in Victoria only. These sessions were designed to provide settlement information to learners and were held in the lunch break, outside regular class hours. Students attended voluntarily, but the timing was designed to allow access to learners who attended both morning and afternoon classes. Guest speakers were invited to give learners information, such as introduction to the AMEP, job seeking, medical benefits and unemployment benefits. Bilingual assistants and/or bilingual trainees were available to help translate information for learners as needed. The bilingual trainees also had some input into the classroom outside of these input sessions.

Structure of the book

Section 1 consists of two chapters which raise a range of theoretical issues related to the use of the first language in the classroom. Section 2 incorporates the reports from each teacher-researcher on the use of L1 in their particular classroom. As reported above, two different delivery models were used by these teachers, one of which had two different systems of delivery. In Section 3 – the final chapter of the book – we summarise the issues which arose from the teachers’ research with respect to the use of
L1 in the classroom, and consider the implications of these findings. Section 4 draws on the major findings of the teacher reports so we can also discuss the importance of increased attention to professional development activities which focus on L1 use in the classroom, and suggest directions for future research.

**Structure of the chapters**

Teachers and bilingual assistants observed their learners and took notes about their learners’ use of their first language and how that use impacted on learning. Each chapter includes the particular research focus for the teacher; a description of the class and learners, including course goals and what L1 support was available; how teachers managed the use of L1 for classroom interaction, for instruction in learning strategies, for delivery of content, and for instruction about language structure; how teachers evaluated the use of L1; teacher perceptions of their learners’ responses to L1 support; and issues that arose in using L1 and how they addressed them. Many chapters include sample activities or materials that teachers used. Chapters on classes where bilingual assistants were participants in the project include reports from these assistants, thus providing two or more perspectives.

**References**


Section 1
Background
Chapter 1
Research in use of L1 in adult learning settings

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It is probably fair to say that in language classes in general, at least until recently, there has been a tendency to discourage learners from using their first language (L1) in group and pair work activities. The reasons for this are quite clear: teachers want classroom activities to maximise learners’ use of the target language in order to enhance learners’ opportunities for interaction in their second language and to encourage learning of the target language. However, it is now timely to review this approach, particularly in the light of recent research which suggests that there may well be good reasons to build more carefully on the L1 resources the learners already have and are bringing into the classroom. In this chapter, I will examine some of the historical reasons why L1 use in the L2 classroom tends to be eschewed, and then focus on what we know about its use.

The policy of English only in the classroom has been widespread both in ESL (English as a second language) contexts, and in EFL (English as a foreign language) contexts, and, under the influence of both historical tradition and political imperative, there have been a number of contributors to the pervasiveness of these English only policies. English speaking countries have inevitably tended to be world leaders in English teaching policy and research, and many of these countries - most notably Australia, Canada, England, New Zealand and the United States - have also been the recipients of large numbers of immigrants from a wide variety of language backgrounds. In many ways, the English-only classroom is a natural result of language classes composed of learners who have varied first languages, where the necessity of developing teaching approaches appropriate to multilingual classes has made the use of the first language difficult. However, as we will see in many of the following chapters, the use of L1 is not precluded simply because classroom participants come from multiple language backgrounds. Nevertheless, since research and the theoretical underpinnings of language teaching pedagogy tend to come out of English speaking countries, there has been a tendency for English only classrooms to be seen as the most efficacious for language learning in EFL contexts as well. With this volume, we challenge this assumption.

While there may have been sound pedagogical reasons espoused for the adoption of English only approaches in the classroom, some commentators take a more cynical view as to the reason such policies have been staunchly maintained to the extent that native speakers are often preferred (and even required) in many EFL settings. Phillipson (1992) suggests that policies which promote the idea of using English only provide an advantage for native speaking teachers who are able, and often do, teach almost anywhere in the world without having to make the effort to learn another language - a practice which may be viewed as a rather pervasive type of linguistic imperialism. Sridhar (1994) argues that the desire to obtain native-speaker-like competence has also contributed to this state of affairs, where success in the learning of a second language tends to be defined in terms of the ideal native speaker. As Kachru (1994) points out, this is an abstract notion since no such idealised native speaker exists - anybody speaking any language is always affected by the conditions of normal usage such as distraction, noise, the limitations of memory, and on-line planning.
There have also been a range of practical reasons proposed for avoiding the use of the first language in the classroom - teachers wish to encourage the use of the second language and want learners to begin to think in the second language, and not to rely on their first language. This presupposes the idea, of course, that if the first language is not actively encouraged in the classroom it will not be used at all. In fact, this is quite unlikely and, as we see in the teachers' reports, the learners often use their first language actively to help other learners in their classroom (for example, Chapters 9 and 14). It is quite likely that allowing, or even enabling, some limited use of the first language in the classroom may mean that its use becomes overt rather than covert (Weschler 1997).

One way to begin to think about the use of the first language in the classroom is to adopt the view that the influence of the first language is inevitable and unavoidable, and therefore to consider the kinds of situations in which it might be advantageous for teachers to use the first language beneficially in the classroom context, and indeed this is borne out in the chapters which follow. Ella (Chapter 3) is able to teach a citizenship course to low-level Russian learners of English because she is bilingual. Mei Fong (Chapter 4) argues that bilingual classes increase retention rates with older, low-level learners.

To date, there has been only limited evaluation of the potential roles that the first language might play in the adult ESL or EFL classroom. Some of this research has been conducted in Australia (for example, O’Grady 1987; Taylor 2000; Chau 2001; Gunn 2003) and some in EFL classrooms, mainly in Asian countries (for example, Cole 1998; Hosoda 2000; Muir 2001). Most recently, a number of researchers working within a socio-cultural framework have conducted a series of studies on various aspects of L1 use in the classroom, mainly with more advanced learners, examining the potential cognitive benefits (for example, Donato 1994; Swain and Lapkin 1998; Swain 2000; Storch and Wigglesworth 2003). In the sections below, I examine what we already know about the value of the first language in the classroom.

The learning context

The learning of English in non-native contexts, such as in Asia or Europe - in other words the English as foreign language contexts - is fundamentally different from learning English in native speaker contexts, or English as a second language contexts, such as Australia or the United States. As Sridhar (1994) argues, in ESL contexts learners are generally immersed in the second language outside the classroom. In these contexts, English is the language of education, politics, and the wider community, although it may not be the language of the individual learners' local networks. Thus, in ESL contexts, the learner's first language will often be limited to that of a social role, and its use in other contexts may interfere with communication, or be inappropriate. The assumption is that the second language will be used for communication with native speakers on a daily basis, and this makes native speakers the point of reference (Sridhar 1994).

By contrast, where learners are acquiring an L2 in their own country - and this is by far the majority of learners of English - it is often, in fact primarily, taught by non-native speaker teachers. In addition, it is being learned primarily for use with other non-native speakers, by learners who are likely to have, at best, very limited contact with native speakers of the second language - if indeed they have any at all (Kachru and
Nelson 2001). Where such circumstances prevail, the first language can be seen as an important resource rather than as a problem, and one which allows learners to integrate English more effectively and more efficiently into their existing linguistic repertoire (Canagarajah 1999). This concords with Sridhar’s (1994) view that under normal circumstances, the second language is not being learned to replace the first language but, rather, is being learned to use alongside the first language. Thus, as Danhua (1995) argues, the use of both languages can be helpful in achieving intralingual proficiency, where learners work from their first language as a reference base and can use it as the medium by which they adjust to the second language.

Using L1 in EFL contexts

Communicative language teaching approaches (CLT) to the teaching of English are now widespread, although it has been argued that its adoption into many EFL contexts has not been easy (Li 1998). At first glance, the CLT approach appears consistent with the use of English only in the classroom. However, in EFL contexts - and to a lesser extent in ESL contexts (although see Chapters 3-6, this volume) - this means that a valuable resource, shared by the whole class and usually including the teacher, is not being used. In fact, there is evidence that the incorporation of the first language into the communicative classroom is both possible and beneficial to the learners, as discussed below.

The question of whether or not to use the first language in English language classes is especially relevant in homogeneous classrooms and learning environments, where the majority of learners in the classroom are monolingual and often share their first language with their teacher. Increasingly, as many of the chapters in this volume attest, the first language is also used in less homogeneous classes in ESL contexts, as well as in homogeneous classes with bilingual teachers. Although there has not been a great deal of empirical research which has investigated the value (or lack of value) of the use of the first language in these language classrooms, three strands of research can contribute to our understanding of the role that the first language might have in the classroom, namely:

- the conditions under which the first language may be used most effectively in the classroom (for example, Harbord 1992; Weschler 1997; Cole 1998)
- the role of teacher code-switching in the classroom as a useful pragmatic strategy in the EFL classroom (for example, Adendorf 1993; Auerbach 1993; Canagarajah 1995; Lin 1996; Arthur 1996)
- the use of the first language for cognitively demanding tasks, and as a bridge to the second language (for example, Anton and DiCamilla 1998; Swain and Lapkin 2000).

**Conditions for L1 use**

The use of the first language in the classroom has been very beneficial with low-level and/or beginning learners (Cole 1998; Gunn 2003). Gunn, for example, investigated the benefits of bilingual assistants in a class of women with low levels of literacy. While the bilingual assistants were only in the class for one quarter of the total allotted time, she found that there were enormous benefits in terms of building rapport in the classroom, enabling a situation in which adult concepts and ideas could be discussed,
as well as in terms of assisting with the learning of particular features of language. Willis (1981) also suggests the first language can be used profitably to explain a meaning, to explain the aims of a lesson, to evaluate learner understanding, or to discuss the main ideas of a piece after reading it. A number of the teachers and bilingual assistants report in this volume using L1 for these reasons. Weschler (1997) suggests using the first language for brainstorming, an activity which Ella (Chapter 3) also found useful. Harbord (1992: 355), following an examination of the different strategies for which the first language is used, argues that it should be used to provoke discussion and speculation, to develop clarity and flexibility of thinking and to help increase learner awareness of the interaction between their first and second languages – a strategy Mei Fong (Chapter 4) also found useful. Thus there are a number of general points which can be raised with respect to the value of using the first language.

We might also consider the other side of this coin – what happens if the first language is not used at all. This has a number of implications; for example, tasks and activities must be kept simple so that the instructions can be understood in the second language. This may mean that learners spend a lot of time trying to work out what to do, rather than doing what the task requires. Many of the teachers in this volume comment on this (see particularly Chapter 5 and Chapter 7). Avoiding the first language, particularly with low-level learners, means maintaining a very basic conceptual level of discussion which may make the learners feel that they are being treated like children. Thus the use of the first language allows the introduction of concepts and discussion of conceptually more demanding material which is of interest to adults, as Gunn 2003 found. The use of the first language also allows learners to access and use different cognitive strategies from those which might be available in their second language and which may not necessarily be the most effective for their learning.

Harbord (1992) proposes that in learner-to-learner communication, the first language will be used anyway, without encouragement from teachers. However, he points out that this has the potential to create a situation where a hierarchy develops between the learners by identifying those who are weaker. However, this contrasts with one of the main tenets running through the teacher reports in this volume. These teachers suggest that learners interact with each other in positive and helpful ways (for example, Chapter 8). Harbord proposes that a more positive use of the first language is to use it to compare, contrast or discuss the work they are doing. Such discussion promotes the development of a more cooperative approach to their work, and allows them to think independently. Particularly with low-level learners, as Yong King (Chapter 6) found, it also allows discussion of aspects of the second language in more depth, since they may not have the ability to conduct such discussion in their second language which results in somewhat tokenistic interaction.

**Code-switching in the classroom**

Code-switching is the ability to manipulate two languages within the same utterance or during the same conversation (Hoffmann 1991). Code-switching in the classroom has been the subject of a limited amount of empirical research, although largely in the Japanese context. While attempts have been made to show that code-switching conforms to certain morphological and syntactic constraints, there continues to be considerable debate over the nature of such constraints (see, for example, Myers-Scotton 1993; Gardener-Chloros 1995; Hamers and Blanc 2000 for further discussion of this phenomenon). It is, however, well recognised as an intralingual social phenomenon that
plays an important social role in bilingual interaction. A number of studies of code-switching in language classrooms have shown that code-switching can have a useful role to play in classes where the first language is shared by teacher and learners.

Examining the ways in which code-switching was used with older EFL learners in a beginning level conversation class, Ogane (1997) identified a range of functions for code-switching. These included cognitive, social and pedagogical functions. Cognitive functions included gaining planning time and attracting attention to, and focusing attention on, specific aspects of the second language content. Social functions included using code-switching to encourage relaxed conversation and to express personal feelings, while the pedagogical functions included using code-switching to identify the need for help, or to indicate important points.

Another study (Hosoda 2000) examined the code-switching of a Japanese teacher of English in a small conversation class. She found the roles for which code-switching was used included explaining earlier second language utterances, providing definitions of words which were unknown, giving instructions and providing both negative and positive feedback.

Finally, Muir (2001) conducted a detailed study of four native-English-speaking teachers working in Japanese secondary classrooms in which the data collection included questionnaires, interviews, and recordings of classroom activities. She found that code-switching was used to clarify meanings of unknown words and for specific vocabulary instruction and to elaborate on English utterances. Teachers also used code-switching as a conscious strategy to negotiate meanings and to negotiate issues around classroom management. In addition, this study found that learner attitudes toward teacher code-switching were positive, in particular for clarification of meaning and for the introduction of new vocabulary.

Muir (2001) found that there were several good reasons for using the native language in focused and limited ways. These included providing explanations of word meaning so that learners avoided becoming confused and frustrated in their efforts to understand. The importance of clarification of word meaning is also reported by several teachers in this volume (for example, Chapter 5, Chapter 11 and Chapter 9). Students were also less likely to become discouraged about trying to communicate. Native language use was also useful for finding out about the lives of the learners who were unable to communicate facts which were important to them in the L2.

**Cognitive benefits of L1 use**

Several of the studies reviewed above also identified the cognitive benefits of the use of the first language. A recent strand of research, conducted within a socio-cultural framework, has begun to investigate these benefits empirically in a systematic way. These studies have focused on the use of the first language as a cognitive tool, or a cognitive bridge, to the second language. Several studies have contributed to how this can be understood.

Many of these studies have examined the first language interactions used by learners as they participate in cognitively demanding activities in their second language. Within this framework it is argued that, where the first language is shared by the learners, it can function as a psychological tool. This has been shown to be the case both in foreign language classrooms (for example, Brooks and Donato 1994; Anton and DiCamilla 1998) and in immersion classrooms (Swain and Lapkin 2000). For example, Anton
Chapter 1
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and DiCamilla (1998), reporting on an empirical study of five dyads of adult learners of Spanish as a foreign language, show that:

the use of L1 is beneficial for language learning, since it acts as a critical psychological tool that enables learners to construct effective collaborative dialogue in the completion of meaning-based language tasks by performing three important functions: construction of scaffolded help, establishment of intersubjectivity, and use of private speech. (p 337)

They propose that the first language not only assists in the process and completion of the task, but also creates ‘a social and cognitive space in which learners are able to provide each other and themselves with help throughout the task’ (p 338). Swain and Lapkin (2000) have found that the use of the first language in completing grammar-focused tasks in immersion classrooms is important to the learners of the language.

Another significant question is the issue of scaffolding. Scaffolding is where one speaker helps another speaker to perform a task or function which they would not be able to do without assistance (Ellis 2003: 180-1). It is a concept which has been widely used, and a number of studies in mainstream education (for example, Forman and Cazden 1985) and L2 classrooms (for example, Donato 1994; Kowal and Swain 1994; Ohta 1995; Ohta 2000) have shown that scaffolding can also occur not only in teacher-learner interaction, but also in peer interaction. Anton and DiCamilla (1998) show that the learners may use their L1 to scaffold their assistance. Such scaffolded assistance may serve a number of functions:

By means of the L1 the students enlist each other’s interest in the task throughout its performance, or develop strategies for making the task manageable, maintain their focus on the goal of the task, foreground important elements of the task, discuss what needs to be done to solve specific problems, and explicate and build on each others partial solutions to specific problems throughout the task. (p 321)

As many of the teachers point out in their reports in this volume, the L1 proved an invaluable resource for these low-level learners to engage with tasks and activities in ways that would have been impossible without some access to their L1.

Swain and Lapkin (2000) investigated the role of the first language in the task-based interactions of second language learners in immersion classrooms. They found that while approximately 25 per cent of the language used by the learners in conducting the task was in their first language, only about 12 per cent of these occurrences were off task. Thus, it appeared that learners were using their first language in positive ways which were helpful to the learning of their second language learning. They argue that the first language provides learners with a tool which allows them to:

Make sense of the requirements and content of the task; to focus attention on language form, vocabulary use, and overall organization; and to establish the tone and nature of the collaboration ... judicious use of the L1 can indeed support L2 learning and use. To insist that no use be made of the L1 in carrying out tasks that are both linguistically and cognitively complex is to deny the use of an important cognitive tool. (pp 268-9)
Using L1 in ESL contexts

Many English-speaking countries have large immigrant populations who come from widely varied linguistic, social and cultural backgrounds. Traditionally, in this context, providers of English language classes have assigned learners to classes based on level of proficiency, and classrooms have often consisted of very heterogeneous groups of learners from widely diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds. In the Australian context, despite the problems inherent in setting up linguistically homogeneous language classes, there has been considerable interest in examining the benefits of using learners’ first language in the classroom, particularly in the initial stages of their English language learning. As seen in this volume, there are currently substantial numbers of classes across Australia which have incorporated the use of bilingual teachers (see Chapters 3–6), bilingual teaching assistants (see Chapters 7–13), and/or bilingual teaching materials – often in the form of in-house publications, and bilingual input sessions (see Chapters 14–16). The focus of these classes has tended to be minimal-proficiency learners, often those who come from low literacy or interrupted educational backgrounds as a result of their refugee status, and/or learners for whom language learning is perceived to be particularly difficult, such as more mature learners. Several recent studies have documented the processes and benefits of the bilingual classroom for adult immigrants (for example, Taylor 2000; Chau 2001; Gunn 2003).

The logistical problems faced by English language providers in setting up classes which can take advantage of the first language are considerable. Class participants, with their widely varied language backgrounds, range in educational experience from those with no schooling, to those with a few years of primary education, and to those with postgraduate qualifications. In addition, they come from diverse sociocultural and ethnic backgrounds. Despite these difficulties, a number of different models of bilingual provision have been the subjects of recent investigations. These include classes where the participants’ language backgrounds are limited to one or two languages and bilingual aides are employed for some period of the classroom time (for example, Gunn 2003), classes where groups of three or four learners speak the same language and several bilingual aides interact with small groups in their first language (for example, Chau 2001), and classes where all members share the same first language background, and the teacher is bilingual in English and in the first language of the class participants (Taylor 2000). Each of these models of bilingual support are investigated in the teacher reports which follow.

Within these ESL contexts, empirical investigation of the use of the first language has found that learners consider the use of their first language in the classroom supports their second language learning (Chau 2001). In particular, the use of the first language is:

- task oriented
- used strategically by learners to try to understand new concepts being introduced
- used to understand teacher instructions related to tasks and activities in the classroom
- used to identify similarities and differences between the two languages.

Importantly, there have also been social gains, with learners reporting increased confidence and reduced anxiety when there are bilingual assistants or bilingual
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teachers present in the classroom (O’Grady 1987; Gunn 2003). The teachers in this volume also comment extensively on these gains. Learners come to the language classroom highly proficient in their first language. It is a resource which can and should be used in the classroom, but with guidelines that limit its use to appropriate contexts, where teachers are aware of the learning function it is playing in the classroom. In this volume, the teachers explore the use of L1 and identify some useful strategies, approaches and guidelines for the use of L1 in the ESL classroom.

References


Chapter 2

L1 as a resource in adult learning settings

Denise E Murray – Macquarie University, Sydney

Introduction

Literature on the use of learners' first language in adult English language classrooms focuses on L1 use as a support for learning English to help transition learners from their first to another language (O’Grady 1987; Wigglesworth 2003). While this is an important aspect of L1 use, another way of looking at L1 use is to consider the rich language practices and cultural value systems adult learners bring with them to the classroom. This chapter, therefore, begins from the perspective of learners having unlimited resources – ones we may not have envisaged, ones that may not have been studied by scholars, and ones that learners may not even be conscious of.

Not only do learners bring cultural and linguistic knowledge and abilities to the classroom, they also bring cognitive abilities. Rather than the more traditional approach to instruction in which the learner is a tabula rasa on which the teacher will write, or an empty vessel which the teacher will fill (cf Freire 1972, who described the banking model of education), I want us to consider learners as bringing rich resources with them, resources that can be tapped in instruction.

Two traditions of scholarship inform the pedagogical suggestions I will discuss here – the humanistic and the ethnographic approach. Humanistic approaches to learning focus on the learner being responsible for his/her own learning (see Stevick 1990), while the anthropological method of inquiry – known as ethnography – views the members of a culture as informants; that is, people with knowledge of the practices of their own culture (see Heath 1983, for application of ethnography to education). With these two approaches to the study of the learner, we can rethink the way we teach, especially the way we teach language. The question to be considered is: How can we foster language acquisition, help learners become responsible for their own learning, and make use of the knowledge and language that learners bring with them to class?

In this chapter, I will give detailed descriptions of a number of activities for adult learners of English, techniques that focus on learners as informants, responsible for their own learning. By considering learners as informants, their self-esteem is raised and they have a context in which content rather than form is the focus of instruction and interaction. Having learners responsible for their own learning empowers them. While some of the activities described here are for more advanced learners than the learners in the classes the teachers report on in this volume, many have been used successfully with beginner classes. Many of the activities draw on learners' knowledge of their own culture and language and involve learners (and teachers or bilingual assistants providing scaffolded help in L1).

In the anthropological sense, learners are informants with a wealth of cultural and linguistic knowledge; however, this knowledge is rarely conscious and rarely articulated in language classrooms. What I am suggesting here is that we create instructional scaffolds (Hammond and Gibbons 2001; Gibbons 2002) that will help learners...
investigate their own languages and cultures. Scaffolding provides support for learners – but only as much support as is needed at any given time, with the scaffold gradually being removed. Scaffolding was first described to explain the interaction between parent and child (Wood, Bruner and Ross 1976) and later extended to describe instruction where teachers assist learners achieve a task (Maybin, Mercer and Steirer 1992). The goal of scaffolding is to provide enough support until the learner can achieve the task independently.

Discovering speech community

Sociolinguists have varying definitions of the concept of speech community, but for the purposes of learners’ exploring their own speech communities, I have found John Gumperz’s (1972: 219) definition the most useful:

[a] social group which may be either monolingual or multilingual, held together by frequency of social interactive patterns and set off from the surrounding areas by weaknesses in the lines of communication. Linguistic communities may consist of small groups bound together by face-to-face contact or may cover large regions depending on the level of abstraction we wish to achieve.

Thus, a speech community may be an entire nation, or may be members of an association, or of a section of a large city.

Investigating speech communities in the classroom

Using matrices

When I was teaching ESL, I usually started any language class with an investigation of the learners’ speech communities. To investigate learners’ speech communities, learners whose English was advanced kept a journal over a period of two weeks, jotting down their uses of language. Learners with limited English did the same task in their L1. At the end of the two-week period, learners then fill in a matrix, such as Figures 1–3. The items on the matrix are chosen from the situations in which the learners engaged in language or needed to use a particular language. Thus, for example, learners in adult English language programs might include ‘my children’s teachers’ if they need to interact with their children’s teachers. Some learners read, and want to read directions or information on warranty or product safety. The items I have used in the samples below are representative of situations various learners have identified over the years. Not all classes identify all these situations and some identify others. The categories must come from the learners in a particular class. Beginner ESL learners can use pictures (cut from magazines, for example) or drawings to identify the categories in their matrices.

The column ‘Reasons’ is included so that learners can think through why they use the particular language they do. Thus, for example, if their L1 is used in talk with family because that is the common shared language, there is no need for us to teach functions in English dealing with family situations. But if a learner replies that she uses her L1 when writing notes on the refrigerator for her children (even though they are barely literate in their L1) because her English is not good enough, such situations could be included in class activities. Or, if a parent is helping the children acquire literacy in the L1, teachers may want to encourage this practice, knowing that L1 literacy will enhance L2 literacy. Whatever curricular decision is chosen, it should be based on firm data of language use and consideration of what the learners themselves want.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Talking Situation</th>
<th>L1/English</th>
<th>Either/Both</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dentist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post Office</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Security</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting things repaired</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class discussion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1:** Example of language use survey: Oral

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading Situation</th>
<th>L1/English</th>
<th>Either/Both</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family/notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends/notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbours/notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service/notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Products</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job ads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalogues</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment forms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 2:** Example of language use survey: Reading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Situation</th>
<th>L1/English</th>
<th>Either/Both</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family/notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends/notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbours/notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service/notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheques</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Résumés</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3:** Example of language use survey: Writing
It is also important to separate oral language from reading and writing because the functions people require for these different channels of communication are rarely the same. For example, a family might discuss soap operas on TV or their problems at work orally, using the written channel primarily for interactions with schools and other institutions. Teachers need to explore which channels are required for which functions in order to develop appropriate teaching activities.

These matrices, completed by the learners, provide both learner and teacher with a clearer understanding of the ways in which individual learners use both their L1 and English. In class, teachers can then discuss situations in which learners used English and determine whether they felt their English was adequate for the task. Teachers and learners can next discuss situations in which they used their L1 and determine whether they wanted to use English in this situation but did not have sufficient mastery of that language for it to be appropriate. Teachers can then decide what functions and situations should be in the teaching curriculum, giving learners responsibility for their own learning as advocated by humanistic educators. In this way, teachers avoid making arbitrary curricular choices or ones based primarily on their own intuitions of what learners need, an issue also discussed in the context of the education of second-language, school-age learners (McLaughlin 1992). Using such an approach to syllabus design, for example, would identify specific learner communities’ needs. For example, in her study of a Khmer community in the United States, Welaratna (1992) found that the adults needed to learn how to respond to door-to-door solicitors, something their ESL teachers had not even considered.

Sometimes, prior to having learners complete the matrices, I have them draw speech community networks for each of the languages they speak. This provides learners with a visual representation of the journal they have kept for two weeks. Quite often, they have distinct speech communities for each language, which provides an interesting discussion point for more advanced classes.

Using profile sheets – an adaptation of the matrix system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>When and where did you use English?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: Learner Profile Sheet

A student in one of my teacher education classes adapted this method for her class of adult, beginner ESL learners. She had learners complete a Learner Profile Sheet (see Figure 4). These sheets covered a full page and learners were asked to provide seven
samples each. She found that learners soon got into the spirit of things. Dialogues began appearing and responses became longer and longer and, even though they had limited English, they transcribed their observations with amazing clarity, as the examples below testify. Reported uses of English ranged from phatic communication, such as ‘Have a nice day!’ said by a checkout woman at a supermarket, to dialogues such as that in Figure 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cam:</th>
<th>Good morning, how are you?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neighbor:</td>
<td>Fine, thanks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cam:</td>
<td>Your dog came into my backyard. Please keep him at your house.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Please repare the fence. Your dog came into my backyard two time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbor:</td>
<td>Yes I will.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cam:</td>
<td>Thank you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5: Student transcribed document**

Other learners reported their conversations, such as the following from a grandmother who helped her grandchildren with their homework:

I always help them to made homework ... Jamie want learned 11 to 20. I took some number card want she pronounce. If 16 she say sixty. I say sixty is 60 isn’t 16. A little while she can say sixteen.

The teacher categorised her learners’ observations, finding that the category with the largest number was family (22% of uses). For me, this was especially interesting because it was contrary to what I had experienced in my own adult ESL classes. Usually, I do not expect ESL learners to be using English with their families. But often English is the only shared language in families with members from different countries or when one member marries a native-English speaker. Often grandchildren only use English, or parents help children with their school work.

By examining actual speech communities and uses of language, teachers can better design curricula for the learners in our classes. Thus, Cam (Figure 5) could be helped with the language needed to make a polite complaint to her neighbour; or others, such as the grandmother, could be helped to learn the functions used for US schoolwork.

**Developing cross-cultural awareness**

Because individuals behave differently in the same situation due to both personal and cultural differences, teachers need to help learners find ways of interacting that are appropriate for them culturally and personally, as well as appropriate in the mainstream culture of the country to which they have immigrated. As informants, learners can provide an understanding of their own culture and personal preferences. As instructors, teachers can provide an understanding of mainstream sociolinguistic practices, which have been discovered through research. For example, Eggins and Slade (1997) identified the role and features of casual conversation in Australia. Role-play and oral life histories are two ways of comparing and contrasting the learners’ culture with that of the mainstream.
Role-play

Traditionally, role-play has required learners to take on a new role and thereby demonstrate their proficiency in the target language. However, role-play can serve quite a different function if the activity begins instead with what the learners already know. In the example in Figure 5, where Cam wants to complain as a linguistically and cognitively functioning adult to his neighbour about the neighbour's dog entering his backyard, Cam already knows (even if unconsciously) the rules for such a speech event in his own language and culture. He may not be able to articulate this knowledge but, given the actual situation, he can effectively role-play how he would respond. Even if learners play the roles as they believe they should be played, rather than as they actually are, the culture's values for the particular situation can be uncovered.

When I was teaching ESL, I used to have classes role-play situations like that in Figure 5, first without using language. While they role-played, other members of the class observed nonverbal communication, such as use of hands, facial expressions and distance between participants. They then wrote these down or drew diagrams/pictures to illustrate what they had seen. Next, learners role-played the situation in their L1, with as many pairs as possible from the same cultural and linguistic background role-playing. Depending on the language level of the learners, these role-plays were very short dialogues, such as the one in Figure 5, or much longer if the learners were more advanced. These role-plays were then either videotaped or audiotaped, and learners translated the language used in the speech event for the rest of the class. Depending on the language level of the learners, either they or I then put the dialogue into English on the overhead.

Using these dialogues, the class first examined individual differences among learners from the same cultural background. Then, the class identified common behaviours in that culture. I did this with as many linguistic and cultural groups as possible. Then learners either watched a video of adults from the target culture in the same situation or I worked with another teacher or aide to role-play the situation for the learners. The class then analysed the dialogue as for the different linguistic and cultural groups. I found that classes were then able to compare and contrast individual and cultural variation in language use, nonverbal cues, and interpersonal relations for this particular situation. This is similar to the cultural comparison and contrasts Zsuzsa and her bilingual assistants discuss in Chapter 7 and that Christine discusses in Chapter 10. From this comparison, learners identified functions and behaviours that can be transferred from the L1 speech event to the target language speech event.

For more advanced learners, this comparison and contrast can be a discussion or a written paper. For beginning learners, I used a matrix on which they can put check marks. A brief sample matrix appears in Figure 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviour</th>
<th>L1</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eye contact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance between participants</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of name in addressing speakers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politeness markers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tone of voice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: Speech event matrix
A useful and more comprehensive rubric for examining the characteristics of these speech events is Dell Hymes’ (1986: 65) SPEAKING mnemonic in Figure 7. Learners and teacher can identify how each of these characteristics is present in their speech events. Not all speech events will be defined by all of these features but they do provide a way for both learners and teachers to compare and contrast speech events across and within cultures. While such activities may seem beyond the level of pre-beginner and beginner language learners, with L1 support for both classroom instruction and discussion of cultural and linguistic differences, learners can engage in informative cross-cultural discussions, such as Cecily reports in Chapter 7.

Setting: Refers to both physical and psychological environment as to the time and place as well as the cultural definition of the speech act or event.

Participants: Refers to speaker, hearer, occasionally to the audience overhearing the speech act or event.

Ends: Refers to the recognized and expected purpose of the speech act or event.

Act sequence: Refers to the actual sequences of speech acts exchanged between participants.

Key: Refers to the manner and tone in which the event is performed (for example, joking).

Instrumentalities: Refers to channel of transmission.

Norms: Refers to both norms of interpretation and of interaction; that is, how the event should be understood and what are the culture-based rules of behaviour.

Genres: Refers to established categories such as conversation, poem.

The next step is to identify the extent to which each learner is willing to adapt his or her behaviour to fit the mainstream patterns of the target culture. For many learners, maintaining eye contact between a superior and inferior is too culturally inappropriate for them to be willing to use (see Chapter 7, for example). Others find that they can use such behaviours in English because English does not seem as personal and culturally real as does the L1. (It is for this reason that so many people can swear more effectively in a second language than in their first, for which all the cultural taboos operate.) The final step is to have learners role play the situation in English.

By using this method of role-play, I gave learners the opportunity to explore what they already know and to choose what they will use in their new setting. In this way they can better understand their own difficulties in adapting; but also, they can understand why Australians might react to them in a particular way. If they choose, for example, not to maintain eye contact, they know that many Australians will perceive them as being shifty or even as lying. But they do it with conscious knowledge and by making the decision for themselves. It is not imposed by the teacher, but offered as a choice that carries certain consequences.

Oral life histories

Another source of cultural knowledge is other members of the learners’ communities. When I was teaching in the United States, I had learners interview older members of
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L1 as a resource in adult learning settings

their communities, asking them questions about their lives in the home country and their adaptation to the United States. This is similar to what Usha Welaratna (Welaratna 1992) did to collect her life histories of Khmer in northern California. Another method, employed by Daniel McLaughlin (McLaughlin 1992), was to have Navajo learners interview experts and write articles for publication in the bilingual community newspaper.

With my classes, I prepared in class for the interviews, helping learners to determine what information they wanted to discover and what sort of questions they wanted to ask. The choice of focus was up to the learners. The interviews were usually conducted in the L1. Learners then had the task of summarising the oral language to report back to the rest of the class. When learners worked in groups, those with better English proficiency helped those with minimal English, but all contributed knowledge and expertise. With the class, I then created a book of life histories for all class members. If the interviewee agreed, we included photos of them or uploaded their photos onto the class webpage. Often learners wanted to share these books with other members in their community. I also encouraged them to write a piece for their local primary-language newspaper - a new and real audience. These life histories provided learners with a better understanding of their own community and also an understanding of the communities of other immigrants and refugees. I also collected a life history of an older native-English-speaking person to share with the class. This helped learners to see the vast patchwork of cultural and linguistic tradition that makes up the United States and Australia (see Nichols 1992, for an activity that helps uncover ‘mainstream’ linguistic and cultural heritage).

Using L1 to support L2 learning

Just as learners have different cultural and personal values, they also have varied competencies in their L1. Research has shown the advantages of balanced bilingualism (see Thomas and Collier 2003) and the prevalence of code-switching among bilinguals; that is, the shift from one language to another within the same speech event (see Gumperz 1982; Ogane 1997; Hosoda 2000; Wigglesworth, this volume). Thus, the use of the L1 in the English language classroom is not a question of laziness (as has been suggested in the past) nor is it an impediment to the acquisition of English. Rather, it is a natural resource that teachers can make use of to facilitate learning and build self-esteem. As Wigglesworth (Chapter 1) notes, teachers and learners use L1 for a variety of functions in the language classroom. Many teachers reporting in this volume have noted the increase in learners' self-esteem when the L1 is used in class (for example, Ella, Chapter 3 and Mei Fong, Chapter 4). In the previous two sections, I indicated several ways of using learners' L1. The following are further suggestions for consciously tapping the language resources learners bring with them to class.

Reading/Writing

Traditional reading exercises consist of teacher-selected texts with end-of-passage questions that are supposed to determine whether learners have understood the passage. Many such texts use questions that require decoding skills only; the learner may have very little understanding of the content of the text and still be able to answer the questions. Even if texts include well-designed questions, this task requires learners to perform in different ways from the way readers normally respond to a text outside educational
settings. Novels are not followed by comprehension questions; nor do newspapers and magazines include comprehension questions. Most people read for enjoyment or to uncover information that they want to use in some way. I believe, therefore, that teachers need to try to create situations for learners that help them read for real purposes, both in English and in their L1. One way is to use learner-produced writing as reading texts for the class. As other learners read what a classmate has written, they want to ask more questions, find out why, how, where, and when. The writings might be those collected in the speech community journal, through oral histories or through cultural role-plays – some may be in English, some may be in the L1. Although the ultimate goal may be to encourage reading and writing in English, beginning with the L1 often provides a step into English for many learners.

An example of such learner writing comes from the language experience approach (Dixon and Nessel 1983), where learners audiotape events in their current or past lives. Advanced learners can then use these as a basis for writing. For less advanced writers, teachers can help frame and scaffold the writing for learners. These texts then become the reading material for the class. The readers are interested in getting to know each other better, they have the writer available to ask questions of, and the original writer has a real audience for the piece of writing. I have had learners draw family trees, identifying the usual biodata such as age, gender, language, and place of birth. They then chose one member of the family they wanted to introduce to the rest of the class and wrote (or audiotaped if they are not yet up to spontaneous writing) about that member, describing him/her physically and his/her character, including some significant events in the person’s life. Finally, they gave reasons for choosing that family member. Sometimes the original audiotape was made in the L1; sometimes the class asked questions in their L1. The choice was left up to the learners; however, they were encouraged to share with all class members, even those speaking a different L1. Thus the teacher, a bilingual assistant, or a more advanced learner from the same class or another class was called on to act as interpreter. The goal was for learners to share information with a real purpose and real audience, unfettered by linguistic limits.

Brainstorming in L1

Research (Friedlander 1990) has shown that writers who brainstorm and write outlines in their L1, when the topic is one they experienced in their L1, write more details and have better organised writing than if teachers insist all prewriting be done in English. For such writers, one word in a cluster or brainstormed list will invoke a whole host of connotations and associated events in their L1, whereas the English vocabulary does not convey such rich connotations for them. Thus, we need to discuss with learners which language will better facilitate access to experiences and details for a particular writing assignment. There can be no hard and fast rules. Learners need to make their own choices.

Grammar

More advanced learners can be encouraged to become mini-linguists, collecting language data from their community and analysing it. In the same way that learners collected cultural information in the life histories and cultural role-plays, learners can audiotape dialogues and collect written pieces in their L1. These can then be the data for a linguistic analysis of features such as word order, verb endings (if any), topic/comment
sentence organisation, and agreement. Learners can write out a word-for-word translation in English, showing how the L1 differs in structure from English. This translation can then be compared with a free translation into conventional English. In this way learners discover that they already ‘know’ rules of linguistic structure - that is, those of their L1. In advanced writing classes, this knowledge can help learners understand some of the errors they make in writing English. Several bilingual assistants and teachers report in this volume that they compare and contrast L1 and L2 grammar, often in the L1, in order to help learners understand their own uses of English (see, for example, Chapter 7).

Speaking/Listening

The ability to interact with native speakers in face-to-face encounters depends not only on the cultural and discourse features discussed above, but also on learners’ pronunciation. However, native-like pronunciation need not be the goal for adult learners. Teachers and learners alike need to accept that some features of the L1 will probably remain as part of their English speech patterns. Indeed, it is often advantageous to retain some non-native features (Maurice Chevalier and others have capitalised on their foreign accents). If learners have an accent, native speakers do not expect native-like competence with the culture and may be more forgiving of culturally inappropriate behaviour. Our goal as both teachers and learners should be for intelligibility (Yates and Springall 2003). The following activity can help learners discover for themselves what is intelligible and what is not in their own speech.

Testing for intelligibility

I audiotape learners speaking their L1 then, with the class, analyse some of the distinctive features of the phonology of their languages (for example, tone in languages such as Vietnamese or Chinese). I then audiotape learners speaking English and we identify sounds they are transferring from their L1.

Learners then play selections from the English language tapes to native speakers and have them paraphrase what the speaker said (graduate students in linguistics or teacher education programs are a great source of native speakers for this activity). Even though this is the least context-embedded of interaction situations (but one that occurs in telephone calls), it does help learners identify problem areas. Learners can then focus on the areas of pronunciation that caused them to be unintelligible and not spend time on features that are unlikely to cause confusion.

In a study of the intelligibility of Thai and Japanese speakers of Australian English (Murray 1983), for example, I found that mispronunciations of /l/ and /r/, traditionally characterised as the most marked features of such speakers, did not lead to confusion. However, mispronunciations of fricatives (for example, /s/ and /z/) and the lack of release of word-final plosives (for example, /d/ and /g/) contributed more to lack of intelligibility for these speakers. Teachers reporting in this volume have identified a number of pronunciation issues that can be clarified through the use of either contrastive analysis of L1 and L2 (for example, Yong King, Chapter 6) or through explanations of L2 phonology (for example, Mei Fong, Chapter 4; Ngoc Bui, Chapter 5; and Forough, Chapter 8).
Conclusion

It is clear that many strategies exist for building on learners’ own understandings and for using their communities, such as self-observation, descriptions of speech communities, community interviews, analysis of culturally relevant speech events, prewriting in the L1, creating reading texts, and grammar and phonology analyses. Teachers reporting in this volume have also found a number of different ways to utilise L1 in the process of teaching English to adult immigrants. Ways of capitalising on learners’ differences are as unlimited as the resources and differences they bring to class. By including the rationale behind the activities suggested, I hope that teachers can create their own activities, building on the wealth of information and understandings all learners have and bring with them to the classroom.

Notes


2 It is important to stress similar cultural backgrounds as well as linguistic ones. Spanish speakers from Mexico, for example, have different cultural values and traditions than Spanish-speaking Argentines. Ethnic Chinese from Vietnam have different cultural rules than Chinese from China.

References


Section 2
Classroom perspectives
Part 1: The bilingual teacher

Part 1 of Section 2 reports on bilingual classes, where learners and teacher shared a common language. Four of the teachers in the project taught such bilingual classes – one in Russian, one in Vietnamese and two in Mandarin. The Russian bilingual class was a content-based class, where the content was civics – teaching learners the knowledge they need to apply for Australian citizenship. The Vietnamese class was an evening class, held two evenings a week for three hours each. Both Chinese bilingual classes were in Mandarin Chinese, even though some of the learners were Cantonese speakers. In one case, all learners could understand Mandarin; in the other, the teacher was fluent in both Mandarin and Cantonese. The learners in both classes were primarily older (45 years old and above). One of the Chinese bilingual classes met on Saturdays for four hours, while the other met for three hours in the morning twice a week.
Chapter 3
The Russian bilingual class

Ella Virosvlianskaia – AMES St Kilda

Introduction

Being a bilingual teacher and having experience in teaching EFL and ESL, I believed it would be interesting and stimulating to take part in this project. Having taught a bilingual class for more than six years, I wanted to listen to other teachers doing similar things, to share ideas and learn something new.

In the first term of 1998 the first Russian bilingual class started in St Kilda. The aim was to accommodate AMEP eligible clients who had dropped out of mainstream classes due to their age, health problems or family commitments.

In the class which participated in this project, the client profiles and survey indicated no previous English study and, for most, no attempts had been made to participate in mainstream ‘traditional’ classes. Most of the 20 learners were new migrants who had come to Australia to be reunited with their children’s families. None of them had chosen to come but had been obliged to come to help to look after their grandchildren. Many of the learners said they were stressed – those who had tried to study English in a mainstream class complained about being too ‘slow’ or ‘stupid’ because they could not compete with younger learners and could not understand their teachers. They felt uncomfortable about being exposed to unfamiliar teaching patterns. They had very low self-esteem due to their inability to participate and contribute in these traditional classes. At the initial interview for the class, the learners appeared to be insecure to some extent. However, they believed that being in a class with people from a similar background, and with a Russian-speaking teacher, would help them to learn some basic English and allow them to gain more independence from their children.

They were regarded as a group of people in need of special consideration and assistance who might benefit from bilingual support. All learners appreciated the effort being made by AMES to help older learners by offering this bilingual class locally, within walking distance of their homes. They felt very special and valued – and optimistic.

The research context

Project focus

The project was conducted over two terms. In the first term (Term 2 of the college year), I offered a citizenship course, and in the second term (Term 3) I taught a general English language course. My focus in terms of the research was to:

• identify optimal ways of using the L1 in the bilingual classroom
• observe and compare the learners’ reaction to different ways of using L1
• try out new teaching techniques.
Class profile

The class was a low intensity class offered in St Kilda (a suburb south of the city) for four hours a week in two, two-hour sessions.

Learner profile

The twenty learners in the class ranged from 43 years to 80 years of age, the majority in their sixties. There were four males and eight females and the class included two married couples. All of the learners had been born in different republics of the former Soviet Union, including the Ukraine, Georgia and Russia. Three of them had come to Australia directly from their birth countries (Ukraine and Georgia) and had never had any exposure to English before arriving in Australia. Two learners had lived in the United States for eight years before coming to Australia and had attended English classes in New York. One learner had arrived approximately two years before the class convened from New Zealand where she did not have the opportunity to study English. Six learners had spent about seven years in Israel before coming to Australia.

All the learners could speak and read Russian, although Russian was the mother tongue for only half of them. Eight had tertiary education with a Bachelor degree or higher degree, two had post-secondary qualifications, and two had completed Year 10. All the learners had studied another language at school or university before coming to Australia, and had their own strong ideas of foreign language methodological style. They all expected a certain pattern to be followed, for example: the alphabet should be taught first, phonetic rules next, and so on.

The oldest learner, the 80-year-old male, had successfully completed three terms of Distance Learning with a monolingual teacher, but wanted to do the Citizenship course to learn more about Australia. His proficiency in English was much higher than that of the majority of the class.

The learners had chosen to complete the Citizenship course because of their interest in Australia now that they were resident. They were interested in history, geography, wildlife, culture, society and policy. It should be noted that due to their age, the learners were not required to undergo their citizenship interviews in English. (Normally, upon applying for citizenship in Australia, applicants are required to either have an interview conducted in English, or to have completed the Citizenship course.)

Course goals

The aims of the citizenship course in Term 2 were to:

- acquire useful knowledge about Australia’s society and institutions
- understand more about Australian Citizenship and how to apply to become an Australian Citizen
- understand the responsibilities and privileges of being a citizen.

The aim of the general English language course in Term 3 was to learn and develop basic English language skills necessary for the learners in everyday life. Specifically the course aimed to:

- focus in writing on filling in various simple forms
• focus on reading formal letters from doctors or hospitals, city council, housing commission, and real estate agencies
• include narrative reading as a part of every lesson and regular homework
• incorporate the speaking and listening topics chosen by the learners, and related to their everyday life, such as shopping, banking, health and socialising.

L1 support in the classroom

As I am a bilingual Russian-English speaker, and all the participants spoke Russian, no other support was required. In the Citizenship class (Term 2), there was a broader and more intensive use of the first language than in the general English class (Term 3) in which the use of L1 was minimised to peer interaction. However, I did listen to these interactions in order to provide feedback. Although I did not use Russian for explanations, I was always happy to give a translation in L1 whenever settlement, welfare or health issues were concerned.

Fact sheets in Russian were used; bilingual dictionaries were used both in the classroom and for homework and various flash cards were used for mix-and-match vocabulary teaching activities.

Management of L1 use in the classroom

Classroom interaction

Peer to peer

I encouraged the learners to use L1 amongst themselves for various purposes such as discussion, brainstorming (as a class or in groups), translation, reading comprehension, sharing experiences, and for all sorts of mix-and-match activities. Discussions were extremely useful in class when new and difficult concepts were introduced, particularly in the Citizenship course. A good example of such a discussion was on reconciliation. The vocabulary for the topic was introduced in Russian, and then the learners read and translated a text ‘The Council for Reconciliation’ in groups. The groups then compared their work and discussed any differences in translation. The learners chose the best translation and asked for my opinion. The learners found this kind of work very useful and interesting.

Brainstorming was a regular and popular activity. I introduced one of the most successful units of work, ‘Australia and its people’, through a group brainstorming activity. The four groups were each offered a different task:

• What do you know about Australia’s a) history, b) geography, c) culture/festivals, d) nature/wildlife.

Two groups of learners chose to write their answers (on geography and wildlife) mostly in English, while the other two groups, working on history and culture, used only Russian to write their notes. After that, the groups exchanged their work and added as much as they could to the lists of dates, geographic names, animals and so on. This type of activity generally resulted in using L1 to teach the relevant vocabulary and whole phrases.
Teacher/learner

As a follow up to the brainstorming activities I gave English equivalents to phrases such as European settlement and gold rush, and for the levels of government. These phrases were used for teaching pronunciation and reading. When the learners felt comfortable using the new words, I played an audiotape or video. In most cases the learners demonstrated good comprehension of the text.

Although this and similar forms of using L1 were frequent and regular, most L1 interaction between the learners and myself was related to learners' questions about cultural, political and social contexts and issues. The most natural forms of teacher/learner feedback were learner-initiated – received not only in the form of direct questions to me and requests for clarification, but in learners' peer-to-peer conversations which demonstrated either understanding, or lack of understanding. This allowed me to assess the learners' understanding and to see whether it was possible to move on, or whether paraphrasing or any other form of additional explanation was required. This form of interaction is an invaluable tool for managing the use of the first language in an ESL classroom. It also worked to the learners' benefit, allowing them to see that they could understand English without explicit help in their L1.

Learning strategies

The L1 was a useful resource for teaching learning strategies and was seen as a necessary tool for both myself and the learners to explore that subject. The learners were happy to share with each other the techniques they used for memorising words, including such unusual ones as assisting the learner's grandchild with preparation for spelling tests. The grade one child had to study about twenty words for a weekly spelling test. Discussing the children's problems with English spelling helped these older learners to re-evaluate their own strategies.

Content

For the Citizenship course, six fact sheets were provided in Russian giving brief summaries of each of the six units of work in the course. These contained the following information.

Sheet 1 What being a citizen means, who is eligible for Australian Citizenship, and why some people become citizens.

Sheet 2 Australia and its people, multicultural society, reconciliation, national symbols: national anthem, Australian flags, the Coat of Arms, some Australian landmarks.

Sheet 3 Democratic government in Australia, representative democracy, the three levels of government in Australia and responsibilities of each.

Sheet 4 The rights of all Australians, the responsibilities and privileges of Australian Citizens. Voting in Australia.

Sheet 5 Law and democracy in Australia: how laws are made and administered in Australia, jury service.

Sheet 6 Becoming an Australian Citizen: applying for Australian Citizenship, attending a ceremony, the Australian Citizenship Pledge.
Chapter 3
The Russian bilingual class

Language

Vocabulary

Planning and structuring a lesson for the Citizenship class was based on the fact that about one-third of the specific vocabulary and terminology to be taught in this course consisted of the words used in L1 (Russian) in the same context. Words such as democracy, climate, emblem, symbol, constitution, federal, parliament, republic, politician, referendum, senate, candidate, opposition, party, privilege, debate, penalty, jury, ceremony, certificate, document, interview and many others sound almost the same and have similar meanings in both Russian and English. The other two thirds of the vocabulary was quite difficult and required complete understanding. To this end, teaching vocabulary combined the use of both L1 and L2 in the following way.

At the beginning of presentation of each unit, I would introduce new vocabulary, giving definitions and explanations only in English. The learners were asked to write down the meanings of the words (as they understood them) in Russian in their books without checking the words in their dictionaries. However, they were encouraged to discuss and compare their suggestions/guesses within their groups. The best translation of the meaning of the new word was then written down and subsequently checked in the dictionary at home as a part of homework, and for self-evaluation.

I then started the next session with oral revision of the vocabulary. I gave a definition in English and the learners then said the word in English. After that, I asked the learners to provide an evaluation of their understanding of the previous lesson. Generally, about two-thirds of the class were happy with their ‘score’ and said revisiting vocabulary when checking their understanding (for homework) was good for memorising.

To summarise, in the Citizenship course, I used the following procedure for teaching vocabulary:

- L2 for initial presentation of vocabulary
- L1 for clarification and comprehension check
- L1 for explanation
- L1 for discussion
- L2 for listening (audio and videotapes)
- L2 for reading and writing.

Pronunciation and grammar

I always taught pronunciation and reading in L2 using a listen-and-repeat approach. Numerous ESL listening resources were used in class and for homework which stimulated the learners to start watching TV news and listen to the radio. Some of the learners started watching SBS movies with subtitles and recommended this enjoyable activity to the others. To assist the learners with grammar, I gave the learners a table of English tenses. All the examples were given in English but the learners were encouraged to write their translation.

Teaching idioms

I also used L1 as a backup in teaching idioms, and this was part of the everyday routine. Each time I would describe in L2 the situation where a certain idiomatic expression
might be used, then asked the learners what they would say in Russian in such a situation. I then provided an English equivalent.

Sample activities

Some of the bilingual activities that were popular in the Citizenship class were modified and used in the general English class when appropriate. Brainstorming was one of them.

Example 1: Brainstorming

Making an appointment to see a doctor

Step 1 Writing: In groups learners were asked to write a list of words and expressions they might need to use in a dialogue with a receptionist. They wrote two lists of useful vocabulary - on one the words they knew in English and on the other Russian words they thought they needed but did not know their English equivalents. In this way the new vocabulary was introduced and the learners were then given the task of writing dialogues in English.

Step 2 Listening to audiotape: The learners listened to three dialogues between a patient and receptionist (Listening to Australia Book 1 [Nicholson and Butterworth 2000]). On the first listening, they were asked to look at their lists of words and expressions and tick the words they heard. On the second listening they were asked to look at their dialogues and tick the sentences they predicted correctly.

Step 3 Reading: The learners were given the copies of the dialogues to practise reading in pairs.

Step 4 Speaking: Pairs of learners were given role-play cards with different situations and then asked to swap partners to practise as many different roles as they could.

Teaching this topic took the whole of the two-hour session. The bilingual brainstorm saved a lot of time in introducing new vocabulary and ensured active participation and team cooperation. Two other topics - 'Accommodation' and 'Public transport' - were taught in the same way.

Example 2: Teaching idioms

Question: What do you call, in Russian, a shop where they sell goods that have been owned and used before?

Answer: Commission shop.

Teacher: Yes, that's right. That's how we say it in Russian but in English these shops are called SECOND HAND.

The learners then gave examples of where they had seen second-hand shops, and what items were for sale there. The learners had seen many second-hand shops and had never realised that they were selling used or pre-owned items!
Example 3: Teaching idioms

Question: Imagine that you are planning a school party and have no funds to provide food for 150 guests. You want everybody to bring some food. What will you write in your invitation?

Answer: Bring some food to share.

Teacher: Yes, ‘bring some food to share’ in Russian means ‘bring a plate’ in English.

One learner remembered an embarrassing experience she had had in her first English class when she did not bring any food for the end of term party. After this class she understood her mistake and why it had happened.

This technique was used in both classes – language and Citizenship – and this kind of work was seen by the learners as extremely useful, and stimulated their listening outside the classroom. The learners were encouraged to collect expressions they heard from their home tutors, neighbours or on TV. In this way colloquialisms such as Well done, Good on you, There you go, How’re you going and many more were introduced. Teaching idioms was probably the most rewarding part of teaching this bilingual class.

Evaluation of L1 use

Teacher perspective

Having taught for a number of years, I had never experienced the need for L1 in a teaching situation – although I had always used L1 as a tool for getting feedback and checking comprehension. The level of comprehension was always quite satisfactory and led to the conclusion that an English-only approach was sufficient and stimulating. The learners were making slow but noticeable progress.

The most difficult part of teaching these older learners was to ensure that their expectations (sometimes too high) would not have too negative an effect on the process of learning. Offering too much bilingual support seemed to reinforce the learners’ L1 dependence. I have found that it has always been critical to finding the right compromise, or balance, between using L1 to complement teaching English rather than teaching about English.

The learners’ attitudes become increasingly more realistic and their self-esteem was raised due to their understanding of the general principles of second language acquisition, and L1 was the only way I could explain these principles. I saw the learners’ independence as a more valuable asset than ‘grammatically correct English’. Initially all the learners felt reluctant to speak before they were sure that they were not making any mistakes. That was the kind of a psychological barrier any perfectionist might have. As the learners spent time in this bilingual class they gradually stopped concentrating only on how to say it in ‘100 per cent grammatically correct English’ and began to attempt to get the message across. Those who were able to get over this psychological barrier achieved increases in their proficiency level.

For me, the Citizenship class was quite a dramatic change. It was much easier to use L1 in this context to explain new concepts or to have a long discussion. Also I enjoyed watching happy learners engaged in various bilingual activities. Never before had the slowest learners been able to participate to such an extent. Their level and
accuracy of understanding difficult concepts was much higher, and the material taught was more sophisticated as a result of the use of the L1. On the other hand, the learners in the class who began with the Citizenship class rather than an English-only class, did not progress as much as would have been expected in an English-only class.

Learner response to L1 use

The overall reaction of the learners was positive. They noted the fact that after the bilingual class they did not feel as tired as they would normally after two hours in an English-only session. They said that learning new material was interesting and useful but that they would have been much more satisfied if they could have done that in English. The learners thought they would prefer a bit more of a challenge. At the same time, they acknowledged that they could never have learned as much about Australia using only English. During the follow-up discussion, many learners strongly expressed the opinion that their class was the only place available for them to practise English. Everybody agreed that the Citizenship class progressed much faster than their previous classes, but some of the learners saw it as disadvantage because of their poor memory, and believed that more time spent on new vocabulary would stimulate the process of memorising. All the learners agreed that a bilingual class was extremely beneficial for them from a social point of view. They believed that it was good to be able to help each other in L1 but they would have preferred to hear more English in class.

Reference

Chapter 4

The Chinese bilingual class

Mei Fong McMahon – AMES Box Hill

Introduction

I am a Chinese bilingual teacher, currently teaching a beginners’ level Mandarin bilingual class. In the past, I had always used as much English as possible in the classroom. However, from my classroom experience, I believe that there are advantages in appropriately using L1 that far outweigh any disadvantages – hence, my interest in this project.

I work in an AMES centre in the Melbourne suburb of Box Hill. Box Hill AMES has approximately 500 learners from many backgrounds (including Chinese, Sudanese, Middle Eastern, Bosnian and Russian learners). Box Hill AMES centre runs classes Monday to Friday and on Saturday mornings. It also runs evening classes on Mondays and Wednesdays.

The research context

Project focus

The focus of this research was to:

- investigate how to utilise learners’ L1 in the English classroom
- observe the frequency of L1 use in class.

There will always be a debate about bilingual teaching and the use of L1 in teaching English; it is my view that whenever possible bilingual teaching should be recognised as a preparation stage and stepping stone complementing later English-only classes. However, there is also a role for using L1 at higher levels, where it can act as a tool to facilitate learners’ own learning.

As this was a beginners’ level Mandarin bilingual class, the focus was on the frequency of L1 usage in different classroom interactions.

Class profile

This was a bilingual Mandarin class with 24 migrants of Chinese background. The class met on Mondays and Tuesday for three hours, from 9–12.

Learner profile

The learners in this class ranged in age from 35 to 74 years. Six were under 45 years, six between 45 and 60 and twelve between 60 and 74 years. Generally, the class was designed to cater for the needs of older age learners (45 years and over) who mainly wanted to learn English to meet their community survival, settlement and social needs.

The class was fairly evenly divided between males and females, with 10 male and 14 female learners. Accordingly, there was a diverse range of gender-specific language
interests among the learners. For example, the male learners were more interested in reading the newspaper, while female learners were more interested in talking to their grandchildren and neighbours. The interests of the class members were surveyed and taken into account when analysing their language needs and planning the course content and activities.

Most of the learners were recent arrivals, with 30 per cent of the male, and 79 per cent of the female learners arriving in 2004 – the year in which the class took place. As recent arrivals, the learners’ unfamiliarity with Australian culture and society affected their sense of belonging and, in turn, their English language needs for surviving in the community. This bilingual class was able to offer these learners comfort and support as they adapted to mainstream society and progressed to mainstream courses.

Twenty-two of the learners spoke Chinese Mandarin (CMA) and two learners (1 male and 1 female) spoke Chinese Cantonese (CCA) as their L1. CMA is the official language throughout China, while Cantonese is a community dialect often used in Southern China. CMA was the L1 normally used in this classroom, but, as I am fluent in both CMA and CCA, CCA was also used in one-on-one interaction when this was deemed necessary.

Twenty of the learners in this class had completed 12 years of primary/secondary schooling in their L1. Of the remaining four, one male had completed nine years schooling, two females had completed eight years each and one female had completed six years. Eleven learners – four males and seven females – had also had some tertiary education. The learners’ L1 education had provided them with transferable conceptual, language and learning skills that they could potentially use for learning English (L2). The use of L1 in the classroom also helped me to tap into the learners’ previously acquired L1 language skills.

Course goals

In this bilingual beginner-level class, learners wanted to learn English to meet their basic needs, such as going to the doctor. Thus, themes introduced in the class included topics like ‘Personal information’, and ‘Health’.

The overall objective of the bilingual course was to provide an orientation for the learners to progress to the mainstream courses. There were two bilingual class goals associated with this objective. Firstly, learners aimed to complete the pre-beginner level course and the associated certificate. Modules of this course focused on learners’ literacy, numeracy and communication skills. Secondly, learners were introduced to the commencement level module of the beginner level course. It was generally expected that the learners would gain enough confidence to go into mainstream classes having obtained, or attempted, a couple of the learning outcomes within the compulsory pre-beginner modules. Learners were given ‘statements of attainment’ as part of their pre-beginner course to show the competencies they had achieved. This gave the learners some concrete reassurance and recognition of their progress. It also encouraged them to remain confident and persevere with their learning.

L1 support in the classroom

As the Chinese bilingual teacher for this class, there was no necessity for other bilingual support participants to be involved. Bilingual written resources were limited, and the only bilingual written resource used in this class was The literacy workbook for
beginners (Christie 1999). This was used as L1 support material to aid learners to understand how to do an activity. The instructions on activities in the book were given in both L1 and L2, but the activity itself was written only in English. For example: An instruction, like ‘Circle these dates on the calendar’ was written in L1 and L2. However, the calendar and all other data were given only in English. Examples of these worksheets appear in Figure 8. Apart from this resource, other worksheets used in the classroom were prepared in English.

![Examples of worksheets from The literacy workbook for beginners](image)

**Figure 8:** Examples of worksheets from The literacy workbook for beginners

**Other L2 support**

Two native-English speakers were available once a week to provide English conversation practice for the class. The class was also active in other activities such as putting on displays, singing and cooking on cultural days.

**Management of L1 use in the classroom**

**Classroom interaction**

In this bilingual class, L1 was generally used for three types of interaction: peer-peer, learner-teacher and teacher-learner interactions. The L1 was also used to assist in deciding course content, in teaching learning strategies and in facilitating English language learning. The aim was to use L1 as a teaching and learning tool without detrimentally affecting learners’ L2 acquisition. This involved using the L1 as a meta-language to explain the English and as an aid to explain, discuss and contextualise activities and lessons. It also involved the learners using their L1 as an aid to broaden their learning opportunities. As learners became more proficient with L2 in particular contexts, the use of L1 was reduced so that they could eventually use L2 in that context.

**Peer to peer**

The use of L1 in peer-peer interactions occurred during activities involving pair work or group work. In these interactions, learners used L1 to:

- clarify activity requirements by checking each other’s understanding
Teaching in Action 1

- exchange ideas and experiences about concepts, tasks and topics
- do question and answer interactions with each other to obtain and give information during classroom surveys
- generally assist each other.

The use of L1 between peers helped to improve learner relationships, communication skills and overall learner morale. In these ways, the use of the L1 enabled learners to progress together as part of a team, and provided them with a sense of belonging and self esteem. This contributed to the high retention rates for the class.

Learner to teacher interaction

In learner–teacher interactions, the L1 empowered learners to initiate interactions with me. In these interactions, learners used L1 to:

- ask questions about activities and topics
- provide information about difficulties and learning needs
- answer questions more fully when their English skills couldn’t cope
- clarify concepts and variations between L1 and L2 language rules.

The use of L1 between the learners and myself helped to improve overall learner participation. It also helped to reduce learners’ fear of making mistakes and their apprehension of risk-taking. Learners retained respect for their L1 and by comparing attributes of L1 and L2, they were able to adapt L1 strategies to expand their L2 learning strategies.

Teacher to learner interaction

My L1 interactions with the learners aimed to broaden the options and strategies available to me for teaching the L2. In these interactions, I used the first language to:

- set activities and give instructions
- explain grammar and similarities/differences between L1 and L2
- introduce and supervise language games
- introduce vocabulary work
- reinforce information already presented in L2
- provide general and administrative information.

The use of L1 in the class enabled me to provide information, set tasks, answer questions and supervise lessons efficiently, knowing that I was being understood by the learners. The L1 helped to reduce misunderstanding and difficulties and provided a comfortable learning environment for the learners. The learners were more confident and asked questions. This continuously improved the learners’ confidence, enthusiasm, ability to participate and prospects for achievement. In these ways, L1 usage improved the inclusion of all learners in the class activities.
Learning strategies

There are a number of cultural differences between Australian and Chinese teaching and learning strategies and methodologies. For example, Chinese teaching tends to be teacher-centred while Australian teaching tends to learner-centred. The Chinese view learning more formally, with the teacher and textbooks being the fountain of knowledge. For Chinese, spoon feeding and learning by rote is common, and making mistakes is considered a sign of failure and to be avoided. Australians view the teacher as a facilitator who guides learners to information sources and helps them find answers and solve problems. L1 was used to highlight these differences and to help the learners adapt to the different Australian pedagogy. Learners needed to understand the importance of the four macro-skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) as part of their language learning. L1 was used to encourage the learners to take risks, guess at answers, do independent research and try different learning techniques. Using the L1 enabled me to provide more in-depth information without being constrained by the learners’ L2 vocabulary limitations.

Content

Both first and second languages were used in planning the content of the bilingual course. A ‘needs analysis’ survey was circulated in both L1 and L2 and all learners completed one or other of the surveys. The survey canvassed the learner’s needs for studying English. Typical information gathered was as follows:

Why learn L2?

• for routine activities (reading the newspaper, conversations with friends, neighbours, grandchildren)
• for survival skills (shopping, seeing doctor, asking directions)
• for social contact (community functions and social outings).

What do you want to be able to do?

• conduct simple conversations (greetings, asking for directions, introducing oneself)
• complete forms (personal details)
• follow instructions (reading bus timetables)
• write alphabet and numbers.

How?

• classroom lessons
• using computers
• listening to audiotapes
• conversations with the teacher and volunteer tutors, in groups.
The inclusion of L1 for surveying learners' English learning needs helped to ensure that all learners' preferred language needs were included in the course content. The survey process in L1 had a 'demonstration effect' by showing learners that their needs were recognised and that the course aimed to satisfy these needs. Allowing learners to provide input to the bilingual course content helped to enhance enrolments and increased learner satisfaction.

Language

I used L1 in various ways to facilitate learners' English language learning. Following is an outline of some methods that I used in the bilingual class to assist learners with pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and discourse.

Pronunciation

Difficulties experienced by learners in speaking-aloud activities, such as 'listen and repeat', 'read aloud' and 'read in pairs', were analysed and discussed using L1. Some sounds in English are similar to words and sounds in their L1. I used L1 examples to compare sounds between L2 and L1 and to explain L2 sound production. In explaining sound production, I used L1 at a higher level to explain techniques rather than having learners merely mimicking my sounds.

Grammar

The metalanguage of the learners' L1 provided a familiar framework for explaining grammatical points of the L2. The class considered how something was expressed in the L1 and I showed them the English structure for the expression. I then used the L1 to discuss similarities and differences between L1 and L2 language elements and structures. This is another example of using L1 at a higher level. The advantage was that the learners were shown how their learning could be applied to a wider range of situations than those under discussion.

Vocabulary

Learners tended to expect me to spoon-feed them L2 meanings in L1. To manage this, I needed to adapt my teaching strategy. For example, I showed them a picture of a bus station. Many learners volunteered the word 'bus'. As the picture showed more than one bus, I had the learners talk in L1 about other things about buses. In other words, I used whole-class discussion to get the learners to come up with a range of new vocabulary. After this, I wrote the new words on the board. I advised learners not to learn single words only, but to consider the context of the vocabulary.

Discourse

It was evident that the L1 was often used by learners to fill gaps when participating in oral discourse. For example, this occurred during role-play activities such as making medical appointments, or introducing friends. I realised that code-switching between L1 and L2 is a natural part of learning among bilingual people and second language learners. I allowed code-switching, within reason, to help learners to improve their conversation flow in L2 and to encourage learners to make more attempts at L2 conversation.
Evaluation of L1 use

Teacher perspective

From my perspective as a teacher, and based on my perception of the learners’ classroom responses, there were advantages to using the L1 in the class. The following is an outline of some of these advantages.

Explanation of English grammar

When I used the L1 to explain grammar points, the learners became involved and conscientious. This showed that they were thinking about grammar. One learner asked me in Chinese, ‘Teacher, English is opposite - yes? You say, “Where is the cat?” We say, “The cat is where?”’ Learners used L1 to discuss grammar, which enabled instant feedback and saved time in the learning process. It also empowered learners to ask questions rather than avoiding questions due to lack of L2 skills.

Giving instructions

I often gave instructions firstly in English and then in Chinese on activities such as surveys, pair work and group work. Learners were more relaxed, having understood what was required of them. Although there was some repetition, it helped me to save time overall by reducing confusion and misunderstanding by learners.

Classroom group discussions

The use of both L1 and L2 in group discussions was successful. For example, learners asked each other questions using L1. Responses were often in English showing the learners were able to use learned L2 sentences effectively. The use of both L1 and L2 during typical group discussions, such as ‘My daily routine’ and ‘Places around town’, successfully focused the learners on the task. They demonstrated increased confidence and enthusiasm when participating in discussions.

Classroom teaching and management

The use of L1 and L2 in the classroom helped to break down communication barriers with the learners and facilitated teaching and class management. It saved time with explanations and enabled all learners to be included in learning. In this way it gave learners a sense of ‘getting there’. This, in turn, created very positive learner attitudes towards learning L2 and achieving success. I was able to use my L1 to listen in on learners. I could obtain feedback and promptly address any problems, confusion or misunderstandings. Listening to learners’ L1 discussion helped me to confirm that learners had understood instructions and what was being taught. It also provided me a means to more easily assess learners’ learning outcomes and learning styles. These all assisted in class management.

Teacher perception of the learner response to L1 use

Learner feedback

Some learners used L1 to comment on how they felt about the class. ‘Teacher, we like bilingual class. We can ask questions.’ ‘I don’t want to go to another class. I don’t
know how to ask questions.' Knowing that they could talk with me in their L1 put the learners more at ease in class and encouraged them to ask a wider range of questions. Overall, learners felt happy that they were able to use L1 to ask me or other learners questions. For learners, L1 is a major learning tool and mechanism that opens pathways in learning a new language.

Language games

The following is a learner's comment made in L1: 'Teacher, when the bus driver asks me “where”, I get so worried. I forget the meaning of “where”. I am slow and I want to be faster. This activity is good. It helps me think faster.' The learners seemed to enjoy the language activity of ‘automatic responses’. The activity involved giving instant translations from English to L1 and from L1 to English. Using both L1 and L2 and alternating between them helped the learners to improve their confidence in English in a fun way and eventually this helped learners to reduce the practice of code-switching.

Learner group and pair work

Consistent with my own earlier perceptions, using L1 facilitated learners working in pairs and groups. For example, they could question each other in L1 to obtain information for survey activities where they recorded their results in English. L1 was often heard with some individual English words, phrases or sentences in the conversation. This confirmed that learners were using L1 to bridge gaps in their L2.

Issues

There were several issues that arose as a result of the use of L1 in the bilingual class. The following are some examples of issues and an outline of how they have been addressed.

**Issue:** The first issue involves balancing the level of L1 use appropriate for teaching and learning and the level of L1 use expected by the learners.

**Response:** I addressed this problem by mainly using L1 as a tool to reinforce information and instructions initially presented in English. This strategy gave learners practice in receiving information in English as a first experience. A wait-time was allowed to enable the learners to reflect on the English presentation of the information. Only after the wait-time was the information then presented in L1. In this way, learners gained the gist of the information from the English and then had any doubts removed with the L2 presentation. As an ongoing process, this helped learners to build their English listening and understanding skills over the course of the term. With more routine and familiar instructions, the use of L1 can be reviewed. L1 use may be reduced, with some instructions given only in English. Some routine conversations, such as general greetings, the weather or what people did on the weekend were held in L2 only. This helped the learners become accustomed to L2 use in daily life contexts and routines as they transit from L1 to L2 usage.
Issue: There have been instances where learners, who have satisfactorily completed their orientation in the bilingual class, have been reluctant to move to the next level mainstream class. There were also two cases where learners attended both mainstream and bilingual classes concurrently during the same term. While they could take in more in the mainstream class, they felt less confident; they then attended a bilingual class so they could ask more questions in their L1 about learning in their mainstream class.

Response: To minimise the occurrence of these cases, I continually reminded learners of the progress they were making in class and advised them when I considered they were ready to cope with the mainstream class. I also explained how they would be able to learn more in the mainstream. Most learners were prepared to move on and progress. When there was some reluctance, I pointed out to the learner their achievements in pre-beginner class, in oral tests and in written tests. I then encouraged them to try the mainstream class to see how they coped.

Issue: Difficulties can arise in teaching learners with low or no L1 reading and writing skills.

Response: To address these situations, I communicated orally as the learner's L1 oracy skills were usually adequate. From this base, I could explain and teach linguistic aspects of the L1 and then move on to teach the same concept in L2.

Issue: There is a weakness with using L1 in vocabulary work when learners tend to rely too much on the teacher as a dictionary.

Response: As mentioned earlier, I encouraged and reminded learners to use dictionaries (English and bilingual) and research answers for themselves. I explained that learning by understanding L2 in contexts was a helpful alternative to learning by rote.

Issue: Limited L1 resources and L1 professional development.

Response: The availability of more written bilingual resources for adults could support learners' home study and self-learning even when they have entered mainstream classes. Professional development for bilingual teachers would help to keep them abreast of current thinking and up to date with bilingual teaching strategies and methodologies. This would help teachers to achieve more appropriate use of L1 in bilingual classes.

Conclusion
While there will always be some issues resulting from bilingual teaching and the use of L1 in teaching English, this project made me more aware of the role of L1 in the classroom. From my experience, I believe that the advantages of appropriately using L1 far outweigh any disadvantages. The use of the L1 can provide a stepping-stone -
Teaching in Action 1

particularly for less confident, and perhaps older, learners – towards entering mainstream classes. Ultimately, it is up to the bilingual teacher to manage the use of the first language in the classroom and this needs to be done carefully and with considerable thought and planning. The teacher should not be viewed as a translator or as a ‘talking dictionary’. Bilingual classes are always popular (as reflected in their high retention rates) and I hope their important role in teaching migrants English is accepted.

Reference

Chapter 5

The Vietnamese bilingual class

Ngoc Bui – acl Cabramatta

Introduction

I was born in Vietnam and came to Australia in 1985 from New Zealand where I lived for ten years after leaving Vietnam with my parents and siblings in 1975. I was trained as a French and ESL high school teacher at Sydney University but was, and still am, more interested in teaching adults. I taught in the AMEP full time with NSW AMES from 1989 to 1998, then had about half a year break before joining acl where I still teach.

I’ve always had a lot of empathy with adult learners trying to come to terms with learning a foreign language for survival while struggling with settlement problems. I went through more or less the same path years earlier and haven’t forgotten the hardship and despair at times. Hence my interest in this project, or any project for that matter, that highlights adult learners’ learning problems, so that we as teachers can develop strategies and skills to help them learn more effectively.

I work as a bilingual teacher and also a monolingual English teacher when the language profile of the class consists of more than just Vietnamese learners. My years of teaching among the Vietnamese group of learners have taught me how relevant and important the first language can be while teaching English to pre-beginner and beginner learners, so when the project was announced I joined in, hoping I could offer to this project some of my ideas and practices as a bilingual teacher.

acl Cabramatta is one of the Australian Centre for Languages colleges in Sydney. It runs full-time (day) and part-time (evening) courses for learners. Although the majority of learners at this college can be classified as beginners and post-beginners, there are some learners who are pre-beginners and some who are at the intermediate and upper intermediate level. Predominant groups of learners are, according to their language background, Vietnamese, Khmer (Cambodian) and Chinese (both Mandarin and Cantonese) with some Serbians, Croatians, Bosnians, Thais and Laos.

The research context

Project focus

The project focus was on teaching the course bilingually, the main goal was to help learners who were working during the day and coming to learn English in the evening to go through the learning process more satisfactorily and to achieve outcomes quickly.

Class profile

This was a bilingual Vietnamese/English class that met three evenings a week for three hours each session, with an initial enrolment of 22.

Learner profile

Initially there were 22 learners in the class but throughout the course six had to withdraw. This was due to work shift changes (3), illness (1) and personal/bereavement
matters (2). One learner transferred to distance learning as her blind husband couldn’t look after their baby while she was in class. With the exception of four learners who had never had an English class before, the rest had done one or two courses at acl in previous terms.

This particular class had both beginners and post-beginners with learning paces ranging from very slow to very fast. The only common denominator was the Vietnamese language used in the classroom by teacher and learners alike. By the end of Week 1, I tried to transfer a few out to higher and lower classes to make the remainder more homogeneous, but they asked to stay because they found the class most comfortable having a teacher they would have no problems communicating with. By Week 11, three of the learners, who withdrew due to illness, bereavement and personal matters, came back asking to sit in the class until the end of term.

There were fifteen female and seven male learners. All but four had a day job. Their ages ranged from 23 to 59 years with the break down as follows: 23–29 years of age (13), 31–42 years old (7), and over 50 years of age (2). They all spoke Vietnamese fluently although three or four spoke Cantonese at home and work, while one could speak Khmer as well as Vietnamese. There were four learners with 12 years education, one with 11 years, two with 10 years, seven with 9 years, one learner with 8 years, two learners with 7 years, one with 6 years and two with 5 years of education.

Course goals
After going through the individual learning plans, the learner selection profiles and a survey on language learning needs, I decided that I would concentrate on two beginner, spoken-interaction, basic-survival English skills as learning outcomes to achieve. These were: ‘can participate in a short, spoken transactional exchange’ and ‘can conduct a short telephone conversation’.

The learning outcome ‘can write a short note or message’ also needed to be introduced as most learners had not achieved this in previous courses or informally. For the four beginner learners, I also planned revision of topics such as personal information and classroom instructions.

L1 support in the classroom
Apart from the language support that I provided as a Vietnamese speaker, the learners also had a Vietnamese bilingual speaker from the health department come to talk to them about their services and client rights. For community speakers who had information flyers in Vietnamese, I did not provide them with translated worksheet materials based on the community speaker’s information. Instead, I provided worksheets in English, prepared as for normal classes, with explanations given orally in Vietnamese whenever necessary – which was quite often given the limited English languages skills of the learners.

I didn’t need bilingual support for this class but instead gave bilingual assistance to the following speakers during the term:

- the Mission Australia representative who came to talk about counselling
- the Migrant Resources Centre officer who presented her services
- the librarian on his guided tour when the class visited the local library.
Management of L1 use in the classroom

Classroom interaction

Peer to peer

The four beginner learners were the ones who had difficulties keeping up with the pace of the lesson most of the time. However, help would come very quickly from the faster learners and very often unsolicited help was given automatically by a group of very friendly but very loud learners who could never resist the urge to answer or reply for their slower classmates.

Jokes, pleasantries and gossip in Vietnamese abounded between class activities. A romance was developing, as most were young and some still single. There was also a regrettable incident involving jealousy, a learner, her family, an outsider, push, shove and whack, the police, centre staff and half a night buzzing with negotiations in English and Vietnamese.

Teacher to learner

I always presented learners with lesson materials in English. Then I would proceed to ask them in English if they understood what they had just read or heard. I would then repeat the questions or instructions a second time. If it still drew blank looks, I would proceed to pick out or highlight the important words in the instructions or question. Usually someone would have some kind of reaction, most often in Vietnamese. If it was correct I would nod, praise and coax them to elaborate. But if they still could not tell me the meaning or kept on giving wrong answers then I would explain or give the answer in Vietnamese.

However, in many instances the above process was nipped in the bud due to the pressure of time in an evening class. Learners have only nine hours per week compared to the twenty hours in day classes. The luxury of time! On the other hand there was also the pressure from learners, slow and fast alike, who did not understand the benefits of brainstorming or other pedagogical methodologies. They told me they wanted to know the meanings or explanations in Vietnamese then and there and very quickly. And thirdly, my own ‘weakness’ that gave in to the above pressures – especially when I saw those tired and exhausted bodies and brains from a hard day of physical labour in front of me, eager to learn and get on with the lesson quickly, with no big fuss.

Learning strategies

The teaching of learning strategies helped the learners to acquire skills both in the classroom and outside, especially at the workplace, in the streets, while shopping or watching TV.

I always encouraged them to take notice of everything written (signs, billboards, paper ads, etc) or within their earshot (on the bus or train, at work, in the shops, etc). I demonstrated to them that shyness or fear of making mistakes, a cultural trait of Asians in general and Vietnamese in particular, would be detrimental to their learning progress and self-confidence. I told them the thousand-year-old Vietnamese adage that tells learners to ‘absolutely keep silent if not completely and totally sure’ was not a very helpful strategy in learning another language. I used myself as an example and told them about my English acquisition process with its successes and failures.
To prove to them that they could watch and understand videos and films other than in Vietnamese, and that learning to guess and draw deductions is essential to language learning, we watched together:

- a beautiful SBS film about two Iranian children, with simple to read subtitles
- a program on cultural diversity through food growing and cooking. Although in English, the clips were short and easy for the learners to guess the gist while hearing some familiar words and phrases.

I also suggested to them that shopping is the most enjoyable mode of learning and acquiring new vocabulary as words are illustrated with pictures. For example, I had them try to distinguish the different cans of pineapple (in syrup, in own juice, sliced, crushed, in pieces) or sales tags (up to 40% discount, 40% off the discounted price, buy two items and the 2nd one gets 40%). Being able to decipher the docket (items, time, GST charge and so on) would always give them satisfaction and knowledge of being in control. This was useful knowledge for the learning outcome ‘can return or exchange goods’.

Content

Most of the content was around the theme of basic survival settlement issues. However, the planned content was – more often than not – extended when a learner had a query on an expression overheard in the streets or something said by the boss or mates at work. The whole class would pitch in to give answers or explanations.

In at least two instances, the lessons prepared were momentarily put aside, with everybody’s consent and participation, to deal with more pressing matters. These happened when a learner needed to prepare for the next day’s job interview and when another learner had to complete an urgent insurance claim form after a car accident.

The class would usually come very alive with discussion whenever cultural matters or anything affecting learners’ life and work in Australia was presented. I prepared a worksheet of ‘Do’s and Don’ts’ for class discussion regarding some activities, gestures and attitudes that are considered rude or unhygienic in some countries but not in Australia or vice versa, for example nose picking, showing the two fingers or index finger, queuing for service, or spouse bashing.

Language

There was less room for mistakes or misinterpretation as far as vocabulary and grammar were concerned, as meaning and rules were explicitly explained in Vietnamese. Pronunciation was more difficult for me to explain as rules are not always consistent, so the learners were required more or less to learn by heart how each word is pronounced. I provided drills and songs, which proved to be very helpful.

Some sounds, which do not exist in Vietnamese, were more difficult to produce than others, to name two:

- The ‘p’ which is persistently pronounced by most as /f/ because in Vietnamese ‘p’ only goes with ‘h’ to form the sound /f/.
- The sound of the diagraph ‘ch’ because Vietnamese has that combination but with a completely different pronunciation.
As Vietnamese is a monosyllabic language, having to link strings of syllables and often words was hard for learners to do and often produced odd pronunciations, for example:

- The sound /s/ is produced ad hoc in words, phrases and sentences in an unconscious way of attaching syllables together.
- On the other hand, the final consonants is happily ignored, especially the final ‘se’ in ‘please’, ‘cheese’ etc.

Linking was one of the most unfamiliar language pronunciation features for these Vietnamese learners who patiently voiced it during drills when necessary, demonstrating that at least they had the concept. However, they could never automatically incorporate it out of classroom drill situation. I took consolation in the fact that at least they understood the concept.

Sample activities
Snakes and ladders
I designed a board game of Snakes and Ladders in which the learners had to read in Vietnamese but speak in English the various questions and responses when on the phone or when calling 000 (see Figure 9).

![Snakes and Ladders Board Game](image)

**Figure 9:** Bilingual snakes and ladders board game from *Art on the run: Visuals for teachers of English as a second language*

**Evaluation of L1 use**
Teacher perspective
Overall, I felt that the use of Vietnamese was most beneficial as it solved many questions on language without having recourse to the slow process of bilingual
dictionary checking. It also helped me explain and elaborate on various other uses, or any background or history attached to the words or phrases. It helped the learners grasp the meaning quickly and clearly without any confusion. It helped them explore and find new, albeit strange, concepts and ideas.

It helped them discuss ideas and opinions without having to struggle for words or give up in the process. Most importantly, it helped us connect with each other – learners with learners and teacher or guest speakers with learners.

Teacher perception of the learner response to L1 use

The learners really did like the idea of using Vietnamese, as it made their life in the classroom much easier. They seemed very comfortable using it with each other and with me. It was good to see that they never felt inhibited asking questions and always looked satisfied when the answers were fully grasped and understood. For some, most lessons were easy, for others they were quite difficult, but the former group chose to remain and refused to be transferred out.

Issues

**Issue:** The big issue was in the initial formation and topping up of the class. The levels were too disparate to really satisfy everyone’s needs and demands, including mine and I yearned for more homogeneity.

**Response:** Some very good and fast learners could have been put in a mainstream language class so they could achieve more English communicative skills, but they really enjoyed having the opportunity to get quick explanations or answers to their queries.

**Issue:** Some learners in this class were quite advanced, being able to watch and understand TV programs in English. Their presence hampered slower learners’ progress in terms of getting enough time to think, ponder and repeat, instead of being rushed.

**Response:** Bilingual classes should be reserved to very beginner learners and learners with a slow learning pace in their first or at most second course.
Chapter 6

The Chinese bilingual Saturday class

Yong King - acl Parramatta

Introduction

I graduated from Beijing Normal University with a degree in Chinese language and literature and then worked as a high school teacher in Beijing before migrating to Australia in 1988. I studied at the University of Technology, Sydney, where I gained a graduate certificate in TESOL, a graduate diploma in TLOTE (teaching languages other than English) and a masters degree in language and literacy. I have worked as an ESL teacher at acl since 2000, where I have taught all AM EP levels as well as a range of vocational and bilingual classes.

The post-graduate studies, ESL teaching practice, and this research project played a significant role in inspiring me in my career and professional development. Through the process, I gained insight into language and language teaching in terms of its social context and functions and the development of language in such an environment.

acl Parramatta, where I work as a teacher of a Saturday bilingual class, provides the AM EP for new arrivals. The centre has a large number of classes, including morning, afternoon, and evening classes and four Saturday classes. Most of the learners are from South-East Asia, People's Republic of China, Middle-Eastern countries and former Yugoslavia. The learners are mainly from the family reunion and humanitarian migration streams to Australia.

The research context

Project focus

In the first term of the project, my focus was on using L1 to:

• facilitate scaffolding; in particular my aim was to use L1 to:
  - introduce and explain background knowledge
  - interpret and elicit vocabulary
  - explain and assist learning activities in terms of modelling the text, constructing the text with aid and independently producing the text
  - have fast learners help slower learners to participate in group activities.

• explain grammar.

In the second term of the project, my focus was on using L1 to:

• assist the development of learners’ pronunciation; in particular my aim was to use L1 at the:
  - phonemic level to highlight the few consonants which are absent or similar in the Chinese phonemic system, and that Chinese learners have problems with
  - prosodic level, to emphasise English as a stress-timed language in which stress and rhythm play an important role in expressing meanings.
Class and learner profile

The class was a pre-beginner class of 17 learners, 11 female and 6 male. They ranged in age from 40 to 80 years old and were mostly from People’s Republic of China, with one from Taiwan. They spoke either Cantonese or Mandarin. All had had some education in Chinese. The learners were especially interested in learning for settling into the community and so needed to learn about such things as form filling and shopping. They were an enthusiastic class, with better literacy than oracy skills. They had all entered Australia as migrants in the family reunion stream. The class was held each Saturday for four hours.

Course goals

As a beginner-level class, the goals were basic. Settlement issues were important and so the themes introduced were to do with community access, such as personal information, simple form filling, transport and shopping. The learning outcomes were as follows:

Students can:

• learn in a formal context
• respond to spoken instructions in the context of learning
• provide personal information using spoken language
• complete a simple form
• perform a goods/services transaction using spoken language.

I also aimed to help students improve the intelligibility of their spoken language by raising the awareness of syllable stress and a few difficult consonants.

L1 support in the classroom

The participating group was a Saturday bilingual class with a bilingual teacher. Both learners and teacher shared a common L1 – Chinese. Therefore L1 support was available throughout the entire learning process.

Management of L1 use in the classroom

Classroom interaction

In terms of teacher to learner use of L1, Chinese was used to introduce and explain background knowledge, such as learning objectives and context and cultural aspects. Moreover, Chinese was used to explain and elicit vocabulary; for example, word family in relation to root word, prefix and suffix. Indeed, Chinese was employed to explain and assist all the learning activities through the learning cycle of teacher modelling of the text type, through learners constructing a text with help, to learners independently producing a text.

In terms of learner to learner use of L1, the fast learners used Chinese to help slower learners to participate in group activities such as pair-work, dialogue and role-play.

Content

I found it necessary to use Chinese to explain some cultural aspects of English use in Australia. The learners used Chinese to raise questions such as ‘What is after-school
childcare?’ and ‘Why must the name of the doctor be included in the after-school childcare application form?’. The learners and teacher used Chinese to discuss these cultural issues. Sometimes written support with Chinese translation was available (for example, The Oxford picture dictionary, and then this support was used to assist vocabulary learning. The learners also brought in their own English learning books with Chinese translations and added in more learning materials.

Language

Importantly, Chinese was also used to explain some difficult grammatical points; for instance, the differences between the two language systems such as past tense verbs, auxiliary verbs, singularity and plurality, third person verb rule and articles.

Other uses of L1

In addition, the L1 phonemic system was used as a contrast to assist the development of learners’ pronunciation of English. Comparing the two systems at the phonemic level, the sounds [l; r] are distantly similar to their Chinese counterparts, but Chinese learners find it difficult to distinguish them, whereas the consonants [θ; ð] are absent from the Chinese phonemic system and are likely to be replaced by [t; d; s; z] by Chinese learners. Some strategies, such as the minimal-pair exercises and the game of bingo, were adapted to tackle the problem.

At the prosodic level, syllable stress can be troublesome for Chinese learners, due to the monosyllabic nature of basic Chinese units. Cantonese learners tend to stress each syllable of a word, whereas Mandarin learners use the stress and pitch moment to differentiate words which have the same pronunciation. To address this issue, I used some learning activities and materials which are close to the learners’ daily life experience, such as the map of Sydney’s urban light railway system. As a result, the learners were able to generalise the conventions of two-syllable and compound word stress patterns in English compared to the Chinese phonological system.

Sample activities

Some sample activities are provided below.

- Minimal pair exercises to work on individual sounds such as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sound 1</th>
<th>Sound 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>long</td>
<td>wrong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jelly</td>
<td>Jerry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>glass</td>
<td>grass</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- At the phonemic level, learners listened and repeated words to highlight and distinguish the consonants. Learners were also asked to put the words and sounds in a context to contextualise the activity, for instance:

  It's a long sum.  It's a wrong sum.
  Mary likes jelly. Mary likes Jerry.
  There's a flower in the glass. There's a flower in the grass.

- At the prosodic level, the learners practised the sounds within connected speech, such as dialogues where the notions of stress and rhythm work together. For example:
Who's running
riding a bicycle along the road?
carrying a television
Ron, Mary and Jenny are all going along the road.

In turn, the learners asked and answered questions like those above in pairs while the phonemic sounds were practised and the stressed syllables and the contour of the rhythm of the sentences were emphasised.

**Evaluation of L1 use**

**Teacher perspective**

I suggest that L1 helps low-level learners. Firstly, L1 can be used as a tool for low-level learners to ask questions or talk in terms of their learning context and also cultural aspects of Australia, such as issues like after-school childcare in Australia and the necessity of filling out the doctor’s name, phone number and address in the childcare application form. Therefore, L1 helps to raise learners’ cultural awareness during their English learning.

Secondly, at least at the lower level, L1 facilitates the learning activities throughout the cycle and the learning topic and materials are made close to learners’ life experience and cultural knowledge. For instance while teaching the learning outcomes of giving instructions and reading a procedural text, the learners’ response to ‘Making steamed fish’ was more enthusiastic than to ‘Making fish and chips’.

Thirdly, the phonological system and the characteristics of L1 can be used as a contrast to assist learners’ pronunciation development.

Finally, L1 is very useful when learners are querying and clarifying grammatical points and makes them more aware of the difference between the two systems.

**Teacher perception of the learner response to L1 use**

Most learners responded positively to L1 use in terms of classroom interaction, learning activities and grammar study.

**Issues**

**Issue:** It remains unclear how much L1 should be involved in higher levels of English study.

**Response:** More research work should be done in this area.

**Reference**

Part 2: Teaching with bilingual assistants

For teachers with multilingual classes, bilingual instruction is not possible – even if the teacher shares a language with some of the learners. However, there are a variety of ways in which teachers can organise instruction that uses learners’ home language to support their learning of English. Many of these, for use with more advanced learners, are described in Chapter 2. The reports that follow demonstrate how teachers have organised instruction for beginner learners – instruction supported by one or more bilingual assistants in the classroom.

Seven of the teachers in the project had one or more bilingual assistants available for some of the class time. Even where bilingual assistants were provided in more than one language (or with proficiency in more than one language), still not all learners in the class had bilingual assistants because of the range of languages spoken in these classes. In five of the seven cases (Chapters 7–11), one or more bilingual assistants reported on their experiences of using a language other than English, and those reports are included in the chapters.

Many of the teachers reporting in Part 2 used bilingual materials in class, as well as being able to call on the bilingual assistants. One of these teachers (Anna, Chapter 12) has provided, as part of her report, a detailed evaluation of the materials she used. Her chapter is co-written with the bilingual assistant.

In the first six chapters, teachers report on the background of their particular class and teaching site, describe the profiles of their learners, explain how they managed the use of the L1 in the classroom, evaluate the use of the L1 both from their own perspective and that of their learners and, finally, discuss issues that arose in their classes and how they were able to respond to them (or not). In five of the chapters (7–11), bilingual assistants have also reported on how they managed the use of the L1, their evaluation of that use and any issues that arose. By juxtaposing teacher and bilingual assistant reports within the same chapter, we get a two-dimensional picture of each of these linguistically complex classes.

Jacky’s chapter (Chapter 13) reports on the ways in which bilingual trainees are incorporated into the classroom to provide L1 support for learners. These trainees were advanced-level English language learners who were undertaking certification as bilingual assistants.
Chapter 7
Zsuzsa's class

Zsuzsa Fodor and Cecily Thevenaz - acl Auburn

Introduction
This class, held at acl Auburn, had a bilingual teacher and two bilingual assistants. Between us, we were able to use the L1 of the majority of the learners in the class. However, a number of learners from a variety of language backgrounds did not have access to L1 support.

Teacher
My name is Zsuzsa Fodor and I currently work as an English language teacher at acl Auburn. Auburn is the most multicultural suburb in Sydney and is also a place where most of the refugee migrants get their first accommodation when they arrive in Australia. The large majority of the learners come from countries such as China, Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan and Turkey. The centre provides day and night classes, five days a week from pre-beginner level to intermediate. After the initial interview, learners are placed into suitable classes where they get three or four hour lessons each day.

I was interested in this project for two reasons. The first is my personal back-ground. Being a Hungarian L1 speaker meant that I had to learn English as a second language, and I still remember how great it felt when I had a bit of help in Hungarian! The second is my teaching experiences over the past ten years. During my six years of teaching in the AMEP, I often had low-level classes where many of the learners had virtually no formal education; some were not literate in their own language or their first language didn't have a written form. Their need for some form of bilingual support seemed obvious - however, that support was not available. In most cases, learners were asked not to use their first language with their peers during their English classes, and were told that they were there to learn English. Thus, I was overjoyed when this attitude started to change, and the provision of bilingual support in English classes has become, if not yet a popular notion, a widely accepted one.

Chinese bilingual assistant
When I (Cecily Thevenaz) applied to take part in this project and was chosen, I felt honoured to be able to participate. Since March 2004, I have been actively working with Zsuzsa in the classroom, helping the Chinese group of learners (all from mainland China) to learn English better and faster.

During that time, I noticed that most learners were new to the country. They were also mature adults (some of them, very mature). Everything was new to them, especially the culture and language. It became apparent that the mature learners could not memorise vocabulary in a very short period of time. Therefore, adopting good study methods and learning strategies could help them to remember more easily.
The research context

Project focus

The focus of this research was to:

• investigate how to use learners’ L1 in the English classroom

• observe the similarities and differences in L1 use between the two main language groups in class – Chinese and Arabic

• learn more about the needs of bilingual assistants.

Class profile

The class was a beginner AMEP class studying general English and focusing on settlement issues. The class was full time (five days per week), with learners studying four hours daily. There was one class teacher and two bilingual support aides assigned to the class – one Chinese speaker and one Arabic speaker.

Learner profile

The class consisted of 23 learners, 15 female and 8 male. There were six Chinese speakers and ten Arabic speakers (including Sudanese who speak Arabic). The other learners in the class were from different language backgrounds – four Turkish speakers, one Bosnian, one Somali and one Farsi speaker – who were not provided with bilingual support. The average age of the Chinese group was 33 years whereas the average age of the Arabic group was 43 years. The average years of schooling of the Chinese learners was 9.8 years and of the Arabic learners 8.5 years.

Course goals

I followed a competency-based curriculum in which settlement issues were covered through different topics, such as schooling and parenting, family and friends, talking about the past, and health. Within these topics I targeted the following language outcomes:

• completing application forms

• writing a short note or message

• participating in a short spoken transaction.

Due to the beginner level of the class, I also focused on improving learners’ study skills in a formal environment.

L1 support in the classroom

As class teacher, I taught the group five days a week, four hours a day. On Mondays and Fridays, two bilingual assistants – one Chinese and one Arabic speaker – joined the class for one hour each time.

The job of the bilingual assistants was to provide assistance in L1 to the Chinese and Arabic speakers. The learners from other language backgrounds were not provided with any bilingual assistance. The bilingual assistants were asked to provide help only when asked by the learners. The assistants had a data collection sheet (see Figure 10).
which they marked during the session to highlight areas in which learners needed help. Each bilingual session was followed by a quick discussion between the class teacher and the bilingual assistants where further notes were taken about the use of L1.

Keeping regular contact between the class teacher and the bilingual assistants was difficult since the bilingual assistants worked only on certain days. However, to help them to understand the course structure, the activities, language focus and so on, I gave them a detailed course outline at the beginning of the term. When there was need for clarification or further explanation, they asked me. Whenever possible, in advance of the lesson, I provided them with copies of the activities they were to support so they could prepare more effectively prior to the session.

![Figure 10: Data collection sheet](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Focus of lesson segment:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translating instructions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Translating word meanings:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Explaining grammar structure:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helping with pronunciation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Explaining cultural differences:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other questions/requests:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comments/suggestions made by BSA:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Management of L1 use in the classroom

Classroom interaction

There was a special seating arrangement during the bilingual sessions. Learners with bilingual assistants sat on the two sides of the classroom in their language groups and the mixed group, which did not have bilingual support, was seated in the middle, where I provided them with special support (in English) when it was needed.

Outside the bilingual sessions, learners used their L1 with classmates who shared the same L1. We encouraged them to use L1 in order to help each other understand or clarify task-related issues. They often used their L1 to explain or clarify word meanings, grammatical structures or other problems. Using L1 also helped those learners who rejoined the class after absences of various durations, or who started the class later in the term.

Content

Within the different topic areas, I varied the focus of the lesson segments in order to cover all the macro-skills (speaking, reading, listening and writing) and to have a better understanding of the learners’ L2 needs. During the bilingual sessions we used in rotation a wide range of activities such as reading, writing, listening, eliciting, discussions, brainstorming, explanation and games. The activities ranged from whole-class interaction to pair work, group work and individual work. L1 was also used in some of the computer lessons. For example, during the weeks when the topic ‘Health’ was covered, we used the following website to provide learners with invaluable information in their L1: http://www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au

Language

The data collected by the bilingual assistants showed that at the beginning of the term the learners needed a great amount of assistance in understanding instructions. Learners often asked the assistants to translate exercises in full, or give lengthy explanations regarding the nature of the tasks at hand. This was probably because the class, the teacher and the teaching methods were all new for them. Even when learners partially understood instructions, they didn’t feel confident enough to participate and wanted reassurance in L1. From the data analysis it was obvious that this need had significantly decreased by the end of the term.

Learners used bilingual support to help them with word explanations. It was especially important in the Arabic-speaking group because many of the learners did not have dictionaries. Even if dictionaries were available, the bilingual assistants were a faster, more convenient, and often more accurate source of information and provided explanations rather than translations.

Both of the groups (Chinese and Arabic speakers) used L1 support to understand complex grammar structures taught during the term, especially when the structure was very different from their L1. The Chinese group seemed to need more L1 support in pronunciation, whereas the Arabic group needed more assistance in spelling and punctuation. Cecily, the Chinese bilingual assistant, felt the need to provide L1 support in other areas, such as classroom behaviour, study skills and explaining methodology and cultural differences.

The Arabic-speaking group, which included Sudanese learners, often needed explanations regarding various socio-cultural concepts such as ‘holiday’, ‘party’,
‘insurance’ and ‘yum cha’. All learners enjoyed cross-cultural discussions during which we asked them to translate phrases, proverbs or idioms into their languages. These types of activities gave learners in the ‘mixed group’ a chance to use their first language in class as well. During the term we also encouraged them to compare and contrast L1 and L2 in order to acquire a better understanding of specific language features.

Bilingual assistant’s report

I listened to and watched the Chinese learners and tried to identify where they needed my help. The following are examples of some of the explanations I gave in L1.

Vocabulary

In order to clarify vocabulary and help learners understand words which seemed difficult to acquire, I used the following strategies:

• **Imaging.** For example:
  - **News:** N-north, E-east, W-west and S-south. News comes from everywhere.
  - **Glove:** G-girl. Usually girls love wearing gloves.
  - **Weather vs whether:** When weather is going to change, it affects what we wear.
  - **Farmer:** Someone who lives far away from the city, pronunciation er person.

• **Visuals.** For example:
  - **basketball:** the ball we put into a basket
  - **football:** use your foot

• **Linking.** For example:
  - **table:** a table has four legs.

• **Sorting.** I used this strategy to point out the difference between the words they look for in their dictionaries. For example:
  - **nouns (n):** countable and uncountable. (Later on when learners encounter something new such as ‘How many ...’ and ‘How much ...’ they will have better understanding of the difference between ‘many’ and ‘much’.)
  - **nouns (n):** words ending in ‘-ence’, ‘-tion’ or ‘-ment’ are recognised as nouns.
  - **verbs (v):** transitive and intransitive, regular and irregular verbs, referring to actions.
  - **adjectives (adj):** some of these words end with ‘-tive’.
  - **adverbs (adv):** the words ending with ‘-ly’.

• **Reinforcing.** Learners were to write a word on a small piece of paper and then put it on the real thing. For example: mirror. When you see the mirror, you have to see the word ‘mirror’.

Pronunciation

To help the learners improve their pronunciation, I explained some of the English pronunciation rules using Chinese and gave them some examples. For example:
• English words ending in ‘e’ after a consonant: the pronunciation of the preceding vowel is as the name of the vowel. For example page, note, tire.
• ee: long ‘e’ /iː/. For example seed, deep, beef.

Word meanings
I always tell the group to learn real English, not ‘Chinglish’, and not to rely on dictionaries all the time. For example:

In each group the words are the same. However, the meaning is totally different:

a What a shame you can’t come with us.
b Shame on you.

a You look great.
b A great man.

a She’s beautiful.
b (We went to a restaurant last night.) The food was beautiful.

Grammar


Present perfect: I’ve worked in a bank.

To talk about events and situations in one's life, up to the present time. We don’t know when exactly these things happened.

Cultural differences
I explained a number of cultural differences to learners to help in their settlement in Australia. For example:

• Eye contact: In some Asian countries, such as mainland China, Korea and Japan, people do not look directly in each other’s eyes, especially when a person is talking to someone of higher social status, such as parents, bosses, teachers and elderly people. In Australia, people expect eye contact when talking to each other.

• Line up: In Australia, people often wait to be served in shops and banks, without queuing. People just hear ‘Who’s next?’ and then the person whose turn it is goes to be served. However, people who come from mainland China, if they do not see a queue, will just jump in, thinking that other people are not in a queue.

• Interrupt: When two people are talking, to ‘chip in’ is impolite in China, but not in Australia.

• Telling the truth: One day, as we were doing the questionnaires, a learner asked me whether giving truthful answers was O.K. I understood what the question meant, knowing they were coming from a country with a communist system, where telling the truth was not always desirable. I told the whole group that in Australia, if you want to say something, it must be true. Otherwise, they should keep silent.
• **Titles ‘Mr’ and ‘Mrs’**: In Mainland China, people never change their surname, even when they are married. Therefore, it was a bit difficult for them, in a short space of time, to understand that Australians may change their name. I had to tell them about western culture and tradition of marriages. Finally, the learners understood.

**Conclusion**

I really enjoyed being a bilingual assistant during this time. Under the five headings mentioned above (vocabulary, pronunciation, word meanings, grammar and culture differences), I have tried to summarise my understanding of what the learners needed and where they wanted my help. Some of the learning strategies helped them to remember vocabulary faster and more easily.

**Teacher Evaluation of L1 use**

**Teacher perspective**

In general, it seems that learners benefited from using L1 in the English classroom; however, they did not all share the same needs. Their need for L1 assistance strongly depended on the following factors:

- age
- length of time in Australia
- cultural background
- educational background
- language-learning background.

Learners’ needs concerning L1 use seemed to change during the course of their English studies. In this class, these changes were in both the type and the amount of need. Generally, at the beginning of the term they required more assistance – especially in areas such as explaining instructions, classroom organisation, study skills and pronunciation. Towards the end of term learners needed less L1 help, and in different areas – such as the explanation of more advanced grammar structures, more sophisticated vocabulary items or concepts they were unfamiliar with.

I believe that using bilingual support in low-level classes is absolutely essential in all possible ways, but higher-level learners could also benefit from some form of bilingual support. This support would be more focused on abstract concept formation and cultural issues, such as the difference between their culture and that of Australia.

Additionally, I would like to emphasise that many of the learners in this class came from a traumatised background, therefore concentrating for four hours each day on studying English was a very demanding task for them. Using L1 gave them a bit of relief, and helped bring a piece of ‘home’ (familiar territory) into the English classroom.

**Teacher perception of the learner response to L1 use**

During the term, the bilingual assistants and learners developed a good rapport. Most of the time, the majority of learners expressed highly positive attitudes towards using bilingual support in the English class and felt disappointed when sometimes they were
not able to join the class because of other commitments. They also emphasised that using L1 helped them to build their confidence levels, which is vital in mastering any language. However, those learners who were not provided with bilingual support and did not have other learners in the class speaking their language often expressed their disappointment at the ‘unfair’ system.

**Issues**

**Issue:** For me, not being able to provide bilingual support to all learners in all the different languages spoken in the class was an ethical as well as a language-learning issue.

**Response:** The special seating arrangement, where the group without bilingual support was positioned in the centre of the classroom and enjoyed special attention from me, the class teacher, eased the situation. However, the real solution to the problem would be to have more trained bilingual assistants in various languages.

**Issue:** The bilingual assistants worked very enthusiastically throughout the term with their groups; however, they expressed their need for some form of training where they could familiarise themselves with the methodology used in class. They also wanted a chance to further develop their own English language skills.
Chapter 8

Forough's class

Forough Dorrnian, Mohammad Kavianpour, Amy Liu and Yousif Yalda
- acl Parramatta

Introduction

This class, held at acl Parramatta, had a bilingual teacher and three bilingual assistants. Between them, they were able to use the L1 of the majority of the learners in the class. One group of learners from Ethiopia did not have access to L1 support.

Teacher

My name is Forough Dorrnian and I come from Iran. I migrated to Australia in 1999 with my family. I have a degree in Teaching English and a Masters degree in Education from Tehran Teacher Training College, Iran. I also have a TESOL certificate from the University of Technology Sydney (UTS), Australia. I was an English teacher in my country for 29 years before I came to Australia and I have been teaching at acl for four years. At the moment I am a part-time teacher at acl Parramatta. As I am a Farsi speaker and acl has a lot of Farsi learners in this centre, I was interested in this project. As a bilingual teacher I wanted to observe the Farsi-speaking learners during their learning process when they are helped in their L1 by the teacher and a Farsi bilingual assistant, as well as other learners who are helped by other bilingual assistants.

Farsi bilingual assistant

My name is Mohammad Kavianpour. I have been in Australia for three years now. I have a Bachelor degree in International Relations from Isfahan University in Iran. My first language is Farsi. I work as a bilingual assistant, providing bilingual assistance to Iranian and Afghani learners.

Chinese bilingual assistant

My name is Amy Liu. I graduated from Bankstown TAFE (Technical and Further Education, Australia) with an Advanced Diploma of accounting in June 2002. Whilst completing my formal studies I worked at acl Bankstown as a Bilingual Support Officer. After graduation I also worked as acting Educational Assistant for ten months at acl Bankstown and acl Parramatta.

I am now working at acl Auburn as Chinese Bilingual Support Officer (BSO) two days per week. I have enrolled in the certified practising accountant program and am expecting to start it early next year. So I am on my way to a career as an accountant.

I like my role as a bilingual assistant and like helping learners in all aspects, including learning English and settlement. Learners at acl are refugees or newly arrived migrants. Since I came to Australia earlier than they did, and I have studied and worked in Australia, I know and understand more about the country than they do. As a bilingual assistant, I have been providing assistance by interpreting for the educational manager,
educational coordinators, assessment and referral officers, as well as administrative staff, teachers, counselling staff, and specialist staff. My work makes the communication between learners and the college easier, more efficient and effective.

Arabic bilingual assistant

I am Yousif Yalda, a Bilingual Support Officer from acl Fairfield. I cover three languages - Assyrian, Arabic and Spanish. I have been employed at acl since 2001. During that period I’ve worked at different colleges. Holding a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish from Baghdad University and a Masters Diploma from Spain in translation (speaking-writing) from Spanish to Arabic has given me the chance to practise in both translating and teaching. As a migrant, I like and enjoy working with different multicultural groups, assisting them with all their needs. I enjoy playing guitar and I write lyrics for Spanish songs as well writing for a local Arabic newspaper as a reporter.

About the Parramatta Centre

Parramatta College is one of acl’s biggest centres, running AMEP courses in three different shifts during the weekdays and one morning shift on Saturdays. There are approximately 500 migrant and refugee learners from diverse nationalities studying in this centre at three different levels, beginner, post-beginner and intermediate. The learners are mainly from Afghanistan, Iran and The Horn of Africa. Most learners are studying at beginner levels.

The research context

Project focus

The aim of the project was to:

- observe the learner’s English learning process through the use of L1 (Farsi, Arabic, Dinka and Chinese)
- learn more about the needs of the pre-beginner learners in their new learning situation and to utilise the learners' L1 in the classroom to answer these needs
- recognise the learning, cultural and social problems that can affect their English learning process
- observe the similarities and differences in L1 use among different language groups – Farsi, Arabic, Dinka, Chinese – in the class and compare their learning achievements with the learners who didn’t have access to a bilingual assistant in the classroom – the Ethiopian learners.

Class profile

This was a pre-beginner, day class conducted from April to June 2004. The learners attended the class five days a week from 9.00 am till 1.00 pm. There were twenty learners from five different nationalities.

Learner profile

The predominant L1 language was Farsi/Dari. There were two Iranians (a married couple) aged around 56 who spoke Farsi and six Afghani females with an average age around
The second largest language group was the Chinese learners. There were six Chinese aged around 55 and four other females with an average age around 56 who were all literate in L1.

The other languages were Arabic, Dinka and Amharic. There were four Sudanese, one male aged 40 and three females with an average age around 38 who spoke both Arabic and Dinka, but usually spoke Dinka with each other in the class. There were two Ethiopian females with an average age around 35 who only spoke Amharic with each other. These six learners, all from The Horn of Africa, were not literate in their L1.

Since this group of learners had no record of ESL learning in their initial assessment, and the level of their formal schooling in L1 was very low, they were assessed as pre-beginner learners.

Except for the Chinese learners who were here mostly as migrants and had come to help look after their grandchildren, the other learners were here as refugees with a history of torture and trauma in their original country.

Course goals

When I was designing my program plan for this group of learners, my focus was on teaching the English alphabet, numbers, some important social sight signs and logos and, if possible, filling in a simple formatted text with their personal information. So, the course goals were for the learners to be able to:

• demonstrate recognition of alphabet and numbers
• write alphabet and numbers
• demonstrate understanding of alphabetical order
• read social sight words and signs in order to have community access
• respond to simple instructions in the context of learning
• complete a simplified, formatted text.

L1 support in the classroom

Learners, except for the Ethiopians, were provided with bilingual assistants. One Arabic (Iraqi), one Dinka (Sudanese), one Chinese and one Farsi (Iranian) bilingual assistant were in the class to help, two days per week for one hour each session. They usually sat with the target group and helped them do their class tasks and interpreted the teacher’s instructions or explanations. They were also present at informational sessions, such as visits by police and health workers, to help the learners to understand the input. Apart from the bilingual assistant, the Farsi learners also had the benefit of working with a Farsi speaker teacher, myself, as an additional help in the class.

The management of L1 use in the classroom

Classroom interaction

Forough

At the beginning of this course, I divided the learners into four mixed nationality groups. The rationale behind this grouping was to create a situation for learners to
interact with each other, even though none of them could speak each other’s languages or English. However, after two or three sessions, it became clear that they preferred to sit next to a learner who spoke their L1. Later I found that this solution was more helpful because the bilingual assistants could sit among the target groups and help them do the tasks or explain the instructions of the tasks. Even when there was no bilingual assistant, or when I was busy explaining something to the other groups, they talked to each other, asked questions and clarified the answers in L1 and helped each other whenever they had a problem during the class activities. I believe that the whole group working in this way felt more secure and helped build each other’s confidence. When there was no bilingual assistant in the class, I tried to use more pictures or realia to help them become involved in class activities. I sometimes provided the Iranian couple and the Chinese learners, who were all literate in their L1, with a picture dictionary or a simplified dictionary, which was a great help in the absence of a bilingual assistant. When they could understand the vocabulary or the instructions for the tasks, they could help their classmates do it as well. I used worksheets with common symbols such as those in Figure 11, where students were asked to match the symbol with the appropriate word.

![Figure 11: Example of vocabulary worksheet](image)

Mohammad

As a bilingual assistant, I translated and interpreted the main lesson and exercises into Farsi and Dari for Iranian and Afghani learners. I also had to make sure that all learners understood the subject and were able to follow the teacher. So, I had to sit with them in a group or individually and make sure that they weren’t lost. Sometimes, they needed to ask the teacher questions but they could not put it in English, so I helped them to ask the question and make sure they got the answer.

It was a good idea to put all Farsi speakers in one group, so that they could help each other too. So, the faster learners became a source of L1 in the classroom. However, I had to make sure that they passed on the points to others correctly.
Amy

The Chinese language group with which I worked included five female and one male learner, evenly split between Cantonese and Mandarin speakers. Five of the learners were over 45 years old and four had a high school education, one had studied at tertiary level and one had only three years of schooling. I spent two hours in the classroom, an hour each Wednesday and Thursday morning.

Yousif

As a bilingual, I always participated in the information sessions, the police talks, the health talks, the employment pathways talks, counsellor’s induction sessions and information on citizenship courses and many others. Because of my skills in speaking and interpreting in three languages, I could help the guest speakers by interpreting and translating so that learners with no understanding of English could get valuable information.

Learning strategies

Mohammad

Teaching of learning strategies was one of the class objectives. As the Australian educational system varies from that in Iran and Afghanistan, it was important to address all the new things learners needed to follow to become good and fast learners. I didn’t only explain Forough’s strategies, I also taught them how to use a bilingual dictionary. Using bilingual dictionaries was essential as these learners had nobody at home to help them understand English. Using a picture dictionary or computerised programs was a useful strategy for them to understand English better. As none of the learners in my group knew how to use a computer, it was essential for them to learn, so I spent more time teaching them how to use a mouse and keyboard and how to access computer programs. I asked my Farsi group to sit together in the same group, so that they could help each other when I was busy with someone else, or while I was not in the centre. I found that it was useful as long as they respected each other.

Amy

In general, the Chinese speaking learners in Forough’s class were educated. They went to school before they came to Australia. Some of them even had tertiary education. However, as shown in the class profile, they were older people except Jing, the young lady who was pregnant. These learners hadn’t been in a classroom atmosphere since their 20s, hence learning a second language from zero was very difficult for them. They did not understand Forough, including her explanations and instructions. So it was very important to have a Chinese bilingual assistant in class to explain for them.

At the beginning of the class, I helped them complete a little survey called the ‘Individual Learning Plan’ so that Forough would have a structure of what her learners needed and wanted to learn. Then she could focus on overall class needs as well as individual needs in choosing the basic English survival skills to teach.

In the class, I also helped learners to learn how to learn English, which was useful as they could continue studying after class, on holidays and even when they finished their entitlement of 510 hours. For example, we required them to number handouts and put them in a folder so that at the end of the term they would have an English book. We also required them to have dictionaries for new words. I always told the
Chapter 8
Forough’s class

Chinese learners to listen to Forough and other learners when they were speaking because it was a good opportunity to practise listening skills. When repeating after Forough, I always encouraged them to repeat aloud. I told them that it was good to have a little notebook to write down new words they learned, and to spend a few minutes each day reviewing them.

Yousif

I tried to help individually the learners who needed more and extra help – sometimes after class, or working closely with them in the classroom – since their problem was the English script, which is so different from the Arabic script.

Content and language
Forough

In order for the learners to be able to read and write the letters of the English alphabet and put them in order, I had to teach them the script of the letters and their sounds.

To teach them to read, write and spell the alphabet, I first started from their own names. I showed them how to draw the letters of their names and to pronounce their names. I also helped them write their names in capital letters and in large letters on a piece of paper, fold it and leave it on their table facing the class so that other learners could see their names.

Then, gradually, I taught them the shape of upper case and lower case alphabet letters and their vowel and consonant pronunciation – first by drawing each letter on the board and pronouncing its sound in groups or individually, and then by providing them with different activities where they had to draw and copy letters.

For the Farsi speakers, I could easily compare the English alphabet sounds with Farsi alphabet sounds, and if there were no such equivalent in their L1 (for example, ‘th’ in they and in thick) I would show them how to use their mouth, the positions of their tongue, lips and teeth and give them enough examples with English words. Afghani learners also had a lot of problems pronouncing some vowels or consonants at the beginning of the words (for example, substituting ‘ais’ for is and ‘haich’ for each) due to the influence of their Dari language. I also showed them how to pronounce these words correctly using the same methodology.

Another problem for the Farsi speakers was the different direction of the script in L1. In Farsi, writing is from right to left. I spent some time with the Iranian couple, who were literate in their L1, to help them write the alphabet correctly. First I noticed they copied each letter from right to left, so I told them that this method of writing was not correct for English and then showed them how to move their pencil on the worksheet and copy the letter from left to right. Then, when they learned the shape of the letter, they couldn’t write on a straight line. They usually started writing from the top left line of the worksheet and finished some lines lower on the right side. After a lot of practice, they finally learned how to follow the instructions, as these were given in L1, so the learning process was faster.

I spent considerable time and effort with the Afghani learners as well. These learners were not literate in L1 and didn’t have any idea of the new script, the alphabet letters and their pronunciation. Sometimes I had to take their hands and help them draw a letter on the line or show them the direction of the pencil movements.
Chinese learners also had some pronunciation problems and had difficulty pronouncing some words properly, as it is common for them to ignore the consonant ending sounds in their L1 (for example, ‘studen’ for student, ‘si’ for six). So it was very difficult for them to get used to English ending sounds. They also couldn’t pronounce some English letter sounds properly (for example, ‘f’, ‘v’, ‘r’, ‘l’, ‘n’ and ‘th’) because of their L1 sound system and they confused these sounds with other sounds.

The bilingual support assistants followed the same techniques as I did and spent a lot of time with their focus groups to show them how to take the pencil in their hand, and move it from left to right to draw or copy an alphabet letter and give them enough examples of their L1 alphabet sound systems to make the learning process easier.

The Ethiopian learners – who had a lot of problems pronouncing some letters (‘p’, ‘f’, ‘s’ and some others) and writing the alphabet letters – were the only group who had no bilingual assistant in their L1 and had to rely on the teacher or bilingual assistant in English. Sometimes I sat next to them and showed them the position of my lips, tongue and teeth and pronounced a letter sound. Then I asked them to copy me and make the same sound. If they were still not able to pronounce the particular sound properly, I helped them and put my hand on their lips to show them how to make the sound. I also took their hand and helped them to move their pencil on their worksheets and draw or copy a letter from left to right. During the activities when I explained the instructions for the task, I usually asked the faster learners (usually the literate Iranian and Chinese) to sit next to them and help them complete the task and I checked their work. At other times the bilingual assistants sat at their table and helped them as well as their own language group.

When I gave examples to show the learners how to pronounce a letter, I first started from concrete words (‘a’ for apple, ‘o’ for orange) and I had no problem with any group as I would use real objects, pictures, posters or toys as much as possible. But for abstract words and personal information words I had to translate some words and expressions in my own L1 for Farsi speakers.

I also used L1 to explain some cultural differences. For example, Iranians and Afghans keep their family name after marriage; they also don’t have a de-facto system in their culture. The bilingual assistants did the same with their target groups and explained the meaning of these words and expressions or the cultural differences.

Here again I faced a problem with the Sudanese and Ethiopian group. I sat down with them individually and gave them lots of examples so they could grasp the meaning of these notions. Sometimes I still felt they were lost because they couldn’t understand the meaning of a word, usually an abstract one (for example, worried) or a concept such as widowed. Sometimes I had to find other Ethiopians from higher levels, who knew more English, to help them understand the words or some expressions in their L1. Sometimes the problem was they didn’t have the concept in their own culture. For example, they didn’t have any idea of ‘date of birth’ or ‘place of birth’ because of their refugee situation. During a meeting held at acl Parramatta with Sudanese Community Link we were informed that because of civil war in Sudan and migration of people to different parts of the country or nearby neighbouring countries, there is hardly any formal record of people’s date or place of birth and so many Sudanese and Ethiopians don’t really know these expressions.

I also used Farsi a lot to translate and explain grammatical points to Farsi speakers, such as the difference between singular and plural verbs (is/are - has/have) and singular and plural nouns (girl/girls – man/men) and helped them transfer their learning skills.
from their L1 to L2. With other groups, the bilingual assistants used the same technique and tried to explain the grammatical problems in their L1, giving them as many examples as possible. The Ethiopians had to listen to my examples and explanations in English, look at pictures and realia and pay attention to my body language.

When I was teaching the numbers, I didn’t use Farsi so much with Farsi speakers as they all knew the counting system. Afghani learners had a little problem in pronouncing numbers (for example, ‘saix’ for six) but with enough practice they learned how to pronounce numbers correctly.

With Chinese learners, I spent more time on their pronunciation as they had difficulty pronouncing one, three, four, five, six and others due to their L1 sound system. Here again the bilingual assistant had to show them the right position of their lips, tongue and their teeth, and helped them to pronounce these numbers correctly.

For the Sudanese and Ethiopians, reading and writing numbers presented difficulty as they confused number ‘3’ with the letter ‘E’ and number ‘9’ with the letter ‘q’. When I was teaching the dates and telling the time, they couldn’t transfer their knowledge to the new situation. Here again, the bilingual assistants had to spend some time explaining the instructions for how to read and tell the time and dates, but it seemed the Ethiopians still had a problem understanding the right time such as the difference between quarter and half or past and to. We used worksheets, like those in Figure 12, to help learners with both ordinal and cardinal numbers.

Figure 12: Worksheets for writing numbers

Source: In print: Beginning literacy through cultural awareness
Content

Mohammad

As all of the learners in my group were new arrival migrants from Afghanistan and Iran, the focus was on cultural and settlement issues. I could see that most of them were suffering from culture shock, which was caused by a new and different culture.

We had a number of different information sessions for new arrivals. These sessions were organised by acl and other departments such as the police, the Health Department and Community Services. These sessions helped the learners to better understand the way of life and culture of Australia. They also helped them to find out about their rights and responsibilities in Australian society. For example, many new arrivals from Afghanistan were afraid to refer their problems to the police because of negative experiences in their own country.

Learners also needed help to settle successfully in their new country. Most of them tried to ask me questions during class time that were not related to teaching. These questions were mostly about Centrelink, housing and Medicare. As they had no English skills to read and write, they would come to me and ask for help, so I had to spend my break time with them or refer them to the Iranian Community Centre. Becoming an Australian citizen was not their first need, as they had to wait for two more years to become eligible to apply for citizenship. At the time they were not eligible to attend the citizenship classes, as learners are required to have at least 300 hours of English tuition completed. They could not attend these classes because of their English level.

Amy

I found that Chinese learners relied on me as bilingual assistant in the following areas:

Vocabulary: When there was no handout, they could not see and understand the words and I had to interpret the words to them. When they were given handouts, it was more efficient and effective that I explained new words to them than they looked the words up one-by-one in dictionaries.

Grammar: It was absolutely necessary for me to help in a pre-beginner class when Forough was teaching grammar. English grammar is completely different from Chinese grammar and it is so difficult and complicated for them. Although it was a pre-beginner class, there was some English grammar taught; for example, the difference between singular and plural and how to apply it to nouns. The Chinese learners understood the grammar easily with my interpretation and explanation, which otherwise would have taken more time and energy as there are no singular or plural forms in Chinese grammar.

Culture, settlement information and citizenship: We were involved a little bit in cultural issues, settlement information and citizenship in this class while Forough was teaching the alphabet, personal information, greeting people and so on. We organised an orientation session, a health talk and a counsellor information session for them. I provided support to both learners and speakers in these activities by interpreting and co-working. I think the Chinese learners would not have understood the speakers without interpreting or translating the key information segments.
**Pronunciation:** Although it might seem that bilingual assistants have nothing to do with pronunciation teaching, actually due to the difference between English pronunciation and Chinese pronunciation, the Chinese learners needed to hear my explanations in Chinese to know how to use the tongue and the teeth to make certain sounds, in particular such sounds as ‘r’, ‘v’, ‘l’, ‘n’ and ‘th’.

**Class activities:** To enable learners to talk more freely, a lot of English speaking practice took place; for example, we used the ‘Learner’s Survey – getting to know each other’ worksheet. I interpreted the instructions and rules of the activities so that they understood how to participate in them. The Chinese learners were a bit shy and liked to practise with the Chinese only. So from time to time I encouraged them to talk with learners from other language groups and sometimes I even participated in the practice.

In this class, Sudanese and Iranian learners were a bit slow in reading and writing compared to the others. So when we had reading and writing activities, I assisted these learners a lot by helping them to get the answers and correcting their errors. In fact, when we had class activities, bilingual assistants not only assisted learners of their own language groups, but the whole class, especially slow-paced learners.

**Giving feedback:** For the Chinese learners, I was a link – a connection between the learners and Forough – rather than just an interpreter who translated what the teacher said. Due to the limitation of vocabulary and English-speaking skills, they were not able to communicate well with Forough. For example, they could not tell her their new address or telephone number if they had moved, neither could they give the reasons for withdrawing or being absent, nor what their needs in the class were. On these occasions, I was the medium to give feedback to both Forough and acl. By using my skills, everybody gained – the learners, Forough and acl – thus maximising the outcome; that is, getting the best results to meet learners’ needs and expectations.

Yousif

The main problem for pre-beginner learners is pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Sometimes they are impatient and want to know it all at once, or if any of these seem to be easier to understand they would like the rest to happen with the same kind of ease. That’s why my presence in the class of beginners was invaluable – to explain that learning a language cannot happen overnight.

Language

Mohammad

During class time, Forough focused on all different aspects of learning English, such as listening, writing, reading and speaking. I noticed that learners needed more help in speaking and pronunciation. They could not rely on each other for help. Reading and vocabulary were then next on their list of priorities.

One of the most important parts of my job was to help learners in filling out forms. Sometimes learners were just confused between the surname, family name and last name. So I translated one of the forms in Farsi and filled out one of the forms as a
sample and gave it to them to practise at home. Finally, they understood that the first name, given name and Christian name are all the same.

For the ones who could not read and write even in Farsi, teaching learning strategies was more complicated. For each individual letter of the alphabet I had to find a sign/symbol or a sound they were familiar with. This helped them memorise the signs and sounds better. For example, I would ask them to remember the shape of the letter ‘C’ as the crescent moon. Also, the pronunciation of ‘C’ in Farsi refers to the number 30. So, when they looked at the letter C, they could remember number 30 and pronounce it correctly.

Yousef

To make Forough’s task easier, since there are always activities in the classroom, I always tried to help her by translating what the activities were all about, key words in the activity and how to follow the instructions. Because I made the activities clear to the learners, most of them were able to perform or produce small dialogues. Not all of the learners had equal skills or abilities, but I tried to encourage them, pointing out that they were just at the beginning of their studies.

Teacher Evaluation of L1 use

Teacher perspective

As this group of learners were all new arrivals in Australia, they not only had a communication problem in their new social situation, but also a lot of settlement and cultural problems. They were also refugees (except for the Chinese learners) with a history of torture and trauma. Therefore at the beginning of the course I focused on their survival needs in Australia and tried to help them to manage a new life in a new situation as securely and safely as possible. So it was very important for me to create a happy and safe feeling in this group of learners when they were in the classroom with me.

From the beginning of the course, the presence and support of an assistant fluent in learners’ L1 was very valuable and effective. It was particularly valuable when I was doing a needs and interest survey to plan the goals of my class program and during some cultural, social and settlement information sessions (for example, police, health and counsellor) which were held at Parramatta centre on different occasions, but it was valuable in all learning processes during the course.

So I believe it is absolutely essential for slow learners – especially older and less educated learners who have no record of formal schooling or who have experienced torture and trauma in their country of origin – to be provided with a bilingual assistant, particularly in the beginning levels. This support in their L1 is a great help at the initial stages of their learning situation and prepares them to adjust to their new cultural and social condition.

Teacher perception of the learner response to L1 use

On different occasions, learners expressed their satisfaction and appreciation for having a bilingual assistant with them in the class or in other places related to their learning situation at acl (for example during the learner’s interview with the AM EP research assistant or during the break time when they talked with a bilingual assistant in their L1).

The learners were also more enthusiastic, more involved in activities and completed
their tasks better and faster than the Ethiopian group who didn’t have any bilingual assistant in the class. You can imagine how an old or middle-agedAfghani, Sudanese or Ethiopian with no history of formal education felt when he/she sat among other learners with different languages and cultural backgrounds and was required to learn a new language with strange symbols and sounds which had no meaning to him/her. But when they realised that they were not alone and that there was some support in their L1 in the classroom or out of the class to help them learn the language, they had a feeling of joy and satisfaction. This secure and positive feeling in the learning situation in return reinforced their self-confidence and helped them to speed up their learning process.

Issues

Issue: It was evident that the Farsi speakers, who had a teacher who could speak their language (on most occasions) and a bilingual assistant in their L1 for two hours a week, became more self-reliant and confident about their learning skills by the end of the term. They found joy and satisfaction once they could grasp a grammatical or comprehension problem which would be explained and solved with the support of L1. However, at the beginning of the course they were more dependent on me or a bilingual assistant during the class activities and were obsessed with understanding the meaning of all words and expressions in their L1. When there was no such equivalent, they asked for more explanation in L1, which was more demanding for the teacher or bilingual assistant and more time consuming for the other learners.

The Chinese group – who were all literate in their L1 – with some L1 support (two hours a week) learned the English alphabet letters and their pronunciation much faster than the other groups and could easily transfer their learning skills from L1 to L2 during the learning process. They were very hard workers, well organised and self-reliant. They were mostly independent during class activities and were also very enthusiastic and interested in helping the other learners when there was no bilingual assistant. They all achieved the planned learning outcomes and transferred to a higher level.

Among the learners with no previous educational background, the Afghani learners – who had the most L1 (Farsi) support – achieved more learning outcomes than the other groups (the Sudanese and Ethiopians) who had less or no L1 support. At the end of the course, six out of eight Farsi speakers transferred to a higher level, but no one in the Sudanese and Ethiopian group could achieve the planned learning outcomes and it was recommended that they repeat the course.

Response: At the beginning of the course Farsi learners expected the bilingual assistant or me to translate every single word and were not independent learners. They were also not interested in mixing with other groups and doing pair activities because of their lack of self-confidence. However, when their learning skills gradually improved and they became more familiar with the strategies of the activities through explanations in their L1, they became less dependent on the bilingual assistant or me and showed more interest in interacting with other
groups. By the end of the course they were very enthusiastic about their learning outcomes and were interested in sitting with other groups, especially the Sudanese and Ethiopians, and even helped them do their tasks.

**Bilingual assistants’ evaluation of L1 use**

**Mohammad**

Students have told me many times that they feel more secure and comfortable when there is L1 to help them. Once they have been able to learn something new, they are motivated to come to class. Many students who need L1 help won’t come to class on the day(s) when the bilingual assistant is absent. I have often been asked by students to spend more time with them in the class. To understand the importance of using L1 in low-level classes, one just needs to imagine oneself in a foreign country surrounded by different people who don’t speak the language of the visitor or the host. How would one feel to meet a fellow countryman in a strange and unknown place who speaks both languages?

**Amy**

According to the response from the learners and my own experience, I deeply believe that it is necessary and important to use L1 assistance in ESL classes, especially at the beginner’s level.

**Yousif**

The role of a bilingual assistant, especially in the classroom, is essential. When learners come to a class with no English background or none or very limited years of education in their country of origin, it is very hard for them to manage the situation in the classroom or in a new social setting. In this case, the teacher – even being bilingual in some other language different from the learners’ – can only do so much. To make learners feel safe in this situation, I think it is important for a bilingual assistant to be with the teacher in the classroom, trying to translate and make it clear what the teacher is talking about, or to help with any other instruction or information needed to be delivered to the learners.

I have had a chance to talk to learners about their observations and what they thought about the bilingual assistance in the classroom. The majority of them preferred to have bilingual support in the classroom, but not for a long time. Since they were eager to learn English, they were happy to have this kind of support at least two to three times per week, but not every day.

**Issues**

**Issue:** Issues may arise when misunderstandings occur between the learners and teachers because of lack of English. I believe that bilingual assistants are absolutely necessary to interpret when learners are coming from countries with a history of oppressive regimes, where every single movement may be interpreted in all sorts of ways. The presence of someone who can speak in the L1 ensures that any kind of misunderstanding is less likely to occur.
Response: I always try to establish and maintain good relations with learners and I never hesitate or refuse to help them, whether that is during the class, at reception when they first come, or any other time they may seek help.
Chapter 9

Tricia and Ngoc’s class

Patricia Barton, Ngoc Bui and Bunna Khin - acl Cabramatta

Introduction
This class, held at acl Cabramatta, had one bilingual teacher, one monolingual teacher and two bilingual assistants. Between us, we were able to use the L1 of the majority of the learners in the class. However, a number of learners from other language backgrounds did not have access to L1 support.

Teachers

Ngoc Bui, is a Vietnamese-Australian while Patricia Barton is Australian-born. We have both taught English to newly arrived migrants at Cabramatta acl in the Adult Migrant English Program for several years.

Ngoc
I am fluent in French, Vietnamese and English, and experienced first-hand the difficulties of migration and learning English as an adult. My involvement in this project was a natural extension of my interest in using learners’ first language (L1) to assist English-language learning.

Tricia
I speak English (and some Spanish, but am not fluent). My interest in the project resulted from experiences teaching pre-beginner and beginner classes at first with nil and later with limited bilingual assistance. I was eager to explore the advantages to learners of being able to use their first language more fully while learning English.

Khmer bilingual assistant

Bunna Khin
I am the Khmer-speaking bilingual assistant in this class and was a teacher in Cambodia before migrating to Australia around ten years ago. I had learned some English in Cambodia and developed this further after arriving in Australia. I was interested in assisting learners, not only through my teaching skills from Cambodia but also through my own language-learning of Khmer and English. I enjoyed the opportunity to help others.

About the Cabramatta Centre

Cabramatta, a suburb of outer-western Sydney, is largely populated by South-East Asian settlers and is sometimes known as ‘Vietnamatta’ or ‘Little Vietnam’ because English is spoken predominantly as a ‘foreign language’. Successive waves of refugees and migrants settled in the area, first from Eastern Europe and later from South and
Central America and South-East Asia - predominantly Vietnam, and Cambodia. Today, learners in acl English classes tend to be part of extended family networks from these countries, with a sprinkling of new arrivals from China, Laos, Thailand, the Middle East and Africa. Learner numbers at the acl Cabramatta college vary from 350–500, fairly evenly divided between day and evening classes, predominantly at the beginner and pre-beginner levels.

**The research context**

*Project focus*

The focus of this research was to:

- investigate the benefits of using learners’ L1 in a pre-beginner/beginner, competency-based, English language learning classroom, with four main language learner groups: Vietnamese, Khmer, Cantonese and Mandarin
- explore ways of using L1 with these four main language groups.

*Class profile*

The class was a mixed pre-beginner/beginner, competency-based English language class. It met from April to June 2004, Monday to Friday from 9 am to 1 pm. Twenty-six learners were enrolled in the first weeks of the class, though by the end of the course there were only twenty remaining.

*Learner profile*

The class consisted predominantly of new arrivals - migrants who had been in Australia for periods of between two weeks and two months. Of the 26 students in the class, 3 were males and 23 females, which is typical of day classes at Cabramatta where the men usually work during the day. Over half the students were aged between 30 and 50 years, with the rest evenly divided between 20–30 and 50–60 years. Older learners had usually settled in Australia as a result of family reunions and they often cared for grandchildren outside school hours. The class also included young mothers accessing acl’s on-site childcare.

Five main language groups were represented in the class: the majority spoke Vietnamese, five spoke Khmer, two Serbian, two Mandarin, and one spoke a Sudanese language, Arabic (Lebanese) and some English. An interesting aspect of teaching predominantly South-East Asian learners from neighbouring countries is that there was a high incidence of learners who shared a second language. This was very useful when bilingual assistance for all language groups was not available or not available on the same day.

Most of the class had had some prior exposure to education. Nearly half the learners had between 5 and 10 years schooling, seven learners had 0–5 years, and seven had 10–12 years. Generally, African and older Khmer learners have little or sporadic exposure to formal schooling before coming to Australia, due to war and associated issues in their countries of origin. These groups tend to have basic learning issues. Older learners, and late starters who may have missed basic content/language/strategic learning orientation and foundations usually acquired during the first weeks of term by other learners, also tend to be slower-paced.
Course goals

Course goals were formally derived from the settlement and language learning outcomes set out in the national competency-based curriculum. These were matched to the learners’ level, skills and abilities through needs analysis and individual learning plan surveys. Settlement needs, socio-cultural understanding and cross-cultural relationship building were also elements of the course planning process.

Formal language goals for pre-beginners were very basic. The aim was to develop students’ ability to:

- identify alphabet and numbers
- write letters of the alphabet and numbers
- understand alphabetical order
- identify social sight signs.

These pre-beginner goals were necessarily extended by the learners’ participation in a mixed pre-beginner/beginner classroom where they were exposed to many of the beginner language goals as well. Aims for the beginners were to develop the ability to:

- learn in a formal context
- respond to spoken classroom instructions
- locate information in an alphabetical index
- provide personal information using spoken language
- complete a short application form
- write a short message.

L1 support in the classroom

Two teachers shared the class – Ngoc, the bilingual (Vietnamese/English) teacher three days per week (Monday to Wednesday); and Tricia, who spoke English only, for two days (Thursday and Friday).

Two bilingual assistants were present for 3–4 hours per week spread over two days. Bunna Khin spoke Khmer, and Quoc Tran spoke Mandarin, Cantonese and Vietnamese.

We expected that the bilingual assistants would be available one day a week for each teacher. In reality, the availability of bilingual assistants varied, as they were sometimes required for other tasks in the college. To complicate matters further, originally both bilingual assistants came on the same day, but halfway into the term they could no longer attend on the same day when the English-only teacher taught. Both these factors impacted from time to time on lesson planning and delivery. For example, a lesson involving grammatical or socio-cultural explanations could not be delivered as planned, or became too complex and difficult for the learners in the absence of the bilingual assistants, particularly for learners who were not literate in L1.

Similarly, because learners who spoke Mandarin, Cantonese, Khmer or Arabic do not use roman-based scripts in their L1, even when they are literate in L1, their transition to English literacy is much more complex than for those who use roman script. The difficulty is even greater for those whose schooling is disrupted by war, famine, other disasters, or simply by the poverty associated with all these factors.
Occasionally, bilingual members of the office staff or learners from higher classes provided additional bilingual assistance. This was especially useful for vital clarification of language learning points or materials, or for administrative matters such as the explanation of the consent form and questionnaires for this project.

Bilingual materials were not generally used in this class, as existing materials were unavailable for all language groups and existing translated materials were often unreliable. The lack of bilingual materials for all class members was potentially even more problematic in this context where learners already had unequal access to bilingual support. The Serbian and Sudanese/Arabic speakers, for instance, had bilingual support only rarely. We therefore considered it inequitable to provide even further L1 resources for learners who already had the support of bilingual assistants in the classroom.

Bilingual picture dictionaries were helpful, but were unavailable in Serbian. The translations were also inconsistent, which could only be detected or clarified by someone with the ability to understand English and the relevant L1. For learners without L1 literacy, the bilingual dictionaries were of more limited assistance in any case as they could not read the script either in their own language or English. Nevertheless, we frequently used the visuals to help clarify oral learning.

We designed some worksheets for learners to have input in L1; for example, visual prompts to which learners literate in L1 could append the relevant term in their language or local dialect. This enabled learners to use local dialect or language terms where these varied from the classical translations. Learners without L1 literacy could copy the English term. It is worth noting that learners unused to ‘reading’ two-dimensional drawings or even photos were often confused by visual materials. This was particularly the case where learners’ cultural practices and level of technological development in their own country differed markedly from Australia. For example, some learners were unfamiliar with the purpose and function of objects as apparently ordinary as an electric kettle, becoming confused by photos in a computer-assisted vocabulary lesson (using the Interactive picture dictionary [Protea Textware 1999]).

Other information about the class

We invited guests from relevant community organisations to inform learners about the services they provide. Bilingual assistants assisted with explanations as necessary. Sometimes these sessions were with individual classes, sometimes with several classes divided into language groups. Guests during the term included representatives of the local police, health and medical services, counselling services from Mission Australia and the Fairfield Migrant Resource Centre, and speakers on domestic violence and other legal issues.

Management of L1 use in the classroom:

Classroom interaction

Learners used their first language in the classroom in a variety of contexts and with a variety of participants.

Peer to peer

Learners from all language backgrounds used their first language with other learners from their own language group. This was usually to clarify meaning, to check information,
to ask questions and sometimes to comment privately on the class, an activity or any
matter that did not include learners from other language groups. It included settlement
questions and information exchange about opportunities for them or their families.

When bilingual assistants were unavailable, or learners were not able to speak
Vietnamese with me (Ngoc), the bilingual or multilingual learners assisted their peers.
Linguistic lines of transmission could be quite extended. A common transmission line
in this class, for example, was from English to Vietnamese to Khmer to Mandarin.
This helped create a cooperative climate in the classroom and in the case of at least one
bilingual learner who was not literate in L1 or English, the role of translator helped
her confidence and self-esteem. Late in the class she stated proudly, 'I translate'.

The Serbian learners, husband and wife, used L1 frequently as the husband had
chosen to remain at this level partly to support his wife's learning. This was useful
because of the lack of regular bilingual support for them, apart from bilingual assis-
tance from office staff which was only rarely available. Once the Sudanese learner had
withdrawn, the Serbian couple were the only language group without some form of
on-going bilingual support.

Personal dynamics between learners could complicate the degree to which peer-to-peer
support was available or accessed - particularly if there were only two or three learners
from a particular language group. There was a serious public dispute late in the term
between two learners in this class, due in part to one learner believing she had unequal
access to support from the bilingual assistant. Cooperation between these learners had
always been difficult due to personality differences, but by the end of the course they
barely spoke to each other.

Bilingual assistant
Bilingual assistants, when present, provided L1 support as required on all activities and
worksheets. The range of activities included: explanation of orientation information on
the learning outcomes of the course, the competencies and testing; introduction to genres
such as messages; classroom instructions; explanations of grammar points; vocabulary
meaning, clarification, and checking; socio-cultural orientation and comparisons; and
feedback to teachers on learner issues and problems, and expansion points.

Bilingual assistants also used L1 to explain English classroom language and later to
prompt learners in its use so they could ask teachers for help directly in English. In
particular, the bilingual assistants encouraged questioning by learners for whom this
was often culturally unfamiliar behaviour in the classroom.

Depending on the experience, education and work background of the bilingual
assistants, learners also used L1 for individual social and settlement needs - such as
translating forms and enquiring about social services and how to access them. This
usually happened in the break or when the bilingual assistant was not involved in
direct language-learning activities.

Slower-paced learners relied on bilingual assistants to a much greater extent,
particularly those with minimal L1 literacy, regardless of language background. Khmer-
speakers were often more self-conscious than others about their lack of education, and
as a group preferred to ask the bilingual assistant for assistance in L1. Some
Vietnamese - generally the younger group and those with more years of education
in L1 - and the Serbian and Mandarin speakers were less reticent about asking for
assistance in English, especially as the term went on and they became more confident
and independent.
The Khmer speakers generally required more detailed explanations of methodology, culture, learning concepts and strategies than other learners, apart from the Sudanese learner and one of the Chinese learners. Learners with low literacy and older learners were also more likely to seek explanations of vocabulary, classroom instructions and activities than the faster-paced learners, and to need more assistance even with recycling and revision.

The lack of bilingual assistance for the Sudanese learner may have been a factor in her early withdrawal, though this was stated as being due to family problems. Settlement issues for this group are often very complex, and they generally have less cultural support than the other groups in the class, whose communities have been in Australia longer and have more established family systems and support networks in place. This learner's English oracy was comparatively high but her late arrival in the class complicated her other learning issues even further.

Teacher to student

I (Ngoc Bui) used Vietnamese with the Vietnamese-speaking learners. I translated English into Vietnamese as necessary but tried to do it as quietly and unobtrusively as possible in order to minimise disruption and potential feelings of exclusion by non-Vietnamese speakers. However, if the Vietnamese speakers' questions or comments were relevant to the whole class, I shared the question and answer or comments with the whole class to ensure everyone benefited wherever possible.

Even when the learners spoke Vietnamese, I still had to ensure learners had the necessary socio-cultural understanding to contextualise the vocabulary item or topic area and attribute the correct meaning. For example, when I was demonstrating a picture of a saucepan on an overhead transparency during a preposition lesson, some learners uttered the Vietnamese term for 'water-ladle' (gao). As I spoke Vietnamese, I could detect and correct the mistaken meaning before learners had acquired the incorrect meaning.

Both of us (Ngoc and Patricia) also requested Vietnamese/Khmer and Vietnamese/Mandarin learners to translate into L1 for Cambodian and Chinese learners. This strategy was only used when those learners were desperate for understanding or clarification and other strategies had not been very successful.

Classroom interaction

Bunna
Whenver possible I encouraged the learners to talk to Tricia or Ngoc first, and if additional information was needed I would help. The learners relied on me to explain to them the materials being taught in order to have full understanding; they were really eager to get the correct answers.

I encouraged them to talk about Australia and what they noticed using comparisons with their own culture. Then they were able to see the differences. For example, to help them learn 'telling the time' in English easier and faster, I used a famous Cambodian rhyme which helped them pronounce English better.

Learning Strategies

Ngoc and Patricia
Most content was explained in L1 when the bilingual teacher and/or bilingual assistants were present, particularly at the beginning of the course. This practice continued
throughout the course for the pre-beginner and slower-paced learners, usually at a reduced level as they became more familiar with the classroom environment, procedures and course content. Interestingly, in the final weeks of the course, the faster-paced learners often requested explanations in English-only, indicating that the earlier scaffolding in L1 had helped them become more independent learners.

Once the initial introduction and explanations of a topic area were provided bilingually, we provided constant revision and recycling, predominantly in English with bilingual assistants available for checking and clarification. Computer-assisted language learning and word-processing software was particularly helpful in the recycling process, giving learners enhanced self-esteem in their new language and computer skills, as well as the opportunity to work at their own pace. Checking and clarification of meaning or usage occurred bilingually where possible – sometimes initiated by us, sometimes by the learners themselves.

Bunna

In the Cambodian educational system, learners first learn the alphabet, vowels and consonants, and the phonetics, as these are considered to be the basics in word building later on. In Khmer they are first taught how to build words using the vowels and consonants in pairs, writing them down and then pronouncing them. When these learners started learning English they encountered ready-made words and word chunks, so they needed to notice the difference and why English was taught that way.

So, one of the strategies that I used, in the case of a 59-year-old student, who was nearly non-literate in L1 and very slow in writing letters at the beginning, was to suggest she wrote pairs of letters in which she joined vowels and consonants (for example, ‘ag’) as they do in Cambodia, in order to help her understand the new language from a known teaching methodology.

Content

Ngoc and Patricia

We determined the language, settlement and socio-cultural content from the curriculum requirements (a needs analysis questionnaire – administered bilingually, a bilingual individual learning plan grid), and from learner needs we (teachers and bilingual assistants) identified as the class progressed.

We provided broad topic areas, which included cultural and settlement areas of importance and were often cross-linked. The list of these (below) looks large but we introduced topics gradually at a very simple level, then recycled and revised constantly. We continued to provide bilingual support after the main work of building background knowledge for a new topic area was completed, but at a reduced level, mainly when learners initiated. These topics included:

- **Alphabet and sounds:** We explained the distinction between spelling letters and basic phonics sounds, bilingually initially and later, when necessary, we provided bilingual introductions to short and long vowels, initial, final and medial consonants, consonant clusters/blends, stress, rhythm, syllables, and alphabetical order.

- **Numbers:** cardinals and ordinals, dates, money, time.
• **Days of the week, months of the year, seasons**

• **Personal information for form filling and spoken questions and answers:** Bilingual assistance was invaluable for this as the cultural norms and forms for requesting and providing personal information vary greatly, and can be very complex. The need for repetition, checking and clarification was very high - particularly as the content is both dense and extensive in many personal information areas and varies in written and oral form. For example: ‘Date of arrival’ on a form, and ‘When did you arrive in Australia?’ orally.

• **Body and health**

• **Family:** Bilingual assistance was particularly vital for this topic as family structures and vocabulary are generally more intricate in South-East Asian cultures. Also, for learners from cultures where family units have experienced trauma resulting from national calamities such as war or disaster, family can be a highly sensitive but nevertheless personally important topic area. This can overlap with personal information, for example in describing marital status, number of children, next of kin.

• **Occupations**

• **Daily activities, leisure, action verbs**

• **Food, fruit, vegetables, meat, shopping**

• **Socialising:** greetings, goodbyes, weather, health enquiries, offers and invitations, polite requests, thanks, messages, etc. These functions vary considerably across cultures and so provide important opportunities for including learners’ cultural experiences and prior learning in the lesson, in cooperation with the bilingual assistants.

• **Transport:** map-reading, suburban train system; timetables, buying a ticket, signs; asking for directions.

• **Australia:** orientation, states, capital cities, map, etc.

• **Messages:** genre conventions and formatting vary greatly across cultures, and can be very complex to teach, even with bilingual assistance. We decided not to attempt this the following term when the general educational profile of the class was lower.

In addition to these topics, we also needed to teach learning strategies. These included an introduction to language for using classroom and learner materials such as exercise book, folder, pen, pencil, eraser, sharpener, vocabulary list in the back of a book, and basic orthography skills for learners without literacy skills. Specifics included:

• dictionary usage: locating words in an English dictionary using alphabetical order; using bilingual picture and elementary dictionaries; learners compiling personal dictionaries

• classroom language and instructions

• independent learning resources

• Independent Learning Centre orientation
Teaching in Action 1

- Cabramatta Public Library visit
- homework.

Bunna

I provided explanations in L1 that helped the learners understand how things are done in Australia and what they mean as compared to Cambodian cultural behaviour. For example, in the classroom in Cambodia, as a sign of respect, learners stand up when answering the teacher’s questions which learners discovered is not the case in Australia. Also, Cambodian learners very rarely look people straight in the eyes when addressing them. I encouraged learners to look at the teacher when they spoke to her, which is the cultural norm in Australia.

Language

Ngoc and Patricia

Many learners, not only pre-beginners, needed to be taught handwriting and orthography, including: letter formation (capital and lower case letters); writing from left to right; writing from the top to the bottom of the page; pencil control; naming and writing the alphabet; and correct spacing between words, letters and lines.

We introduced learners to basic punctuation such as full stops, question marks, apostrophes and commas, although they did not necessarily master their use.

We introduced learners to grammatical features, such as: personal pronouns; possessives; present simple verbs, most essentially to be, have, do, can, go and like; plurals, contractions, affirmatives and negatives; interrogatives (‘wh-’ and ‘how’ questions); preferences; articles; indicatives – there is/are; prepositions of time, place and movement; adverbs of frequency; short adjectives; and comparatives.

We didn’t expect pre-beginners to participate in all these activities, but they were in the classroom when these learning activities occurred and often ‘picked up’ simpler elements. The material was often beyond their learning level, and so they didn’t absorb it until much later, if at all. For example, learners had been taught the different English personal pronouns and the instruction had been recycled extensively throughout the term with ongoing bilingual support. It was not until the final week of the course that one pre-beginner with no previous formal education understood personal pronouns. She was not at a stage in her language development to accommodate the concept until this point.

Bunna

**Pronunciation:** Learners found it very hard to pronounce English words. I would repeat the words after the teacher, pronounce the words slowly, and then Ngoc or Tricia would say it again and ask them to follow. Understandably, they always wanted to know the meanings of words and I provided them as soon as I noticed that pictures or visuals were not clear to them. Even though they were anxious to be able to pronounce correctly straight away, acquisition of pronunciation was a slow process. I had to explain that learning another language is a process that does not happen quickly.

**Grammar:** Khmer learners had many difficulties with English grammar because Khmer grammar is quite different. In Khmer there are only three tenses - present,
past and future - and the verb does not change. The only way Khmer speakers can convey the time of an action is by using an additional word, an adverb of time. When Khmer speakers use adjectives to describe someone or something they put the adjective after the noun - the reverse of English. Learners found telling the time in English to be difficult to learn as the form in Khmer is different. Khmer speakers never say ‘ten to ...’ or ‘five past ...’. It’s always ‘8:05’, ‘1:25’ with the words ‘morning’, ‘afternoon’ or ‘evening’ to follow.

**Vocabulary:** Learners were always eager to learn new words and understand them completely. I found most of the words easy to explain, but the word ‘counsellor’ was difficult since it does not exist in Khmer. I could only explain it through the service they provide.

Sample activities

As teachers, we planned activities most likely to require bilingual support for the days the bilingual assistants were available. These activities included: grammar explanation and tasks; new tasks, activities and learning methods where learners needed to understand instructions; new topic or genre areas where learners needed assistance with new vocabulary, staging or contextualisation; and complex tasks such as administering project questionnaires, introductions to learning outcomes, assessment and instructions. I (Patricia) had difficulty teaching these areas as I taught Thursday and Friday when the bilingual assistants were unavailable.

We encouraged learners to keep personal bilingual dictionaries using picture prompts or computer-generated picture and pronunciation prompts which allowed them to use regional L1 dialect terms rather than unfamiliar or dated terms in bilingual dictionaries. It also allowed for variations in L1 literacy. These dictionaries also partially substituted for bilingual dictionaries which were often unreliable or even unavailable in some languages and were especially useful for learners without access to bilingual assistants, such as the Serbian and Sudanese/Arabic learners who had no regular access to bilingual support.

**Teacher evaluation of L1 use**

Teacher perspective

Generally, the benefits of L1 usage in the classroom were visible: improved whole-of-class understanding and more unified progression in learning; clear, immediate feedback between learners and us as teachers; speedy problem identification and resolution, including for those less vocal learners who can be much more difficult to involve actively without bilingual support; and greater certainty that the basic foundations for language acquisition were in place so learning could proceed for the class as a whole.

Bilingual support was essential for administrative and complex matters such as the course orientation, surveys and needs analysis, Individual Learning Plans, and the consent information, interviews and questionnaires for this project.

Teacher perceptions of the learner response to L1 use

All learners who had access to bilingual support in the class appeared to appreciate and benefit from it. The learners’ ability to fully participate appeared to increase.
included their ability to request repetition and explanations, and to extend their level of understanding, for example through comparisons with their own culture. Learners' enjoyment of and engagement in class activities were enhanced, particularly for new or more complex tasks. Learners actively contributed their L1 learning and experience, and made comparisons with Australian cultural practices or the English language. Learners generally became more self-motivated and independent as the term progressed and they could participate more actively in their learning.

In the second half of the term, faster-paced learners needed less on-going bilingual support, while most other learners still required such support - particularly those with less previous education in L1 and those not literate in L1.

In this class, a dispute between two learners from the same language group over perceived ‘competition’ for bilingual support highlighted the impact that personal dynamics can have on the success of bilingual assistance in the classroom. However, this may not be generalisable.

The impact on learners without access to bilingual support was harder to assess. When asked, the Serbian learners indicated that they felt it was not generally necessary and they knew they could access L1 support through the office if needed. In this case, the husband was more able than his wife, and so was able to assist her himself. The Sudanese learner’s withdrawal may have been affected by the lack of bilingual assistance, but it was not stated as the reason.

Issues

**Issue:** It is particularly important to note that in a combined beginner/pre-beginner class such as this, pre-beginners can easily be overwhelmed and left behind.

**Response:** The bilingual assistants could provide more intensive assistance for slower-paced learners, particularly those with minimal or no literacy in L1. This, however, would not adequately compensate for the level of inappropriate material the pre-beginner learners were exposed to daily. Though they may have gained a small benefit by exposure to different material and through the assistance of more advanced peers from their language group, this could not compensate for the bewilderment and confusion they experienced. As teachers, we knew these learners needed intensive assistance to advance at optimum speed for their level and abilities, but we were unable to provide it because of the multi-levels and size of the class. This inequity is likely to remain a problem as long as the current fiscal and staffing restraints continue, especially in areas where numbers of pre-beginners are too small to create a separate class. If bilingual assistants could provide small groups of these learners with specific L1 assistance on a daily basis, their learning would be enhanced; however, current staff/student rations and resource and time constraints make such a strategy impossible.

**Issue:** Dependency on bilingual assistants or peers by some slower learners meant that they tended not to develop problem-solving and language-learning strategies as quickly as others. They did not take the same level of responsibility for their learning as more independent learners did.
**Response:** We could use specific strategies with learners who demonstrated such dependency in order to develop their independence as learners. For example, we could pair them with another peer or a learner from a different language background. Alternatively, a bilingual assistant or a teacher could spend time with them, encouraging the development of independent learning strategies.

**Issue:** There exists a potential dynamic for competition or resentment among learners because of their unequal access to bilingual assistants. In this class, this occurred among members of the same L1 group, as well as across different language groups. Some learners’ perception was that they did not have as much bilingual support as another group because they did not perceive the bilingual teacher as a bilingual assistant.

**Response:** As teachers, we could spend more time with learners without access to bilingual support, while bilingual assistants could assist learners from other language groups where possible once they have completed assistance required for their group. This strategy worked particularly well in this class as the bilingual assistants could assist at a basic level across some language groups because Cambodia and Vietnam have a history of border communities, transmigration and refugee relocations, and so bilingual assistants often have limited proficiency in the other language. Additionally, within Mandarin-speaking families, Mandarin often persists as L1 or L2, in addition to the national language.

In relation to the specific problem that arose between members of the one language group, we (the bilingual assistant and both teachers) spent time with the learners individually in order to resolve the problem as far as possible. However, the resentment continued to appear in one form or another for the rest of the term.

Provision of bilingual materials and tasks in minority languages may also assist but it is quite difficult to obtain or create reliable translations or even any translations without appropriately qualified bilingual staff.

**Issue:** The educational experiences of the bilingual assistant may vary from Australian educational approaches. Bilingual assistants from more traditional, teacher-directed hierarchical learning approaches may assist learners prematurely or too readily when the aim of the activity is to encourage learners to develop independent learning skills.

**Response:** Teachers can informally discuss with the bilingual assistant the purpose of particular learning activities and Australian approaches generally. They can explain the purpose of activities and suggest ways to intervene sensitively only when necessary to correct situations. Essentially, bilingual assistants must have some form of training about Australian educational methods and teaching methodologies. This would also provide some recognition and career-advancement for the invaluable work they do in supporting learners’ learning in many areas beyond the strict limits of their job descriptions (for example, translating bills or letters from government departments).
**Issue:** Sometimes, bilingual assistants were suddenly unavailable, having been called away to some other task in the centre. This had a strong impact on activities that had been planned for delivery with their assistance. The lessons could be too complex for learners to assimilate without assistance. Sometimes not all bilingual assistants were available on the same day, which meant that some learners would understand quickly and others would not.

**Response:** Teachers can simplify the lesson or defer it to another day. This can be difficult if the lesson is a foundation for an extended series of activities planned for a number of days. Teachers can ask peers to help each other in their L1; however, if the task or concept is complex, the peer may not be able to understand it either.

**Issue:** Teachers who don't speak the language of the bilingual assistants cannot guarantee the quality of the bilingual assistance.

**Response:** Centres could introduce formal quality control on employment, such as a translation or interpreting test of some kind. Training and classroom visits by qualified interpreters or teachers who speak the same language could also help to ensure quality.

**Bilingual assistant’s evaluation of L1 use**

I (Bunna) noticed that communication between learners and Ngoc and Tricia improved. Learners made constant attempts to talk directly to the teacher. Their progress was evident, although it was not the same for all learners.

In my opinion, the use of L1 is beneficial in this early stage, especially with older adult learners. I also noticed that the learners who were more literate in L1 acquired English faster, irrespective of age. For example, a 30-year-old Khmer lady, totally non-literate in L1, was making slower progress than an elderly lady who could read and write in Khmer.

The use of L1 has helped this group settle into Australia. They all came to class regularly as they had someone they could trust in a new country. The fact that there was someone who spoke their language in the class made their learning less stressful. Although they communicated to me that it was hard for them to learn English, their attendance was excellent. They missed the class only when they had to visit a doctor or a family member was sick. Even then, one of the ladies came back to the class the same day, after attending to her husband. Mutual respect and trust were established and it was evident their English was improving.

Finally, they were very proud when they could produce sentences or speech segments and the teacher was able to understand them, with me as a bilingual assistant not just an observer.

**Reference**

Chapter 10

Christine's class

Christine Martin and Salwa Boulos – Macquarie Community College

Introduction

This class, held at Macquarie Community College, had two monolingual teachers and two bilingual assistants. Between us, we were able to use the L1 of the majority of the learners in the class. However, several learners did not have access to L1 support. One of the teachers, Christine, and a bilingual assistant, Salwa, report in this chapter. The other teacher, Anna, and her bilingual assistant, Ljubisava, report in Chapter 12.

Teacher

In March 2004, Macquarie Community College invited my colleague and me to participate in a research and development program examining learner responses to explicit teaching using L1 resources and strategies to scaffold instruction. I chose to work with an Arabic speaking bilingual assistant who used L1 to scaffold instruction. Although I am a monolingual teacher, I have a basic knowledge of spoken Arabic, having lived in North Africa for four years. I have always been interested in the use of L1 in the classroom for lower levels as I have experienced first hand the challenge of floundering through unknown language concepts, scripts and sounds.

Arabic speaking bilingual assistant

My name is Salwa Boulos, and I come from Sudan. I can speak, read and write both modern standard and general Arabic fluently. I worked as a bilingual assistant in Christine's class on Tuesday and Thursday mornings.

I was thrilled to learn about this bilingual assistant position and that there were learners from many Arabic-speaking backgrounds. I felt that I could relate very closely to their needs as migrants striving to learn a new language. I was especially excited to note that there were clients from Sudan, my country of origin. I was encouraged to take this opportunity to help them overcome the language and culture shock they were experiencing, which were quite evident.

Moreover, teaching in general is one of my greatest passions and over the years I have acquired insight and experience in helping learners achieve their goals.

About Macquarie Community College

Macquarie Community College, a non-profit organisation, is one of the oldest and largest community colleges in New South Wales. It has been providing adult education since the 1930s under a variety of different names.

In 1998 the college, as part of a consortium, won a federal government tender to deliver the Adult Migrant English Program in Western Sydney. Macquarie in Blacktown specialises in delivering English to new arrivals and in the provision of other courses, such as Australian Citizenship, English through Computers and Pre-vocational English.
Approximately 1300 learners are enrolled per year including the community classes. The college provides morning, afternoon and evening classes and also Saturday morning classes. Counselling, childcare services, referral to support agencies such as Blacktown Migrant Resource Centre, and services for torture-trauma survivors are also offered in conjunction with language program delivery. Learner levels range from pre-literate to upper intermediate classes with learners coming from most of the cultural groups in the Blacktown area.

Blacktown itself is the largest local government area in New South Wales. Originally it was a very large Aboriginal settlement incorporating people from the Dharug tribe. These people were issued two land grants in the 1820s with a Native Institute known as ‘Black Town’ to assimilate Dharug people into European lifestyle. This was abandoned in 1833 and by 1862 it was officially known as Blacktown and in 1979 it became a city.

Today Blacktown is an extremely diverse multi-cultural suburb with a population of approximately 250,000, including people from Oceania, north-western Europe, southern and eastern Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, South-East Asia, North-East Asia, Southern and Central Asia, peoples of the Americas and Sub-Saharan Africa.

The research context

Project focus

The focus of this research was to investigate the use of L1 in:

- helping with classroom language teaching and learning
- acquiring increased understanding of vocabulary, grammar and culture.

Salwa and I worked with two different groups over a period of six months; however, the data for this project is based on the second group, with whom we worked from July to October 2004.

Class profile

This was a beginner class of twenty-eight learners, six of whom came from the pre-beginner class the term before. Over half the learners were Arabic speakers or used Arabic as their L2. This was a big vibrant class who attended regularly. The class met Monday to Friday from 9–1. I taught the class for three days and my colleague (see Chapter 12) the other two days.

Learner profile

As mentioned previously, the majority of the learners were Arabic speakers or used Arabic as their L2. The group of learners who used Arabic as their L1 included a Lebanese man, a Kuwaiti man, an Egyptian woman and an Iraqi woman. This was a mixed age group, but all had 10–12 years of formal education. The learners who used Arabic as an L2 came from Southern Sudan. Many of these learners identified themselves in their tribal groupings as well as being Sudanese. Among the tribal groups were seven Dinka speakers—five women and two men. This group had quite good oracy but very low literacy as they’d had few years of formal schooling. They were of mixed ages, ranging from early 20s to late 40s. The remaining tribal groups were Nuba and Fur.
learners consisted of an older woman who was a teacher, and a man in his mid 30s who had 11 years schooling. The two Fur learners included an older man with no formal schooling and a woman in her early 30s with pre-beginner background.

The remaining class members were a young Turkish girl, three Chinese women, one of whom was in her late 60s, three Afghani learners – two men and a young woman, three Iranian women – two of whom were in their mid 40s and one in her late teens. The final three learners were a young Indian woman, a Macedonian woman in her mid 20s and a young Vietnamese woman. These learners all had 10-12 years formal schooling in their home countries. This class did not stay this size for the whole term as some finished their AMEP entitlement of 510 hours, some withdrew because of settlement issues and others for health or personal reasons. Many of the learners in the centre are in Australia because of humanitarian or other related reasons.

Course goals

As this was a true beginner class, the goals were basic. Settlement issues were important so the themes introduced were personal information and health. The program is competency-based with learning outcomes. The class was working towards achieving the following outcomes:

- Can demonstrate capacity for learning in a formal context.
- Can respond to spoken instructions in the context of learning.
- Can locate information in an alphabetical index.
- Can provide personal information using spoken language.
- Can complete a short application form.

L1 support in the classroom

The bilingual assistant working with the class was Salwa Boulos. As she is originally from Sudan, this was an added bonus. She was introduced to the class as an assistant for all learners but her language was Arabic. She was in the classroom with me from 9–1 on two of my three days. There was no regular time set aside during the lesson for specific bilingual input, but when language or concepts proved difficult, then bilingual assistance was available on an ongoing basis. However, not all learners were able to access this bilingual assistance because not all spoke Arabic, therefore many learners used L1 dictionaries or asked Salwa or myself for extra help in English.

Other Information about the class

During the term the class visited the local Migrant Resource Centre to assist learners in accessing answers to the many questions they had regarding settlement issues. The Resource Centre has bilingual workers and literature in most of the learners’ L1, which was extremely helpful. Towards the end of the term, the police also visited so that learners could become familiar with the role of the police in the local community. Learners showed great interest in the assistance the police offer as this was an unfamiliar concept to some, many of whom had come from countries where citizens mistrust the police.
Management of L1 use in the classroom

Classroom Interaction

Christine
The first major hurdle facing us was to acquaint our learners with the program, and this proved to be a challenge. Those who had come from the pre-beginners class at the college already understood, but some were suspicious of what we were doing, of our record keeping and of where the information was going. Most of the learners needed repeated information from Salwa to explain about the course, its modules and so on. L1 was used with those who understood Arabic, and Salwa also assisted in simple English those who needed it but didn't understand Arabic. I showed overhead transparencies and drew pictures on the board to assist understanding as this class was strongly visual and had reasonable oracy.

I relied heavily on L1 instruction when explaining the rather complicated absenteeism system, but it gave the learners more confidence and ownership of their learning once they knew this was a mutually beneficial experience.

Salwa
Some of the fast learners were always confident to help their peers understand difficult issues in learning English by using their L1. This learner-to-learner interaction took place particularly when I was busy with learners who needed extra help and attention.

The area learners had the greatest difficulty with was grammar. This is because English sentence structure and grammatical rules are very different from Arabic. The learners constantly inquired about new grammatical concepts. My role was, therefore, to simplify these concepts and to clarify the differences or similarities between the two languages.

Learning Strategies

Salwa
To improve learners' learning and comprehension, I constantly repeated any difficult concept or information given by the teacher, in 'general' Arabic, to ensure that all the unfamiliar terms were fully understood. I provided sufficient help to all learners according to their various needs, including simple English help for those who did not understand Arabic.

I also noticed that the more advanced learners compiled their own personal glossary (in L1), writing the meaning and transliteration of the vocabulary that had been taught. They often used bilingual dictionaries, which gave several meanings and so it was essential that I showed them the intended one.

Content

Christine
Once the travel forms and other documents were completed, I began introducing personal information. Learners found filling in forms and following instructions to be very challenging and so I relied heavily on Salwa's assistance. She assisted not only Arabic speakers but all learners. Date of birth is an issue for some Sudanese as record-keeping in their own environments was often not reliable. It is common practice to go
to Khartoum where a doctor will judge age from height and teeth. Having L1 assistance removed the feeling of nervousness around form-filling and made this and instruction language more accessible. Many matching activities were used with forms, using a word in block letters, and matching its meaning.

Salwa

Occasionally, during teatime or before classes, the learners would share in Arabic some of the problems that they were facing regarding different issues. One of the main issues discussed by some learners was child discipline. They were all concerned and worried about the differences in child rearing methods between the two cultures. I was always attentive to their needs and felt it necessary to inform the teacher of this issue. The teacher in turn regarded this as an important learning concept and allowed for further discussion and for learners to express personal opinions in class.

Other concerns of the learners were their ability to understand and respond to Centrelink notices/letters, find employment and other personal matters. With this, I helped them to the best of my abilities by explaining any written information and directing them to places where they could get support, such as the Migrant Resource Centre.

Language

Christine

The topic of the term was ‘health’ – for the body and the mind.

By the end of the first week I was using L1 to translate not only instructions and assist in form filling but also in the introduction of English sounds and consonant blends. For example, in Arabic there is no ‘p’ sound and often learners say the ‘b’ instead. For many, spelling strategies were a new concept and some told Salwa they had never studied the pronunciation of the English words in context, neither did they know the difference between vowels and consonants. The learners needed much assistance in this area and asked Salwa to write down word meanings in Arabic so they could follow up my explanation. They were then able to complete the exercise with ease and feel confident about what they had achieved. I took the lesson from A time to learn (Faine, Smith and Tinney 1993–4) from the chapter ‘Study Skills’ and adapted the information to suit the class.

Personal information was woven into most of what was done throughout the term. Many of the learners were confused about questions asked on a form and questions they could ask Australian people. Salwa and I worked on what was culturally appropriate to ask and, by using L1, we were able to discuss what ‘Aussies’ talk about and what are ‘safe’ or ‘unsafe’ topics. Such cultural discussion is important to enhance learners’ sense of belonging in the new culture and to combat the feelings of isolation and ‘strangeness’ often experienced in learners’ lives. When using personal information we also introduced job names and the verb to be. This grammatical concept proved to be a real stumbling block for many of our learners, as there is no equivalent of this in Arabic, and many learners make the mistake of attaching the verb to be to the beginning of a verb instead of seeing it as a verb in its own right – for example, ‘I am come Australia 2004’.

Once again the most helpful approach was to have Salwa translate and also to use picture and word-matching activities. Job names were confusing not so much in the pronunciation but in the understanding of gender. For example, ‘teacher’ in English...
can be male or female. ‘Teacher’ in Arabic is ‘mudarris’ for men and ‘mudarrisa’ for women. Once again Salwa and I used pictures with words and L1 assistance.

Salwa

I used all types of language explanations in Arabic, wherever appropriate, to facilitate the learning process. For instance, some learners asked about the meaning of words in Arabic and wrote them down, together with the transliteration of the English words. This seemed to be very helpful to those learners.

I also assisted other learners to use the bilingual dictionaries so that they did not spend a long time searching for terms while the lesson was in progress and I encouraged them to be independent learners.

Sample activities

In introducing the topic ‘health’ I found it best to brainstorm words familiar to all on the whiteboard. In working with unfamiliar vocabulary or cultural concepts, L1 was invaluable, but also learner help was enlisted, with faster-paced learners helping their classmates. Introducing activities which were hands-on and visual was very rewarding (for example, board games for personal information, and crosswords). As well as using L1 assistance, gap-fill and pictures were helpful in scaffolding the lessons in health. Many activities, such as reading medicine labels, were challenges as new words were introduced. Salwa spent much time assisting in clarification and also helping learners to make their own lists in Arabic to match the new words. Family relationships and words are also very cultural and so in working with learners, teachers need to realise that English will have some words for which there are no equivalents in Arabic, such as ‘mother-in-law’.

As the term progressed, the learners overall became more confident, hence the use of more peer work and cross-linguistic interaction. For example, one of the Chinese girls willingly assisted one of the young Dinka men with his writing, and he began to show trust in someone outside of the immediate group with whom he normally related. This was an important step for him to make as he had experienced major deprivation and was traumatised and therefore would relate to no one in the classroom except Salwa and me. About half-way through the term, we began to observe subtle changes in his overall behaviour. He would smile, begin to take part in class activities, and not interrupt the class to ask Salwa or me about his personal situation.

Teacher evaluation of L1 use

Teacher perspective

This is the first time I have used L1 in the classroom with a beginner group and I found it an invaluable experience for many reasons.

The classroom needs to be a welcoming community in which members are respected and feel safe in a learning environment. Learners who come with little or no formal education often have a high degree of fear and embarrassment, which is often heightened by experiences of torture and trauma from their previous histories. Making the classroom a place of peace and understanding is vital in the early stages of L2 acquisition, and, to me, the use of L1 is an important factor in establishing this, as well as a confidence in learning. As expected, use of L1 helped learners gain quicker and deeper
understanding of the curriculum and learning strategies. Teachers cannot assume that learners know what is required, and therefore ownership of this process is important.

The foreign concepts in grammar and sentence structure were initially more accessible to learners through the use of scaffolding in L1; that is, we provided high levels of support at the beginning of the term and then, after some time, gradually removed the level of assistance. Salwa was required about 90 per cent of the time at the beginning of the term, which decreased slowly until by the end she was needed mainly for assisting only a few of the slower-paced learners.

Teacher perception of the learner response to L1 use

The learners’ response to L1 was extremely positive, and for some there was obvious relief. At the beginning of the term I introduced Salwa as an aide for the whole class, but that her language was Arabic. This helped the other learners feel less excluded from the overall language acquisition process. I realised that assuming all Sudanese speak Arabic was a misconception, so in the first two days Salwa and I did introductions with name, country, and/or tribe if the learners so preferred. Many did, and identified for me many tribal groupings. Assuming learners know Arabic can cause stress as many would have a working knowledge of general Arabic but would not know the vocabulary and concepts of modern standard Arabic, which is often used in translation.

By using L1 on a regular basis at the beginning of the term, I saw changes in the class. For example, learners think that the teacher is not doing his/her job if self-directed study is encouraged. By working with Salwa on the learning expectations here in Australia, I saw a gradual change in attitude from this to an appreciation of individual progress and the adoption of some self-directed study practices; for example: organisation of materials, asking for extra grammar and alphabet work and completion of homework.

Issues

In the anthropological sense, our learners are informants with a wealth of cultural and linguistic knowledge which is rarely articulated in the language classroom.


The above quote sums up for me why I found the use of L1 so necessary this term. Learners cannot learn in linguistic isolation. It is not enough for teachers to deliver an English lesson, as issues of cultural differences are woven through the behaviours, beliefs and learning styles of the people we work with. An understanding of learners’ backgrounds and experiences are, I believe, necessary for helping learners achieve their potential. Teachers are often the interface between the new and previous cultures. Teachers face a continuing challenge, trying to find a balance between introducing the new culture while validating the previous one. The use of L1 in these early days can encourage the learners to inquire about their new culture as well as express how they feel as this new way of doing things threatens or confuses them. How language helps them relate to their new culture, and how their own can be expressed in the learning environment are issues to consider.

Issue: One morning, I entered the classroom to find all learners, mostly Arabic speakers, very animated and emotional over a subject I could not quite pick up on. Salwa explained they were very concerned about their older children and feared the impact a more liberal environment
was having on them. They were discussing whether or not to send the children back to Sudan, when they became of marriageable age.

**Response:** Realising that this was an important issue for the class as a whole, I engaged Salwa's assistance in questioning not only Arabic speakers but all learners. Through the use of pictures and L1 translation we were able to have meaningful interaction about the differences between their cultural expectations and that of Australians.

**Issue:** Another issue was the problem of discipline, as physical punishment of children in Australia is forbidden.

**Response:** Once again, enlisting Salwa's assistance proved invaluable in explaining cultural differences. We kept the discussion going and it led on to discussion of the impediments to learning. Through very basic pictures and language I asked learners to tell me which things hindered their learning process. They responded with:

1. **Language**
2. **Culture**
3. **Pressure of work.**

Explaining cultural differences was not just for Arabic learners, but all class members. Many learners' perceptions of government, laws and so on are based on their own cultural experiences. If these experiences have been negative, which they often are especially for refugee and humanitarian immigrants, class members can have a deep sense of mistrust of government and worry about providing information to government. Airing how they felt and getting some of these issues discussed gave a sense of openness. I was able to explain through Salwa reasons for Australian customs and to demystify the threat of the unknown. It is important to humanise teaching and make English accessible in a non-threatening manner. I believe L1 in the classroom can be a part of teachers' 'human' face. Teachers do not merely impart knowledge or have a tick in a box as a goal. Teachers' true joy comes when they see the light in a learner's eyes as he or she grasps the meaning or concept hitherto unknown, or when a heightened sense of fear begins to abate.

More important than this, is the development of an ongoing ability to adapt to the new culture and the demands it places on our learners. As can be observed from other disciplines, the way a person begins can often be a significant determining factor in the quality of life for the future. For these new Australians, it is to be hoped that their language learning process will be part of their ability to adapt more quickly to the new society and to be effective citizens in their new culture.

**Bilingual assistant's evaluation of L1 use**

Being a part of this program was a very rewarding and enjoyable experience. My assistance seemed to be more effective as I was able to relate to the learners in regards to my previous language learning experience and because of our cultural similarity. The knowledge of the cultural differences, educational background as well as the ability to speak the Arabic language were all key elements that were essential for me to provide high quality support and assistance to the learners.
Also, their increased confidence whenever I explained to them some topics in Arabic was such a gratifying experience for me that it made working with them all the more enjoyable. I therefore strongly recommend the use of L1 by bilingual assistants to improve and enhance the learning process of the learners. This idea can be successfully applied to other languages to help non-Arabic-speaking learners.

Perception of the learners’ response to L1 use

Throughout the whole program, I felt an overall positive reaction from the learners. I was able to see that they were gradually becoming more confident and comfortable in approaching the teacher and me. They were also entrusting me with personal issues that required assistance, such as completing forms and writing notices to be granted permission for specific reasons. I also felt that the incorporation of this program has greatly improved the social skills and relationships between the learners, and their active participation in class – not only individually but also amongst each other.

The learners themselves commented on how effective the use of Arabic was to their overall learning experience. They said that without the use of Arabic during class, they would have found it difficult to learn complex topics, particularly in terms of grammar and sentence structure.

References


Chapter 11
Sooi Lin's class

Sooi Lin Tye and Michelle Phuong Tran – acl Cabramatta

Introduction
This class, held at acl Cabramatta, had two bilingual teachers and a bilingual assistant fluent in two learner languages. Between them, they were able to use the L1 of the majority of the learners in the class. Several learners, however, did not have access to L1 support.

Teacher: Sooi Lin Tye
I am a teacher in the Adult Migrant English Program and have been teaching pre-beginner and beginner level classes for some years. I am trilingual in English, Cantonese and Malay. I first came to Australia as an overseas student from Malaysia and later became interested in teaching English as a second language as I believed my cultural background and my status as a migrant would enable me to empathise and identify with many of the learners and to contribute positively to their learning. I was interested in the L1 project because I hoped the findings would confirm my belief that the use of L1 is necessary in the early stages of the learners’ acquisition of the second language. Such support is especially relevant for older, slower paced and less literate learners.

Vietnamese/Khmer/Chinese bilingual assistant: Michelle Phoung Tran
My name is Michelle Phoung Tran and I have been a bilingual assistant at acl Cabramatta for over two years. During this period I have helped several teachers in the evening program. I have interpreted in Vietnamese, Khmer and Chinese at various information sessions such as orientation to the AMEP, health talks, induction to counselling services, and police talks which were organised for learners so that they could get the right information on these issues. Generally, I spend most of my time in the classroom helping teachers by explaining to the learners at the pre-beginner’s level. I use L1 for different levels of complexity and the lesson is usually preceded by consultation with the teacher. Depending on the level and educational background of learners, L1 use may cover:

- aims of the lessons/activities/learning options
- instructions for various activities
- vocabulary (meanings of words)
- grammar explanations
- how to use dictionaries
- how to use prior learning in learning English
- how to feel at ease when learning English.
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About the Cabramatta centre

This centre is in Cabramatta, a predominantly Vietnamese suburb. The centre is relatively big, with the majority of the cultural groups being of Asian origin – Vietnamese, Cambodian, Chinese, Lao and Thai. Other ethnic groups include Serbians, Russians, and Middle-Eastern and Arabic speakers. The centre operates in three sessions – full-time day classes and part-time afternoon and evening classes. The evening classes cater mainly to learners who work during the day. The range of learners attending the centre is diverse in terms of educational background, learning styles, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, age, gender, religion, and personality factors. Some are also torture and trauma survivors. Generally, the majority of the learners in the centre are beginners.

The research context

Project focus

The focus of this research was to:

- investigate the importance of L1 use in the English classroom
- determine the significance of the role of the bilingual assistant to the class and the centre.

Class profile

The class was a slow-paced beginners class of 17 learners – 12 females and 5 males. The cultural groups were: ten Vietnamese, four Cambodians, two Serbians and one Thai learner, with the majority in their 40s. They had varying years of schooling.

- Three Cambodian and one Vietnamese learner had fewer than five years of education and so had minimal literacy in their L1. For the Cambodian learners this was their third beginners class. At this stage they could only read a little of the alphabet, numbers and basic words. One had handwriting that was difficult to read because her words were all strung together. The Vietnamese learner with minimal previous schooling experienced difficulty with literacy and also pronunciation.
- The two Serbian learners had 12 years of education and so were fast learners, having previously developed good learning skills.
- Six Vietnamese, two Cambodians and one Thai had between five and ten years of schooling. The Thai learner, who was middle-aged, had good oracy skills, mainly because of her exposure to English at work, but had a problem with writing in cursive.

The class met part time in the evening for three hours, Monday to Wednesday. Many of the learners worked in the day so they usually came to class late and tired but still keen to learn. The main purpose for their wanting to learn English was to be able to function in the community, to be able to socialise and to access community services. Their goal was to be able to understand and speak some English. The majority of the learners had been in the country for a year or more, while the rest were new arrivals. The former had already done an English course in the previous term or earlier. The class on the whole was lively, enthusiastic and friendly.
Course goals
As a beginner level class, the goals included learning strategies, settlement issues and basic English competencies. As learners had minimum and varied learning backgrounds and skills, I focused on learning strategies such as:

- learning to learn in a formal context
- learning how to respond to spoken instructions in the context of learning
- learning how to locate information in alphabetical order.

The language focus was on basic communication.
Settlement issues were important for these new migrant learners and so topics such as the following were included in the lessons:

- personal information
- health
- jobs
- housing
- writing short notes
- socialising.

An Individual Learning Plan was carried out for all learners in order to assist them in their learning or career path.

L1 support in the classroom
As teacher (Sooi Lin), I am trilingual in English, Cantonese and Malay, but since there were no Chinese or Malay learners in the class there was no necessity for me to use my bilingual skills.

I (Michelle) am fluent in Khmer and Vietnamese and so provided bilingual support for the Vietnamese and Cambodian learners. I worked twice a week, on Monday and Wednesday, from 6–9 pm. Bilingual support was not provided for the Serbian and Thai learners because the numbers were not big enough to warrant the employment of Serbian and Thai bilingual assistants. Moreover, it was hard to get such bilingual assistants. I (Sooi Lin) usually did not give worksheets in L1 because Michelle was not permanently on site to work on the translation and it was not feasible to find other resource people to do the translation for the Serbian and Thai learners. I therefore usually referred all learners to the bilingual picture dictionaries (available in all languages except Serbian), especially for vocabulary items.

Other information about the class
The centre invited speakers from the Migrant Resource Centre, Mission Australia and the health community to give talks to learners. For such sessions the bilingual assistant’s expertise was required to translate for the speakers. For such talks other bilinguals (either from the community or from the centre’s staff) who could speak the languages of the major cultural groups such as Vietnamese, Chinese, Cambodian, Serbian, Spanish and Arabic acted as interpreters for the speakers. For groups with fewer learners,
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the talks were conducted in English and all learners - beginner, post beginner and intermediate learners - sat in their cultural/linguistic groups so that the more advanced learners were able to interpret for the beginners. The Thai learner in my class managed to get the gist of the talks with the help of her Thai peers. I, as teacher, usually coordinated lessons with topics from these settlement issues and so she had other opportunities to understand and learn about this information.

During the term, both teacher and bilingual assistant accompanied the class on their visit to the library. Michelle was able to help Sooi Lin in interpreting the necessary information to the Vietnamese and Cambodian learners and to answer their queries about some of the library rules and regulations. The Serbian and Thai learners were able to have their queries answered by the Serbian- and Lao- speaking library staff. (The latter could also speak Thai.)

Management of L1 use in the classroom

Classroom interaction

I observed that the good relationship between learners, bilingual assistant and teacher was instrumental in encouraging learning. Generally learners were very caring and helpful with their classmates. The learners who had learned English before, and the faster-paced learners, helped their friends from the same language group in carrying out the teacher’s instructions after receiving the explanation in L1 from the bilingual assistant, and they worked in pairs or groups for activities such as mix and match, sequencing, board games and class survey. The Serbian learners, who were much more advanced, also helped slower friends in their group. The more advanced Cambodian learner, who sat next to the Thai learner, helped the Thai learner when he saw her struggling. Both the teacher and the bilingual assistant encouraged this team spirit, which was important for enhancing learning.

At the beginning of the course, the bilingual assistant helped to convey to the learners the centre's and the teacher’s expectations and to find out from the learners their needs and interests. This was also carried out at different stages of the course so that the topics and classroom activities could to a great extent be tailored according to the learners’ needs. At the beginning, the learners did not know what they wanted to learn and felt that the teacher was the authority and should be the one to determine their course of study but later, as they became more comfortable, they were able to express their interests to the teacher through the bilingual assistant. The bilingual assistant also helped the newcomers to the class by going through previous work with them so that they could catch up with the class.

In class, the bilingual assistant’s expertise was needed to convey information about various centre events such as: orientation sessions, school holidays, class excursions, evening tea, pizza night and graduation. Last term, in spite of writing on the board the date they were to return to class, the Thai learner came back a week later because she presumed that the centre's holiday was the same as the K-12 school holidays.

A very important role the bilingual assistant performed was to telephone the Vietnamese and Khmer learners, who had been absent for two days at a stretch, and find out the reason for their absence. Most learners appreciated these calls as they felt recognised and well looked after. This was quite an effective strategy for retention of learners. Those who needed counselling were referred to the centre's counsellor if they wanted.
For effective learning to take place the learners needed to change their perception and recognise that making mistakes was all right and that learning was fun. I asked Michelle to explain that clearly to the target groups. I also took the initiative to learn a smattering of Khmer, Thai, Vietnamese and Serbian in order to have some cultural identification with the learners and also to put myself in their shoes as a learner of another language. Some laughs and fun were generated as the learners took pride in correcting my pronunciation.

When Michelle was not present, I usually planned lessons that needed little bilingual support, such as pronunciation and vocabulary of simple items like fruit and vegetables, clothing and transport which could be done with the assistance of bilingual picture dictionaries (available in Vietnamese, Chinese, Khmer and Thai but not in Serbian) and The literacy workbook for beginners (only available in Chinese [Christie 1999] and Vietnamese [Christie 2004]). According to Michelle, the glossaries at the back of the dictionaries and in the literacy workbook gave quite accurate translations of the context. The Serbian learners were given monolingual dictionaries and the visual were enough to convey the meaning of the vocabulary. However, the use of bilingual dictionaries was not really encouraged because, according to Michelle, some of the meanings given were not totally accurate and the pronunciation of the speaker in the electronic dictionaries was not very suitable.

Learning strategies
Sooi Lin

The new learning styles, strategies and teaching methodology had to be explained explicitly to the learners since these were very different from the ways they learned in their respective countries. Even the fact that there were no textbooks and all work was done on worksheets was a new learning concept for the majority of learners. Michelle helped to explain to the learners in their L1 how to ‘learn as learners’ so that they could fully participate and respond to the tasks I set. It was initially quite difficult to convince the learners that such things as having the seating arranged in clusters and moving around the class doing surveys were learning strategies. Some of the male learners were initially quite resistant to this new learning style but they eventually participated as they saw the others doing it, and they seemed to enjoy it. In order to encourage more interaction amongst the learners, I always mixed the learners from different cultural groups.

When the learners were participating in group activities, like mix-and-match, communicative board games and gap-filling, the bilingual assistant would assist by helping some groups. This strategy generated quite a lot of speaking amongst the learners. Very often, while the rest of the class would work on the task I assigned, Michelle would give additional attention to the slower, more mature and low literacy Khmer learners. Feedback from these learners concerning this extra attention was that it was of enormous importance to them since it helped them ask questions, clarify their doubts and build their confidence about their ability to learn.

Surprisingly, role-play, though a culturally unfamiliar activity, was very successful once Michelle capably explained in L1 that acting and role-playing was a learning strategy, and then assisted learners. I usually asked Michelle to model role-playing with me and then to team-teach. Some of the learners were initially shy and reticent but as they watched how other learners were participating and seemed to enjoy the activity,
they started joining in. One Cantonese-speaking learner from Vietnam commented to me in Cantonese that learning how to buy fast food was such a practical, helpful and relevant activity. There was much active participation, enthusiasm and enjoyment across language groups with question asking, clarification of certain points and checking of pronunciation with Michelle and me. Music, the universal language, was quite a welcome strategy and songs were often used to reinforce grammar, rhythm, stress and intonation.

Michelle

I mostly used my language skills to clarify and check learners’ comprehension, especially for elderly learners and those with minimal literacy.

One of the strategies that worked very well was the use of pair and group work.

To encourage the learners to use and practise English more, Sooi Lin would mix pairs and groups so they had two different language backgrounds. My task was to listen and check on their understanding if they used wrong words or phrases. Sooi Lin used this strategy to make sure L2 was acquired correctly as much as possible.

Content

Sooi Lin

In teaching Australian culture and assisting learners’ adaptation to the Australian lifestyle, a big part of the lesson was focused on socialising and social etiquette – how to apologise when you are late for class or work, how to accept an offer or invitation, and how to decline an offer or invitation politely. It was good feedback for me that they had learned these functions when some said, ‘I’m sorry I’m late’ when they were late for class. Other lessons included what they should and should not do in the Australian cultural context. What was culturally acceptable in their countries was not considered acceptable here – such as littering, spitting in the streets, and jumping queues.

Some of the learners had already completed the citizenship course, while the new ones had not completed enough hours to be able to enrol in it. For the learners to understand the concept of government and other complex vocabulary, they had to complete at least 300 hours of their 510 hours. In some cases, where learners from the pre-beginner and beginner level classes wanted to do the Citizenship course, and bilingual teachers were available, the course was provided bilingually in Vietnamese or Chinese. Two learners wanted to do the Citizenship course and so were taken out of their English class two weeks before the end of term so they could begin the course. I taught some topics on Australiana to familiarise the learners with life in Australia.

Michelle

My L1 explanations helped learners to understand how Australians do things here as compared to the people from an Asian background who are very shy in communication with authorities and teachers. To help them understand the culture and language itself, I always urged them to tell Sooi Lin or me what they did not understand. I told them not to be scared as both of us were there to help them. Some of them were concerned that they had to forget their own expressions in their first language because they were learning English. After a lot of discussion, they were finally convinced that they were learning new skills in the new language, but that this would not erase their language or personality.
To help them settle better in their new country, they learned about basic life in Australia. The topics Sooi Lin chose were ones that would facilitate them in their future life in Australia, such as basic survival English to manage life outside the school environment. They learned such things as: how to catch a train, do the shopping, see a doctor, make various appointments and go to the bank.

Language

Sooi Lin

The part of language teaching that I found to be difficult was the teaching of grammar to learners with minimal English. So, to have a bilingual assistant who could give a detailed explanation to the Vietnamese and Cambodian learners in their L1 was a huge asset. To understand new grammatical concepts, such as pronouns and the verb to be, singular/plural nouns and how in English the adjective had to go before the noun, was rather new and confusing for the learners. Michelle constantly reminded the learners not to compare the English sentence structure to their own. To reinforce such understanding meant constant revision and continual exposure of learners to its use. The Asian learners found kinship and sibling relationships rather simplified in English because in their cultures, seniority in relationships is indicated by the title used to address the person. Therefore, just using ‘you’ to address someone seemed rude or inappropriate.

The learners enjoyed learning new vocabulary and I created some simplified bilingual worksheets where the learners translated the meaning of the new words into their L1, or I made reference to the new vocabulary in the bilingual picture dictionaries. However, new vocabulary such as ‘marital status’ needed fuller explanation by the bilingual assistant as its definition includes married, single, separated, divorced and widowed. That separation of at least a year is needed in Australia before being considered for a divorce also needed fuller explanation (see Figure 13).

![Bilingual worksheets for learning new vocabulary](image)

The activity which I felt did not work so successfully was in the area of pronunciation because I did not feel very confident teaching it. The learners were quite good at identifying syllables, intonation and stress, but when it came to pronouncing the sounds they found it frustrating and difficult. The Vietnamese learners found difficulty in pronouncing words with ‘f’, ‘th’ and ‘s’.
Pronunciation: Because most Vietnamese and Khmer learners could not pronounce all the English sounds well, I tried to help them by emphasising that repetition and practice in English were crucial in mastering the English language.

Grammar: When explaining the grammar points, I asked them not to compare the English sentence structure to their own language. In some cases I would interpret the English grammar rules and give them some tips on how to remember by using examples from my own learning of English. For example, usually learners were eager to understand the meaning word by word and I could satisfy this eagerness promptly enough. But learning each word in isolation proved to be too hard and confusing for them because the dictionaries would sometimes give a different meaning. So I suggested they should memorise what that sentence meant overall, in context, and use it that way. Using language chunks in context rather than memorising words on their own proved to be a better way of learning with some, but not all of the learners.

Vocabulary: Learners were always eager to learn new words and understand them completely. I would translate vocabulary into their own language and give the meanings in particular contexts. I suggested they use every spare moment to copy new words and expressions as many times as possible. Most of the words were easy to explain, but the word ‘counsellor’ was difficult since it exists neither in Vietnamese nor in Khmer. I could only explain it through the service counsellors provide.

Sample activities

The only L1 bilingual materials used in class were the worksheets on the explanation of marital status (Figure 13). As mentioned earlier, it was too difficult to produce many bilingual worksheets because of the lack of bilingual support staff to provide the translations.

Other use of L1

In class, the learners were aware that they should try to communicate in English, and when they used their home language amongst themselves, their peers often asked them to use English. L1 was also used during break time, the visit to the library and social excursions where there was a lot of conversation between the learners and the bilingual assistant.

Teacher evaluation of L1 use

Teacher perspective

I was very positive about the use of L1 as it helped me overcome a lot of frustration and saved learners’ time. It definitely paved the way for English learning by reducing a lot of their anxiety and slowly building up their confidence in their ability to learn the second language. L1 support was most beneficial with low-level, slower-paced and more mature-aged learners. As mentioned above, we used it profitably for task orientation, to convey information, answer learners’ questions, clarify doubts and introduce certain concepts, and to allow discussion on certain issues.
For many learners, using the computer was a totally new concept. So, having to combine computer skills with learning English was a daunting task for them. This could not have been done without Michelle’s help. Her explicit instructions in L1 for programs like The interactive picture dictionary (Protea Textware 1999) and That’s life! (Hajncl and Livingstone 2002) was crucial. It was so encouraging to see many of the learners access these programs by themselves and begin to explore other topics in these programs and do activities by themselves. In doing this, the learners, especially the younger ones, were acting independently and determining their own pace of learning and interests.

Teacher perception of the learner response to L1 use

When they realised that they had a bilingual assistant to assist them in their learning, the Vietnamese and Cambodians were very relieved, excited and happy. They felt very comfortable with Michelle’s presence in the classroom and did not feel so anxious. As so aptly expressed by one of my colleagues, you can draw an analogy between a bilingual assistant and a bridge. So the bilingual assistant use of L1 helped learners cross over from L1 to L2.

Many of the learners, especially the older ones, wanted the bilingual assistant to be in the classroom three times a week instead of just two. When I asked them if they understood her and what was being taught, they said that to some extent they did but they still preferred Michelle to be there in order to answer their questions and to clarify certain concepts. I perceived that the learners felt more secure and less threatened in a familiar language environment. The younger learners, however, wanted only a little of L1 to be used in the classroom. They felt that too much use of L1 would make them too dependent on it and hence prevent their progress in learning English.

Issues

**Issue:** There was no bilingual support for the Serbian and Thai learners and these learners, especially the Thai learner, felt disadvantaged and were struggling.

**Response:** Fortunately, the Serbian learners were able to manage well on their own with help from each other. Moreover, they had twelve years of education, and the Serbian language, being a European language, does not differ as much from English as the Asian languages do. The Thai learner’s support was her bilingual dictionary and the help of her Thai friend from a higher level class who helped her during the break time. I felt she would have made faster progress if she had had the help of a Thai bilingual assistant or peer in class.

**Issue:** Ideally, the bilingual assistant should be permanently on site so that their expertise can be called upon at all times to interpret, to recommend some reliable bilingual resources to the teachers and to contact absent learners. Whenever the centre organised talks about settlement issues or other centre-based events, the bilingual assistant’s expertise was called upon. Her first priority was to the needs of the centre and not the class and so she would not always be available when needed in class.
Response: The number of hours for having a bilingual assistant on site has increased but the problem is with bilingual assistants who cannot be at the centre for a long time because of their other work commitments. Instead of calling more on the bilingual assistants to interpret for the centre, the centre is now using other resource people who are bilingual - such as coordinators, administrative staff and the work experience personnel.

Issue: When the learners who had very little or no education in L1 joined the class late, especially when it was already half way through the course, they were obviously overwhelmed with the whole learning process. They soon withdrew from the course in spite of having a bilingual assistant to help them. From observation, I feel it could also be because the learners did not feel comfortable working individually with the bilingual assistant as it gave the impression that they were slower than the rest of the class. Culturally they did not want to lose face.

Although it was hard to create just a pre-beginner class because of the lack of numbers, combining this group of learners with beginners proved to be a great challenge as this group was more disparate than initially believed. Some learners in the pre-beginner group, who had little formal education in L1, felt intimidated by the better learners and withdrew from the course. This shows how deeply sensitive and serious some issues can be when learners are referred to an English class.

Response: The above problems were beyond the teacher’s control and so were referred to the coordinators and the management, who are still trying to work out the best solution to the problem. Clearly, funding is an issue since classes have to be an optimal size for the centre to be financially viable. Were funding based on level and need, rather than numbers, this problem could be addressed.

Issue: When the teacher, with the help of the bilingual assistant, asked the learners the topics they were interested in learning, they were keen on most of the ones suggested by the teacher but many of the Asian learners did not see why they had to learn how to ring up to make a doctor’s appointment or to ring the real estate agent because they would contact a doctor or real estate agent who spoke their language. For them, most of their needs were met by using their L1 in this predominantly Asian suburb.

Response: The teacher explained to them through the bilingual assistant that she would still teach them the topics for two main reasons: firstly, if they should move out of Cabramatta they would require this skill and secondly, she needed to cater for the needs of other learners in the class who wanted to learn such a skill.

Bilingual assistant’s evaluation of L1 use
Whenever there were information sessions on settlement and other issues, such as orientation to the AMEP, health talks, police, introduction to the counselling service,
my interpreting skills were needed. The learners not only wanted, but also needed, to understand all information details given in those sessions.

During the term the communication between learners and Sooi Lin improved. Learners in this class appreciated the fact that I could help them in their language whenever they needed help and assistance.

As a bilingual assistant I have been helping teachers, particularly with learners at the beginner level or with very slow learners, and at this point I would say that L1 seems to help learners learn English better, faster and with less stress. Learners were all very happy whenever the immediate help, explanation or assistance in L1 was available.

The use of L1 has helped this group feel much better during their process of settlement in Australia. I have become something like a close friend in their new country, since they would even stop me in the street and ask for advice or help. I am trying to do my best to help them in many ways, for example, how to fill in forms or submit documents for translation, even if it means working extra hours. Being a migrant myself I understand their needs and anxieties only too well.

References


Chapter 12

Anna’s class

Anna Barbara and Ljubisava Residovic – Macquarie Community College

Introduction

When the AMEP Research Centre called for expressions of interest to research the use of L1 to scaffold instruction, Christine (see Chapter 10) and I (Anna) decided to participate in this research project because we have always been interested in the use of L1 in the classroom and have also been looking for new and innovative ways of using L1 in the classroom.

I (Anna) am a monolingual teacher who has always had questions about the use of L1 in the classroom. For example:

• How much does use of L1 in the classroom assist L2 learning?
• How much or how little should L1 be used in the classroom to assist L2 learning?
• At what point does use of L1 in the classroom interfere with L2 learning?
• Do learners use L1 as a crutch and so become dependent on L1 when learning L2?
• Can learners readily wean themselves off L1 dependency when learning L2?

I hoped that some of these questions would be answered at the end of the project.

Ljubisava, the bilingual assistant in this class, has a language teaching background, is a migrant herself and a former AMEP learner. She wanted to share her knowledge and first-hand language experiences with the newly arrived migrants.

Our centre, Macquarie Community College, is located in Western Sydney at Blacktown – a young city, rich in multiculturalism, and thriving on its diversity. Macquarie Community College Blacktown specialises in delivering the Adult Migrant English Program to new arrivals in a caring and professional learning environment. As well as the competency-based language curriculum, the college also provides supplementary courses in Australian Citizenship, English Through Computers and Prevocational English. Our 360-learner body (1300 a year) also has access to flexible and diverse modes of English language learning. Classes are held in morning, afternoon and evening sessions, and Saturday classes offer English Through Computers and Australian Citizenship. Learners attending the centre range from pre-beginners to post-intermediate, but they are predominantly beginners. At present we have a large number of Sudanese learners, many of whom have limited literacy in L1 or English.

The research context

Project focus

The purpose of this project was to investigate the use of learners’ home language (L1) in instructions and materials. In attempting to evaluate the usefulness of L1 teaching materials and bilingual assistant support, I considered the following questions:
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- How much or how little L1 support was beneficial?
- At what point did L1 impede L2 learning?
- When should L1 support be given and when not to?
- What kind of L1 support facilitates the best L2 learning outcome?
- How can L2 efficiently be maximised?
- Should learners be free to decide for themselves what use they are to make of L1 materials?

In Chapter 10, Christine and Salwa focused on Salwa’s bilingual support. Although Ljubisava provided L1 support for speakers of Slavic languages, in this chapter we (Anna and Ljubisava) focus primarily on the bilingual materials used in the class, especially those available to Arabic speakers as they were the majority of the class.

Class profile

The class group that I focused on for the research consisted of sixteen learners who met five days a week for four hours a day. This group was from a different term to the one Christine and Salwa focused on.

Learner profile

The class consisted of sixteen learners – four males and twelve females from nine different language backgrounds. Nine were Arabic speakers, two being Lebanese and seven from Sudan (from both the north and the south). Of the seven Sudanese, two were Dinka speakers and two were Nuba speakers. The Dinka and Nuba speakers spoke General Arabic (a spoken language) as opposed to Modern Standard Arabic (a spoken and written language). Of the four Dinka and Nuba speakers, one could not read but was able to recognise some letters and sounds, one had good literacy and one had only basic literacy in Arabic. Therefore, using L1 materials was problematic as Arabic was not the southern Sudanese learners’ first language. However, for the three northern Sudanese learners Arabic was their L1.

The remainder of the class consisted of one older Croatian speaker, one Bosnian speaker, one Polish speaker, two Turkish speakers (one of whom was a Turkish Cypriot), one Tamil speaker and one Chinese speaker.

The group was young and vibrant and their attendance was excellent. There was one learner under 20, twelve in their 20s, two in their 30s and one 56-year-old. Their previous schooling was disparate: two learners had primary school education, thirteen had high school education and only one had been educated at tertiary level.

Course goals

The learners had clear goals for learning English – to participate in Australian life. All learners had had previous instruction four hours a day, three days a week for six weeks. Many were fast-paced learners and full of enthusiasm. Some of the learners were trailed in a post-beginner class in the following term and coped well and remained in their new class.

The course set out to achieve four learning outcomes:

- Can write a short note or message.
• Can give instructions.
• Can read short instructions.
• Can demonstrate understanding of the measurement of time.

**L1 support in the classroom**

We, a bilingual assistant from former Yugoslavia and a monolingual teacher, participated in the research project. Ljubisava’s help was absolutely invaluable, especially with such marked cultural differences in the classroom. Ljubisava was in the classroom for four hours a day for two days a week.

L1 was used more as a tool and resource than a word-for-word translation. By controlling the use of L1 and allowing the learners to use L1 to make sense of L2, we were able to provide a less threatening and safer environment that was more conducive to learning. We were conscious that learners often need to internalise information in L1 while learning another language.

Our research focus was on Arabic speaking learners. However, bilingual materials were also distributed to Chinese and former Yugoslavian speakers.

**Bilingual materials**

Bilingual dictionaries were available to all learners in their L1. However, the southern Sudanese learners remarked that the dictionaries provided to them used Lebanese Arabic and claimed that they were not Arabic. The vocabulary and terminology used were unfamiliar to these southern Sudanese learners. Salwa (see Chapter 9) believes that Egyptian Arabic dictionaries would be closer to the Arabic used in Sudan and hence, more appropriate. We also used:

• The literacy workbook for beginners in both Arabic (Christie 2000) and Chinese (Christie 1999).
• Step by Step Orientation in Croatian (Ojeda 1995).
• Starters dialogues: Arabic (Beaverson and Carstensen 2002).
• Learner’s own resources in Croatian and Bosnian. The former Yugoslavian learners had their own resources in L1.

**Other information about the class**

The class also visited the Migrant Resource Centre which provides material in many community languages. Talks on orientation and settlement issues, which were conducted in various languages, were followed by an opportunity for question time. Bilingual materials were also handed out to the learners at the end of the session.

**Management of L1 materials used in the classroom**

Classroom interaction and content

In using Arabic for all the Arabic speakers, it was assumed that Arabic was their L1 but it was, in fact, their L2. Some of the learners could only speak Arabic and were embarrassed because they had difficulty using written Arabic. For some learners, the Arabic language was a reminder of a language imposed on them in Sudan, and
therefore they were reluctant to use it when learning English. We used a number of different L1 resources with this class.

The classroom policy was to encourage learners to use L1 only if they could not understand in English. So learners would call upon the bilingual assistant when they required help or when the bilingual assistant considered it necessary.

Bilingual dictionaries were made available to all learners in their L1 and all learners were encouraged to use them. However, in addition to the issue of Lebanese Arabic dictionaries, some learners did not know how to use dictionaries.

The literacy workbook for beginners was used in both Arabic and Chinese. This resource only translates the instructions. Even though the learners could read Arabic, they still did not understand how to do the activities as they were not familiar with instructional Arabic. In such cases, a bilingual assistant was invaluable in helping to explain the activity.

Step by Step orientation was available in Croatian. This resource translates individual words and handwrites them above the English words. This resource looked unprofessional and gave English a higher status, as the English words were typeset.

Starters dialogues was used in Arabic. This resource translates each dialogue. However, it also uses the Arabic format (the book starts at the back and goes from right to left), and therefore does not help pre-literate learners become accustomed to the conventions of English. This resource uses Modern Standard Arabic and is therefore too difficult for Sudanese Arabic speakers to use. So, this resource was actually not used because as a teacher, I questioned its validity in teaching English to Sudanese learners.

Language

Vocabulary

Learners viewed the glossary from The literacy workbook for beginners in both the Arabic and Chinese workbooks quite favourably because it explained the meaning of the words in context and hence, became a popular quick reference.

Bilingual dictionaries were used for new vocabulary. However, the bilingual assistant was often called upon to be a helpful quick reference in checking for the contextual meaning of words.

Grammar

Grammar was taught in context as the need arose and The literacy workbook for beginners was used in both Arabic and Chinese.

Punctuation

Punctuation, such as full stops, commas, question marks and capital letters, was taught in context as the need arose. Once again, The literacy workbook for beginners was used in both Arabic and Chinese.

Other uses of L1

Learners quite often spoke to the bilingual assistant in their L1 during their break time and after class.

The class used L1 for a variety of settlement issues, including: explanations ofCentrelink, immigration, health, children’s school notes or letters, housing, rentals,
banking using the ATM machine, the Roads and Transport Authority computer program for getting a driver’s licence, and further education opportunities after learners had completed their entitlement of 510 hours.

Although this chapter is written from my perspective and that of Ljubisava, I also had an Arabic-speaking bilingual assistant available. I drew on these bilingual assistants to help with grammar points covered in class, to clarify instructions on how to do the homework – or sometimes to check their homework before I corrected it, and for help with vocabulary where the dictionary was not helpful.

**Evaluation of L1 use**

Teacher perspective and perception of the learner response to L1 use

I examine the strengths and weaknesses of the various bilingual resources and materials below.

**Bilingual dictionaries**

All learners had access to bilingual dictionaries. Some learners were unfamiliar with using a dictionary and therefore using dictionaries to check vocabulary was problematic. The bilingual assistant’s input was often necessary to put the words into context. Lebanese Arabic dictionaries often used vocabulary and terminology that was unfamiliar to learners. Learners did not always find these dictionaries helpful. Furthermore, dictionaries were sometimes inadequate as they did not put the meaning of words in context. Hence, some learners had difficulty in working out how to use the words.

Some learners tended to translate word for word as if context was not important to them. So, often learners preferred to ask a bilingual assistant for meanings because they would provide explanations rather than translations, and those explanations would include how to use the word in context. This demonstrated the importance of having dictionaries that show meanings of words in context. For example, the English-Croatian dictionary had such contextual examples in the English-Croatian section of the dictionary but not in the Croatian-English section.

Surprisingly, even the meaning of words in some dictionaries was incorrect.

**Issue:** Would learners’ bilingual dictionaries with word meanings in simple context be helpful for real beginners? Should learners be encouraged to transfer to dictionaries using simplified English sooner rather than later?

**Response:** A good bilingual dictionary with word meanings in simple context showing where, when and how to use the words would be most helpful to beginner learners. Using simplified English dictionaries sooner rather than later would encourage learners to slowly become independent learners and begin relying more on English.

The literacy workbook for beginners (Arabic and Chinese)

This workbook uses L1 only for giving instructions for the planned activity. Since Modern Standard Arabic was used in the Arabic version, learners had to be given examples and explanations of what was required in General Arabic by the Arabic-speaking bilingual assistant. Similarly, the assistant had to also explain the importance
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of the activity and why the activity was being done in this way. This was necessary as learners often asked why they were doing certain activities when they already knew the particular procedure in their L1. For example, they knew how to tell the time in Arabic, so why were they being taught to tell the time in English. Therefore, it is important that learners are aware that they are practising the four macro skills of English as well as learning to tell the time in English if they ever need to.

In the Chinese version, Traditional Chinese is used to translate the instructions instead of Simplified Chinese which is more familiar to AMEP learners, especially younger Chinese learners. So, instructions still needed to be explained to them. Using two versions of the workbook in the classroom also created some confusion. This was because the books used different L1 first and last names (ie Arabic first and last names in the Arabic version and Chinese first and last names in the Chinese version). Using L1 names helps the learners to identify that the words, in fact, are names and do not need to be looked up in a dictionary. It also helps them to understand the question, if the answer is a name. However, it made talking about the workbook in English in class quite confusing. Also the factual information was different in each L1 version, also causing confusion.

**Issue:** Is it better to have a good explanation of an activity rather than a translation of the instructions?

**Response:** It is far better to have a good explanation of what to do and how to do an English activity in L1 than to just simply translate the instructions into L1. A translation does not give the learner who is using the L1 resource enough help to complete the required activity.

Step by step orientation in Croatian and Chinese

Dual texts are used in this bilingual resource. In the Croatian version, the individual words and sentences have been translated. The translated words seem to be accurate; however, the sentence translations are often confusing and incomplete. Statements have been translated into questions, the translation is littered with incorrect punctuation and there are many L1 grammatical errors. This translation displays a poor and limited knowledge of L1, providing an inappropriate language model. It is therefore an unreliable resource. A common assumption is that anyone who speaks another language is capable of translation. In reality, quality translation is a highly skilled re-creation of the L1. Additionally, this translation is handwritten and hence demeans the status of the L1. It is a low-cost response to a shortage of suitable bilingual resources. As many of our bilingual resources are produced for a small audience on low budgets, they tend to be of an inferior quality. High quality dual textbooks are usually very expensive.

In the Chinese version, Traditional Chinese and not Simplified Chinese is used in the translation. The quality of the production, as in the Croatian version, is poor and the script is almost illegible in some places. Furthermore, the translation became confusing when technical language was used. For example, when speaking about the location preposition ‘on’, it is not the preposition that gives location, it is the remainder of the phrase. In Chinese, one preposition has more than one location meaning.

Since Arabic speakers read from right to left, the English resource was confusing to learners because the English version contained position prepositions that were sometimes read from right to left and other times from left to right.
Issue: Are there no better bilingual resources? Does a ‘bad’ bilingual resource impair L2 learning? What message is sent when the English text is typeset and the L1 is handwritten? What message is sent when the English text always comes first?

Response: A ‘bad’ bilingual resource interferes with L2 learning not only by creating bad language habits but also by frustrating and confusing the learner. The handwritten L1 resource is not professional and the errors contained within the translation make the resource unreliable. The typeset English text demeans the L1 by giving a higher status to English. These low-budget L1 resources are not recommended for use in the classroom.

Starters dialogues in Arabic
This resource also translates word for word but does not use the English format. It uses the L1 format. There is no advantage in using the Arabic format because the learners who can read Arabic can easily transfer to the English format anyway. Once again, this resource uses Modern Standard Arabic. Southern Sudanese learners with 12 years of schooling do not have a problem with this resource; however, learners with fewer than 12 years of schooling find transferring the formats more difficult and this impairs their English learning. This resource uses a double page spread with Arabic on one side and English on the other.

Issue: Is this a valid resource if we are trying to teach English?
Response: An L1 resource that uses the L1 text format for the L2 is only going to confuse learners and not help them transfer to the L2.

Issue: How good is Starters dialogues as a bilingual resource? How does a monolingual teacher judge the resource as being suitable for the L1 users?
Response: To judge both the language accuracy and the appropriateness of L1 resources, monolingual teachers need to ask bilingual colleagues. Perhaps organisations can provide annotated bibliographies of such resources to help monolingual teachers make appropriate choices.

Learners’ own L1 resources imported from learners’ country of origin
These resources come from the country of origin of the group and are often written by someone whose L1 is not English. When learners are told that some of the information listed in the resource is incorrect, it confuses and frustrates them as they may have been using this resource as a reliable reference for some time. Since the resource often deals with experiences that are far removed from life in Australia, much of the information used in these overseas bilingual resources lacks cultural context.

Issue: Should we discourage these kinds of resources?
Response: L1 resources written by someone whose L1 is not English should not be encouraged because they have proved to be inaccurate and hence unreliable as a reference material.
Migrant Resource Centre materials

Learners found the bilingual materials provided by the Migrant Resource to be useful as they could take them home to discuss with their families. This also gave them more time to read the information and make informed decisions. The information could also then be kept for future reference.

References


Chapter 13
The Dandenong class

Jacky Springall – AMES Flagstaff

Introduction
Dandenong AMES is a busy centre and AMEP provider in the industrial southern suburbs of Melbourne, catering for approximately 400 learners in a range of classes. The learners come from over 20 different countries. However, in the past 12 months, newly-arrived learners from the Sudan have formed one of the largest groups at the centre. Classes are offered from beginner to post-intermediate levels and there are now sufficient learners from pre-literate/low literacy L1 backgrounds to form three classes.

The teacher at Dandenong who was initially involved in this project was an experienced practitioner with a long history of interest in the role of the learners’ L1 in the acquisition of English. She was particularly involved in identifying some higher-level learners who could take up an opportunity to undertake traineeships for certification in education with the view to working as teacher assistants in lower-level classes. As this teacher took leave mid-way through the project, I took on the role of coordinating the data-collection from this site and undertook the classroom observations, learner interviews and interviews with the classroom teacher and bilingual assistants. This, in fact, fitted comfortably with my role as one of the project coordinators within AMES and the Education Development coordinator for AMES Education.

The research context
Project focus
The research focus at Dandenong was to:
- explore a model of providing L1 support to learners through the provision of bilingual assistants in a multilingual class
- observe the role and impact of using bilingual education trainees who have recently completed their own AMEP entitlement and shared the predominant language backgrounds of the learners in the class
- consider issues of not catering for all of the language groups in one class.

Class profile
The learners who were the focus of this study were enrolled in an orientation to literacy, numeracy and communication course that took place five mornings a week. The curriculum used for the group was the Course in Preliminary Spoken and Written English (CPSWE). As the project straddled two terms, the learner group gradually evolved and shifted, as some learners moved into a higher class at the end of Term 2, other learners left for a variety of reasons, and new learners joined the group following their enrolment in the centre. At one point, the class numbers grew to such an extent that the class had to be divided in two.
Learner profile

Despite the continuous enrolments and movements of individuals, the learner group maintained the following characteristics:

- The learners had predominantly little or very disrupted prior education.
- Most had no experience in L2 literacy and came from non-roman script backgrounds.
- The two major groups of learners in the class came from the Sudan and from Afghanistan. However, at all times there were at least two to four learners from other countries of origin, including China, Vietnam and Serbia.
- The learners were at the beginning of their AMEP entitlement and were in the very early stages of settlement in Australia.

Course goals

Given the class characteristics described above, the key goals of the course were to provide learners with an orientation to literacy, numeracy and communication skills.

Course work focused on: developing recognition of, and skills in writing, the alphabet and numbers, social sight signs and high frequency words; social interaction; and introducing some initial learning strategies. There was also a focus on utilising settlement contexts, such as housing, health and schooling. The pace of this class was fairly slow with a great emphasis on recycling information and activities and on providing plenty of scaffolding for learning.

L1 support in the classroom

Over the duration of this project two teachers were involved in teaching the class, both of whom were monolingual. However, two bilingual assistants were supplied from another program run by AMES. They supported the teacher in this class. These assistants were undertaking education traineeships (Certificate III in Education) in AMES Victoria and were placed in the centre to assist for eleven hours of classroom support each week. Both trainees were multilingual - one came from Afghanistan and spoke five languages including Arabic, Farsi and Dari; and the other was from the Sudan and spoke Arabic and a number of African languages. One of the trainees had been a primary school teacher in the Sudan and the other had been involved in education at the tertiary level. Whilst the trainees were placed in the general role of teacher assistants, supporting all learners and the teacher, given their language skills and the predominance of Sudanese and Afghani learners, their primary function became that of bilingual assistants.

Apart from reflecting the dominant language backgrounds of the learners in this class, both of the trainees had been AMEP learners in AMES. This meant they had first-hand knowledge of the AMEP learner experience, the teaching styles and culture in AMES and the settlement issues facing the learners. Neither of the assistants had received any specific prior training in working as bilingual assistants, although issues relating to this were discussed during their feedback and supervision sessions both individually and in the trainee-course content that was delivered in a one-week block during the term breaks.
Other information about the class

The learning environment for this class was a bright, purpose-built classroom located off a central, open-learning space which contained banks of computers with a range of computer assisted, low-level language learning programs. The learners had an opportunity each week to work in this area as part of their class program but could also use this space and these resources independently after class.

Management of L1 use in the classroom

Both teachers involved in this class saw the learners' L1 as a potential and important resource for the learners in learning English. They were happy for the learners to use their L1 when talking to each other about class activities and when discussing class information between themselves.

The teachers utilised the assistants to help in a range of activities involving all of the learners. Additionally, they also made regular and structured use of the language skills of the bilingual assistants in their program. This was done in a number of ways, some of which were initiated and managed by the teachers and some of which were initiated and managed by the trainees themselves.

Classroom interaction

The learners in the class generally sat around tables with three to four others. They self-selected their seating and there was no attempt to arrange them in language groups. Generally, learners tended to sit with at least one other individual from the same country of origin; however, the groups were mostly mixed in terms of language backgrounds with at least a couple of language backgrounds represented at each table.

Learning strategies

From discussion with the bilingual assistants, it seems at times they took it upon themselves to counsel the learners about their attitudes to such things as time-keeping and absences. It is hard to know exactly how they chose to discuss this information and advice. However, it seems likely that they presented it in a manner they saw as culturally appropriate – which may, in fact, have been different to the way the teacher would have presented this same information. For example, I suspect at times they were much more direct in their discussions with individuals in reinforcing issues such as not wasting their 510-hour entitlement.

Content

The teachers regularly used the bilingual assistants to translate information for the learners. This was often at the beginning of classes when ‘house-keeping’ type issues needed to be discussed and information given. For example, the teacher might have needed to inform the group about changes in arrangements regarding the timetable. The general model followed was that the teacher would present the information in English, and then allow time for the assistants to translate that information in L1 to the groups of learners from their respective language groups. Whilst the assistants were interpreting this information to their groups, the teacher would often be repeating the information (in English) to those learners who were not represented in the language background of the assistants. There then generally followed a period of some
input from the bilingual assistants who brought back questions and points of clarification from the learners.

The bilingual assistants were sometimes called upon to provide cultural information to the teacher or to the learners. For example, the teacher might check with the bilingual assistant what a normal practice might be in the learners’ country of origin, or ask the bilingual assistant to find out this information from the learner. The bilingual assistants would also independently provide some Australian cultural information to the learners from their language groups about how something worked in Australia; for example, how they might make a request more polite or what was expected when they were not going to be able to come to class on time.

Language

Frequently the bilingual assistants would be used to clarify in L1 the instructions the teacher had given for classroom activities. At times the teacher would request the assistants to do this and allow time before moving on to the activity or her next instruction. At other times the bilingual assistants would take the initiative in doing this from their observations of the learners (ie checking who appeared to have understood.) They would then move around the class whilst the learners were working either independently or in groups and clarify what they had been asked to do.

Whilst the assistants moved around the classroom, they would assist learners with any problems or questions about such areas as grammar, pronunciation or vocabulary. At times, this was on instruction from the teacher but as the term progressed the assistants became increasingly familiar and confident with this role. In most instances, the bilingual assistants used the learner’s L1 to provide assistance but they also used English to help both learners from the same language backgrounds as themselves and other learners who were not.

Sample activities

As already mentioned, the class had regular times on the computers and the assistants provided one-to-one help in supporting the learners both in the development of their information and communication technology skills and in using the computers and computer-assisted language learning (CALL) materials – for example, demonstrating CALL programs such as ‘The alphabet’ and ‘Picture dictionary’ and teaching learners how to use the mouse (click, ‘drag and drop’ functions etc). Again, at times this was initiated by the teacher, and at other times the assistants moved around providing the help they felt was required.

Other use of L1

Often the bilingual assistants were in the situation of representing the views or requests of the learners in the class, in other words providing an advocacy function. For example, early in Term 3, the class grew to a size with new enrolments that necessitated dividing it into two. The teacher used this opportunity to do an activity with the learners which involved counting the number of people in the class. She then used this to introduce a discussion on dividing the class into two separate groups, one that would remain in the morning with her and one that would meet in the afternoons with a new teacher. The group had been divided with considerations of child-care issues and levels of English. After the bilingual assistants had translated this information there was much
discussion in the learners’ L1. Predictably, no one wanted to move to the new time or teacher. The learners, through the bilingual assistants, presented quite complex and at times compelling reasons as to why the teacher should reconsider her choice.

The other major use of the L1 resource that was evident was the role of the bilingual assistants in helping with settlement issues. The learners frequently came to class with issues relating to their settlement in Australia (for example, forms or questions from Centrelink and queries relating to housing). During class breaks and after class they would often approach the bilingual assistants for help. These requests necessitated a variety of responses, ranging from translating written information to making telephone calls to external agencies on behalf of the individuals. Frequently, learners would approach one of the bilingual assistants to discuss their learning or classroom issues such as absence. The assistant and the learner would then go together to discuss this with the teacher.

**Evaluation of L1 use**

From the perspective of the teachers involved in this class, the availability of the L1 skills of the assistants has been enormously useful for the learners and some of these ways are outlined below.

Understanding and pace of the class

With the L1 input, the learners were able to understand so much more of what was being presented by the teacher and this assisted them in more quickly being able to engage in the range of learning tasks and activities. Often it was apparent the learners had not really understood the task instructions given in L2 by the teacher and this was quickly rectified by the bilingual assistants, enabling the learners to participate in the task. It was also possible to get continuous feedback about the learners’ levels of understanding and then take appropriate action if they had not comprehended what was presented or what they were being asked to do.

Empowerment

The bilingual assistants provided the learners with a voice that enabled many of them to be more active participants in both their learning and in the content and delivery of their program. Learners were able to voice their opinions on issues ranging from their placement in classes and timetabling to their learning needs and preferred modes of learning. In general, it appears to have allowed individuals to become more engaged and active in their learning. At times this has meant dealing with differences of opinion – for example in the instance described earlier about splitting the class. Rather than listening passively to the teacher’s decree, a number of the learners challenged it and put up coherent arguments via the bilingual assistant as to why the teacher should change her decision. Whilst this was potentially more challenging for the teacher, it enabled her to engage in a discussion with the learners, hear their concerns and further present her rationale for the decision. It is possible that this may have avoided some learners feeling disgruntled about the changes and dropping out of the course.

Improving cultural understandings

The two-way communication and dialogue that was established between the learners and teachers via the bilingual assistants assisted both the teachers in their understanding of
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the learners’ cultural backgrounds and the learner’s awareness of the culture of Australia and the use of language. This included issues such as the culture of the AMEP/AMES learning environment and a range of subtle and complex features relating to language use.

Meeting settlement needs

Perhaps one of the most noticeable benefits of having the bilingual input from the assistants was in the ability to meet some of the settlement needs of the learners. As new arrivals in Australia, AMEP learners have a huge array of demands they need to respond to outside of the classroom. It was apparent that the bilingual assistants were extremely useful in helping the learners from this class to negotiate some of these demands and find out the information they needed to know to assist them in life outside the classroom.

Retention

Whilst this study did not involve any comparison with classes who did not have L1 assistance, it can be noted that attendance and retention in this class was excellent. Learners appeared very positive about their learning environment and expressed considerable satisfaction with the program. The classroom environment presented as happy and relaxed, with the learners confident to express opinions and ask questions via the bilingual assistants.

Issues

Matching all the language needs

In this multilingual class, the L1 backgrounds of the majority of learners were matched through the provision of two multilingual aides. However, there were a small number of learners in this class who had no L1 assistance. This obviously raises issues of equity and the impact of being in a minority group in a class. There were a couple of factors that militated against this: Firstly those learners in the group who did not have L1 assistance from an assistant tended to have more of a background in L1 literacy (for example, there were two Chinese learners and two Serbian learners). Because of this they had more learning resources and strategies at their disposal – for example an electronic dictionary. Secondly, these learners were able to avail themselves of more one-to-one teacher time whilst the bilingual assistants worked with other learners in the class. Ideally, however, it would have been good to have L1 input for all the learners in the group.

Training needs of the bilingual assistants

The assistants in this class were still learning about life in Australia and developing their own language skills. Obviously, the disadvantage of this was that sometimes they were not able to provide totally accurate models of English for the learners and sometimes they did not fully comprehend the teacher’s intentions.

The advantage of their status as relatively new migrants, however, was that:

• they were very empathetic to the learners’ experiences and this gave them much credibility with learners

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• they provided role models of individuals like the learners themselves who were progressing through educational and vocational pathways in their new country

• they were able to provide and reinforce information to the learners in a culturally acceptable way.

Continuing further and more targeted training for working in these bilingual classroom roles under the auspices of these Education traineeships would be of benefit to those assistants who work in the classroom.

Teacher training

Finally, there is probably much still to explore as to the best way of utilising bilingual assistance in a multilingual class. Neither of the teachers concerned with this class had received any formal professional development on how to best utilise this bilingual assistance and so they approached it in an intuitive way. Further teacher development in this area would be useful, with projects such as this contributing to the process.
Part 3 Use of L1 to support settlement needs

The teachers reporting in Part 3 (Chapters 14–16) participated in a bilingual support activity that was unique to Victoria. Learners across different language proficiency levels came together once a week voluntarily for ‘bilingual input sessions’. These sessions were held during the lunch hour so that learners in both morning and afternoon classes could participate. The sessions included guest presentations on topics of settlement interest to learners, such as job seeking, health, medical benefits, unemployment benefits. In the bilingual information sessions, learners’ L1s were used as necessary and when available. Learners sat in language groups with a bilingual assistant who interpreted the information given and encouraged learners to ask and answer questions. Teachers used the questions or concerns in follow-up activities in the classroom.

Learners without bilingual assistants sat in a number of small groups with a teacher, who tried to explain the meaning of the information as simply and as clearly as possible. When there were two or more learners from the same language, one of the learners tried to interpret for the other learner/s.

In addition to the bilingual input sessions, the three teachers also had bilingual trainees and/or assistants assisting in the classrooms. The trainees were usually former AMEP learners, who were undertaking education traineeships (Certificate III in Education) in AMES Victoria. We use the term bilingual assistant to include both, except when specifically referring to trainees’ training.
Chapter 14

**Shahan’s class**

Shahan Tan - AMES Flagstaff

**Introduction**

For the last five years of my teaching career, I have taught adult ESL learners from beginner to advanced levels in formal classrooms and by Distance Learning. Prior to my ESL teaching, I taught in primary schools. I started my education bilingually in a French Lycee in England and migrated to Australia as a child. Although I am now a monolingual teacher, I still have a keen interest in bilingual strategies used by beginning learners of English.

I am currently teaching in a large centre located in the Melbourne CBD. Due to its central location, learners are from a wide range of cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds, and live throughout the suburbs of Melbourne. The centre provides a range of classes from beginners to advanced, as well as specialist classes including Information Communication Technology, Certificate II in Childcare and preparation for IELTS. Bilingual classes are available for older Chinese learners. There is also an Employment Skills Centre located on the premises which provides courses and assistance for job seekers.

**The research context**

**Project focus**

The main focus of the project was to evaluate learner responses to the use of bilingual strategies by a monolingual teacher in a multilingual classroom using scaffolding with L1 resources. Other aims included:

- implementing bilingual sessions with pre-beginner and beginner classes on a regular basis
- encouraging retention of learners at beginner level
- providing accessible settlement information relevant to new migrants and refugees
- increasing learner access to bilingual support in the classroom.

**Class profile**

The learners I worked with over Terms 2 and 3 in 2004 were enrolled in the AMEP and were all beginner-level students. I taught the class for twelve hours a week over four days, while my co-teacher taught them for four hours on one day. Although there were usually about 25 learners enrolled in the class at any one time, there was continual enrolment throughout the project with some learners withdrawing from the program during the research period for a number of reasons. Bilingual support was available for some of the learners, particularly Arabic and Amharic speakers, for a few hours a week, and during bilingual information sessions.
Learner profile

In Term 2, my class was a low-level beginner class. By Term 3 (Semester 2), the class had progressed to a high-level beginner class. Although the class changed in its scheduled time from the afternoon to the morning, most of the learners who completed Term 2 continued into Term 3. However, a number of the learners who were initially in the class withdrew for a variety of reasons. These included access to class because they had moved to another suburb, travel overseas, pregnancy, illness, work, and promotion to a class at a higher level. At the same time, a number of new learners were enrolled in the AMEP and placed in the high-level beginner class. At the beginning of Term 3, a number of learners progressed from the pre-beginner class and were transferred to my class. Throughout the research project, the class maintained an average enrolment of about 23, with 16–18 learners attending on any one day.

The learners were beginners with low levels of language proficiency. Their ages ranged from 22 years to over 50 years. About two thirds of the learners were female, as generally reflects the make-up of the AMEP. The main language backgrounds of the learners included Oromo, Amharic, Arabic, Tigrenia, Chinese, Turkish and Thai. Other languages represented during the project included Russian, Vietnamese, Serbian, Korean, Japanese and Farsi. The learners’ previous schooling was disparate, ranging from zero years to four years of tertiary education – although the majority of learners had completed twelve years of schooling.

It is important to note that a number of learners did not have access to any L1 support either from other learners, bilingual assistants or the available bilingual resources.

Course goals

As a beginner level class, the goals were related to achieving appropriate learning outcomes related to daily life. Settlement issues were important, so themes introduced were related to personal information, housing, health, transport and food. The following language goals were set.

Ability to:

• learn in a formal context
• give personal information and complete simple forms
• respond to spoken instructions in the learning context
• locate information in an alphabetical index.

Development of:

• beginner spoken interaction skills
• beginner spoken discourse skills
• beginner listening and reading skills.

L1 support in the classroom

Throughout the project, I had access to a number of bilingual trainees who were undertaking education traineeships (Certificate III in Education) in AMES Victoria and acted as bilingual assistants in the classroom. These bilingual assistants spoke Arabic, Assyrian, Amharic, Sudanese and Tigrinia. Initially, one or two of the bilingual
assistants spent an hour or two in the classroom weekly and assisted in bilingual information sessions but later in Term 3 the bilingual assistants spent little or no time in my classroom. However, in Term 3 they were available for individual and group conversation in the Independent Learning Centre.

Other information about the class

Centre-wide bilingual information sessions

Once a week, a one-hour bilingual session was held at the centre for all pre-beginner and beginner learners. These sessions were held in a double classroom in the middle of the day – at the end of morning classes and beginning of afternoon classes – and were led by a Learning Advisor. Some high-level learners were given training in voluntary peer mentoring/tutoring and participated in these sessions.

These sessions were designed to address a number of learner needs and aimed to provide information about the AMEP and learning in the context of AMES, and settlement information, and to develop awareness amongst the learners of the availability of community support. Some specific aims of these sessions were to:

- develop greater understanding and use of individual learning plans and roles of learning advisors
- discuss issues relating to adult learners – learning styles, strategies, 510 hours, childcare
- encourage participation in specific activities – for example, Specific Skills Program (during traditional holiday periods), Harmony Day, Centre excursions, Adult Learner’s Week etc
- provide support within language and cultural groups
- enhance learning by offering bilingual support
- encourage peer support/mentoring in and outside AMES
- foster groups of learners working together in cross-class groups
- explain alternative modes of delivery – Distance Learning, VTP, evening classes, study groups, Citizenship class etc.
- assist with continual enrolment issues
- develop learner confidence to approach teachers, learning advisors etc.
- promote cross cultural understanding.

The idea of the bilingual sessions was for the learners to have access to this information in their first languages. To this end, we had access to a few high-level learners (Turkish, Japanese and Thai), some customer service staff (Russian and Vietnamese), and two Bilingual Liaison Officers who spoke Chinese and Somali. However, these people were not always available which caused a number of problems. These issues will be discussed later.

A range of other resources were used which included:

- multilingual pamphlets and information sheets:
  - Your Guide to the AMEP
  - AMES Learner’s handbook
Teaching in Action 1

- Individual Learning Plans
- Distance Learning and Volunteer Tutor Program
- CSWE I Modules and Learning Outcomes in L1

- multilingual websites (for example, Centrelink, Cancer Council of Victoria, DIMIA)
- AMES teaching materials with multilingual support
- guest speakers from various organisations.

Management of L1 use in the classroom

Although most of my research was based on the bilingual information sessions, strategies for using L1 in the classroom were also implemented.

At the beginning of Term 2 (the start of the research project), learners were surveyed to find out how much bilingual assistance they received and how much they wanted. They were surveyed again at the end of term and then again the following term. It is important to note, however, that during the term there was a turnover of learners, so that many learners may not have been surveyed at the beginning and/or at the end.

Generally learners appreciated having access to bilingual support for some of the time, but this need reduced as the project progressed and their understanding and use of English increased.

Classroom interaction

As a monolingual teacher, I was unable to give language explanations for such things as grammar, pronunciation or vocabulary in other languages. However, the bilingual assistants were able to assist a few of the learners, while other learners were able to assist each other. Cross-cultural discussions were used to compare vocabulary or grammar structures. The following is a summary of the ways a learner’s L1 was used in the classroom.

- **With bilingual assistants on a one-to-one basis using L1, one-to-one using English and in small groups using both L1 and English:** On a one-to-one basis, the assistance was usually of a specific nature related to literacy, correction, or for pronunciation, grammar or spelling practice. In small groups, bilingual assistants participated in discussions, group tasks (for example, sentence completion games and follow-up to information sessions).

- **Teacher to learner/s:** This occurred when new words or phrases were discussed by comparing different languages and for cross-cultural purposes. For example, ‘What is this word/phrase in your language?’ In these situations other learners and I would try to pronounce the word, providing opportunities to share and compare languages, sounds, pronunciation difficulties etc.

- **Peer to peer discussion:** Learners discussed concepts, task instructions, grammar points and vocabulary as well as issues related to settlement, information sessions and learning in Australia. The learner interpreting for his/her peers was confirming his/her own understanding, reinforcing knowledge of structures, vocabulary and or instructions and assisting the other
learner/s and the teacher. General discussion unrelated to the classroom learning was discouraged other than during break times or before and after class. Most learners respected this.

- **Bilingual dictionaries**: Most learners had access to a bilingual dictionary, some electronic.

- **Learner strategies**: One learner regularly verbalised a word/phrase in her L1 (Russian) to help her with translation of new words/phrases or ideas, particularly during conversations or when answering or asking questions.

**Interaction in bilingual information sessions**

In the bilingual information sessions, learners’ L1s were used, when available, as often as necessary. Learners sat in language groups with a bilingual assistant who interpreted the information given and encouraged learners to ask and answer questions. This feedback from the learners was important for the Learning Advisor, the presenters and for teachers who used questions or concerns in follow-up activities in the classroom. Learners also used part of these sessions to discuss issues related to their classes, AMEP hours, learning outcomes, childcare, excursions etc.

Learners without bilingual assistants sat in a number of small groups with a teacher. The teacher tried to explain the meaning of the information as simply and as clearly as possible, allowing for feedback from the learners. If there were two or more learners from the same language, one of the learners may have tried to interpret for the other learner/s. This reinforced and confirmed the understanding of the first learner and allowed him/her to feel valued and helpful.

**Learning strategies**

Throughout the project learners were encouraged to use their L1 dictionary for support and to ask other learners, the bilingual assistants or class teacher for assistance where required.

**Content: Bilingual information sessions**

In the bilingual information sessions, topics related to settlement into the learners’ new country were covered. Learners were introduced to Individual Learning Plans, followed by discussion about individual learning needs and styles. Learners were also given information about alternative learning options including evening classes, distance learning and the Volunteer Tutor Program. Further information was given about the use of the Independent Learning Centre (ILC), computers and computer-aided language programs (CALL), other services provided by AMES, and access to Learning Advisors for vocational and further study, pathway planning and counselling. One session per term was devoted to discussion related to the Student Representative Group.

Speakers from community organisations, including a Migrant Resource Centre, Centrelink, Consumer Affairs, Tenancy Union, Cancer Council of Victoria and the Deafness Foundation were invited to speak to the learners and answer questions. Many were able to provide bilingual information sheets. An advanced English learner with specific skills in Australian Taxation also spoke to the learners about tax file numbers and completing tax returns.
Sample activities

A sample of a worksheet given to learners during a bilingual session about the Cancer Council of Victoria is provided in Figure 14. This worksheet was completed in small groups at the end of the session with bilingual support where available, and was followed up in a computer class the next day. Learners were able access the website and read information in their L1. Further discussion about issues related to cancer risks and prevention occurred in English.

**Figure 14:** Worksheet used after a bilingual session with the Cancer Council

Other use of L1

Many learners found having other learners who spoke their first language very supportive. The bilingual sessions enabled learners to meet other learners not in their own class as well as to have access to some higher-level learners who assisted during the sessions. Many learners met up outside class times, particularly in the ILC. Bilingual assistants were also available to speak with learners formally or informally in the ILC.
Chapter 14
Shahan’s class

Issues rising from the bilingual information sessions

Although there have generally been positive outcomes from the bilingual sessions, a number of issues were identified and acted upon during the project. Some issues related to the bilingual assistants, in particular reliability, punctuality and resourcefulness. Others related to the guest speakers, including choice of topic or organisation, reliability (one guest speaker failed to turn up after confirming the appointment the day before), the speed at which they spoke, the content and relevance of the information given, the lack of time given for translation and feedback and the lack of, or limitations of, bilingual support materials.

Repetition of information, particularly that concerning AMEP, was an issue initially and may have resulted in reduced attendance at one stage as some learners had already attended similar sessions for up to two terms and felt that they had heard most of the information before.

Another issue related to timetabling as some learners in morning classes left before the session and those attending afternoon classes regularly came late or not at all. Most of these issues were addressed in Term 3, and a few additional strategies were implemented resulting in improved attendance and more positive feedback from learners, teachers and bilingual assistants. At the beginning of Term 3, a specific session for new learners was included to cover information related to the AMEP, while ongoing learners discussed their holidays and issues related to their learning for the next term. A wider variety of topics were covered in Term 3 and guest speakers chosen to support settlement were invited. Worksheets were developed which could be completed during sessions and/or used as follow-up in class. An example of such a worksheet is reproduced in Figure 15. Teachers were also encouraged to include follow-up discussions and to further develop, in their class program, themes or topics introduced in bilingual sessions so that learners did not see the sessions in isolation.

Evaluation of L1 use

Participation in this project has been a valuable learning experience for me. I have enjoyed working as part of a team of teachers involved in promoting this program and observing the progress and increased involvement of the learners. I have adapted my teaching methodologies to involve increased use of L1s in the classroom and have encouraged increased participation by the learners in the bilingual sessions.

Prior to this project I encouraged learners to use English exclusively in the classroom, even to clarify understanding and explain instructions to each other. Although I still encourage the use of English as much as possible, I now also encourage learners to use L1 as part of the learning process in the classroom and in bilingual sessions. I have noticed greater learner support for each other from different languages in and out of class and a greater acceptance of the use of L1 for support by individuals and groups.

In bilingual sessions, those learners who participate in language groups are more actively involved in discussion. Learners are more able to ask questions related to their learning and settlement needs and exhibit greater understanding of the information given. Learner retention at this level has not been an issue, even though there have been many learners withdrawing or transferring from the class. In general the reasons given have been very legitimate and specific. A number of learners have returned to the class, or have indicated that they intend to return after a period away. Learner responses to discussion about the bilingual sessions have become more positive after a
**Bilingual Session**

In language groups answer these questions.

1. What are your teachers' names?

2. Who is your bilingual assistant?

3. Who is your Learning Advisor?

4. What is a Learning Advisor?

5. What days is she available?

6. How do you make an appointment to see her?

7. How many hours of English can you have?

8. Who pays for your classes?

9. What do you do if you want to stop classes?

10. What other learning options do you have?

11. If you miss a class, what should you do?

12. What telephone number do you call if you can't come to class?

13. Who can you talk to if you have a problem?

14. Do you have any questions you want to ask?

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**Figure 15:** Worksheet used at the end of a bilingual information session on activities in the AMEP

The use of learner's L1 in the classroom has been a very positive aspect of teaching and learning in my beginner class. As the learners have developed their knowledge and understanding of the four macro-skills in English, their reliance on their first language has decreased. However, my learners understand that it is OK to resort to L1 for help, clarification and support when necessary though they are not encouraged to use their L1 for social purposes during classes.

The use of bilingual sessions has also been a valuable way of getting informal feedback for teachers and AMES Victoria about such things as courses, programs and facilities.
Chapter 15

Gail’s class

Gail Anderson – AMES St Albans

Introduction
I am a monolingual teacher with twelve years experience teaching English as a Second Language to adult migrant and refugee learners. Retention of learners, in order that they maximise and utilise their 510 hour English as a Second Language tuition allotment, and a personal belief that L1 can serve to facilitate the acquisition of the target language, were the reasons for my involvement in this project. At this centre there are many learners who have had little or no opportunity to attend formal education and I am very mindful of making explicit strategies that can assist those learners in their English language acquisition. Using L1 for this purpose was also part of the impetus for my involvement.

I work in St Albans – a western suburb of Melbourne. At this centre there are morning and afternoon classes from Monday to Friday and evening classes on Mondays and Wednesdays. It is one of the largest AMES centres in the Western Region. The largest groups represented at this centre are Chinese, Vietnamese, Sudanese, East Timorese, Serbo-Croatian and Arabic speakers. The ages of the learners enrolled in classes at this centre range from 18 to 70.

The research context
Project focus
The focus of this research was to:

• incorporate and monitor bilingual assistance in the ESL classroom
• provide bilingual assistants for one of the largest language groups at the centre
• learn more about the topics or types of information that some learners prefer to be given in L1.

Class profile
This class met from Tuesday to Friday for a total of fifteen hours per week. My co-teacher, also monolingual, taught the learners for ten hours and I taught them for five hours per week. There were 27 learners enrolled at the beginning of the course but only 22 completed it. Securing employment, health and family issues were the reasons the other five did not complete the course.

Learner profile
There were fourteen females and eight males in this beginners group. Most of them had recently arrived in Australia in 2003 or 2004. Their years of schooling ranged from two to thirteen years, and none had tertiary education. Their ages ranged from
19 to 50 years. The learners came from Vietnam, China, Iraq, Timor, Bosnia, Uruguay, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Sudan and Turkey, and languages spoken included Vietnamese, Cantonese, Assyrian, Arabic, Hakka, Bahasa and Portuguese, Serbo-Croatian, Spanish, Macedonian, Romanian, Dinka and Turkish.

Course goals
The course goals were limited due to the beginner nature of this class, and were based on the curriculum goals for the Certificate in Spoken and Written English I. They included:

- learning in a formal context
- understanding and responding to spoken instructions in the learning environment
- locating information in an alphabetical index
- providing personal information using spoken and written language.

L1 support in the classroom
Two Vietnamese bilingual assistants worked with the Vietnamese speakers for three days a week. One of them provided support for my co-teacher for six hours a week, and the other supported me for three hours per week. Their personal timetables and availability determined these times. There were only three bilingual assistants available at St Albans at this time. They were undertaking education traineeships (Certificate III in Education) and were placed in the centre to assist in eleven hours of classroom support each week. Also working at the centre was a bilingual assistant from Sudan - a Dinka and Arabic speaker - who was involved with another group of predominantly preliterate learners with no oracy in English.

Other information about the class
In addition to the bilingual assistants, there were weekly, one-hour bilingual information sessions in which visitors from other service providers spoke on different settlement topics. This information was provided bilingually to the learners attending these sessions and then followed up in the classroom.

The bilingual information sessions included guest speakers from Hillside Primary School, Consumer Affairs Western, and AMES Employment Services. They addressed topics on education, housing and employment respectively. Two fortnightly sessions were provided on each of these topics.

In the education sessions, learners were asked about their perceptions of primary schools, and the guest speakers spoke about the cultural expectations for parental involvement in their children’s learning processes, classroom and other school activities, and how this often enhances their experiences and motivates them to learn. The primary teachers assured them that L1 input in the children’s learning process is valid and valued.

The speaker from Consumer Affairs Western spoke about tenants' rights and responsibilities.

The speaker from AMES Employment Services spoke about CVs, job applications and interviews, and how employment services can assist people in their endeavours to secure employment.
Management of L1 use in the classroom

Classroom interaction

In the classroom context, the Vietnamese assistants provided the Vietnamese learners with explanations of vocabulary and grammar and helped them with their general understanding of the teachers' instructions. They also participated in small group discussions and helped with pronunciation.

In the bilingual input sessions, there were three adults in the group who could not consult others in their L1 and had to rely on their monolingual teachers and bilingual dictionaries for assistance. They speak Romanian, Spanish and Turkish as their first languages. All of the other learners had L1 support from peers or assistants in these bilingual sessions.

Learning strategies

Learners were given homework and encouraged to complete it. Time in class was spent on encouraging them to keep their workbooks, learning resources and reference materials in an organised fashion. Sheets of different coloured A4 paper were provided which served as subject area dividers for their workbooks.

I wrote a very short, didactic text about a learner who didn't study regularly but tried to study English in long and erratic stints - either late at night when his children were in bed or at the weekends when they were home from school and wanted to play with him. After his teacher's suggestion to study for shorter periods of time more frequently, and at a time when he was not likely to be disturbed, he started to achieve success in his learning, started to recall what he was learning, and felt more confident about finding a job. This text was presented as a reading and comprehension activity.

Bilingual input sessions

In the weekly input sessions, the information was explained in L1 to the Chinese, Vietnamese, Dinka, Arabic and Serbo-Croatian speakers. These are the languages spoken at the centre by assistants and other staff. All of the classes from beginners to intermediate attended these weekly sessions.

A needs survey was conducted in the first week of the term. The Vietnamese speakers in the class all nominated preferences for bilingual assistance with grammar, speaking and listening, pronunciation, vocabulary and employment information. As indicated above, content provided in L1, in which guest speakers spoke on education, tenancy issues and employment, was for the purpose of settlement.

Language

L1 support, for which the St Albans centre could cater, was provided for Vietnamese, Chinese, Dinka, Arabic and Serbo-Croatian speakers. The weekly one-hour bilingual sessions, organised to provide important settlement information, also became a time in which the learners could ask about classroom content for that week and anything that was unclear could be explained to them in L1.

In the classroom, the bilingual assistants provided language explanations of the teachers' instructions, classroom activities, grammar and vocabulary in L1.
Evaluation of L1 use

The weekly bilingual information sessions were very well received by the learners for whom L1 support was provided. There was a keen interest in the settlement topics on education, consumer rights and renting.

Of the twenty-two learners who completed the ten-week course, only six were ready to undertake further study at the next level. Three of these had no bilingual assistance in the classroom other than their dictionaries, and the other three all spoke the same language and facilitated each other’s English acquisition in L1. These six learners were all female, were educated at primary and secondary levels in their countries of origin and their age range was from 19 to 40 years.

None of the Vietnamese speakers, who had bilingual classroom support three out of the four days on which the class was scheduled, were ready to undertake further study at the next level. None of them had achieved the level of oracy needed for the next certificate level. Nonetheless, the two Vietnamese assistants reported that the Vietnamese learners were ‘happy with everything’. They said that they enjoyed listening to the teachers’ instructions in L2 and then checking that they had understood them correctly in L1.

Teacher perspective

The weekly bilingual, settlement information sessions were well attended. The learners for whom bilingual support was provided, engaged in discussions with the interpreting teacher, assistant or administrator and asked a lot of questions regarding education, renting and employment in Australia.

The Vietnamese speakers in the class were slow to develop their speaking and listening skills. They became quite dependent on the assistants’ translations and interpretations and were reluctant to take risks in their learning. Receptive skills, such as listening and reading for gist, were neither developed nor practised. It may be that these learners were developing an over-reliance on the bilingual assistants who were in the class for quite a high proportion of the time available. It may be that consideration should be given to reducing their proportion of time in the class in future.

The three learners who had no bilingual assistance, other than their dictionaries, were the most competent orally by the end of the course.

Issues

In the bilingual sessions on settlement issues there was always one group who sat with monolingual teachers and had to depend on the teachers’ ability to explain the content in very simple English. One learner, an Amharic speaker from another beginner class, reported to me that she was able to understand about 10 per cent of the content explained to her in L2. Contact was made with an Amharic assistant whose timetable and commitments at another centre prevented him from coming to St Albans.

**Issue:** Dependency on the bilingual assistants developed and hindered progress in speaking and listening. Less responsibility was taken for their learning.

**Response:** Learners were offset for the purposes of oral communicative tasks. Assistants were instructed to remind the learners of their need and opportunity to utilise classroom time to develop and practise these skills, given that very little English was spoken once they left the classroom. They encouraged them to speak to them in L2.
Chapter 16
Susan’s class

Susan Henenberg – AMES Springvale

Introduction
I have worked for AMES for over 20 years, teaching a range of adult ESL programs from low literacy to advanced level, which included task-based learning and organising work place components for learners. Coming from a migrant background myself, I have some personal insights into the refugee and resettlement experience.

I am currently teaching in a medium-sized centre in the south-eastern area of Melbourne.

The research context
Project focus
The focus of the research was to:

• investigate the use of the first language in the classroom
• explore the benefits to low-level learners of having bilingual assistance
• investigate the provision of limited bilingual support for learners from oral cultures with little literacy in either the L1 or English
• identify effective ways of working with bilingual assistants and volunteers.

Class profile
The class involved in this study met for fifteen hours every week, and this time was divided over four days. There was continuous enrolment during the program, which meant that the class profile tended to change over the course of the project, and some learners withdrew for a variety of reasons. There was an average enrolment of 21 learners. Attendance varied, but there were generally between 15 and 18 learners in the classroom.

Learner profile
Six months prior to this project, I began working with a group of low-literacy learners who, because of interrupted schooling, had between 0–6 years of schooling in total.

The 19 learners in the class – 16 female and 3 males – ranged in age from 24 to 53. A variety of language groups were represented in the classroom with the main languages spoken being Dinka, Nuer, Vietnamese, Chinese and Cambodian. Other languages represented were Afghani, Burmese and Turkish. In terms of their oracy skills, most were able to communicate basic personal information and to briefly describe their weekend activities. The range of literacy skills was extremely limited with most only being able to copy letters or words, but without comprehension. Some of the learners, however, were able to produce a short sentence based on a model.
Course goals
This was a very low-level class with low-levels of literacy and very limited amounts of previous schooling. As a result the goals of the class were necessarily limited, but the aims were to:

- develop oracy and literacy skills as appropriate for pre-beginners
- introduce learners to resources such as language master machines, audio-cassettes and basic computer-assisted language learning (CALL) programs in order to facilitate independent learning
- introduce basic learning strategies such as record keeping and the organisation of worksheets
- provide customised settlement information
- provide a supportive interactive learning environment.

L1 support in the classroom
In Term 4 of 2003, a Sudanese bilingual assistant became available to assist in the classroom. I also used bilingual volunteers drawn from classes with high-proficiency learners, and occasionally I had access to a Burmese interpreter. There was also a Chinese-Vietnamese and a Cambodian classroom assistant who participated in the program.

Apart from bilingual assistance in the classroom, learners attended information sessions arranged by the learning advisor. These were held in conjunction with Centrelink (the government-sponsored job-search agency) and Social Security. The information sessions provided information mainly about settlement issues, and bilingual assistance was provided for these to ensure that the students understood and could ask questions.

Bilingual picture dictionaries, shopping catalogues and simple readers were always available in class. Learners often used these materials during their break time or to supplement their classroom activities.

Other information about the class
ESL texts used included the video English everywhere everyday (Chau 2003), Listening to Australia. Beginner (Nicholson and Butterworth 2000), English for success 1 and 2 and CALL materials such as The alphabet (Westwood and Kaufman 1997) and The interactive picture dictionary (Protea Textware 1999). I also introduced some basic word-processing in the class.

A language master machine and cassette player were set up daily in the classroom for independent learning. I also developed dialogues and language-master cards for individual students. The ILC (Independent Learning Centre) sessions were very popular as learners were streamed into three groups and received a lot of individual attention. These sessions were organised into two oracy groups and a literacy group and were conducted by the ILC teacher and two volunteers. I was then free to induct new learners or conference with learners using bilingual assistance.

Management of L1 use in the classroom
Classroom interaction
As mentioned earlier, volunteers from high-proficiency classes, and a Burmese interpreter, were called on to assist learners outside the main language groups.
The Sudanese bilingual assistant spoke Dinka and Arabic. This suited the majority of Sudanese. However, one Nuba speaker who didn’t speak Dinka didn’t wish to use Arabic as a support and requested the bilingual assistant to address her in English.

Students sat in groups around tables. The Asian and Afghani learners often preferred to sit with their own language groups, whereas the Sudanese mixed more with the other nationalities. The classroom was often noisy during pair and group work on dialogue practice, text construction and pair dictation. Classroom presentations were informal and often interrupted by learners’ questions and comments. Those students who didn’t have access to language assistance tolerated these interruptions quite well. Daily lessons followed a fairly consistent pattern – often beginning with a short warm-up activity then moving to the main lesson point, which could be presented either as a dialogue or a short narrative. A reading/writing component followed which included the use of various word charts, dictation and copying from the board.

This consistency made everyone very comfortable. I was careful to limit the number of worksheets I handed out, usually no more than 15–20 per term. Worksheets were numbered and pre-punched to assist with filing. People who had missed a lesson could request a worksheet by number.

To ensure maximum student interaction, I used a 1, 2 numbering-off strategy whereby each student was numbered 1 or 2, and then all the number 1 students would be asked to stand up and find a number 2 partner, preferably someone from another table group. Everyone enjoyed this opportunity to choose another partner, which sometimes involved working out of their comfort zone for a short time. There was often some hilarity as, for example, a very tall Sudanese interacted with diminutive Vietnamese, or young learners chose a much older partner.

Sample activity

The chart in Figure 16 can be used for the following activities:

- Circle the word.
- Point out a sentence (for example, I come home at 7.00.).
- Call students to the front of the class to point out a sentence using a transparency of the chart projected onto the board.
- Seen dictation and pair dictation.
- Sentences from the chart can be used for various group work activities.

![Figure 16: A sample classroom activity - word charts](image-url)
This type of activity builds word recognition. Students enjoy the sense of achievement as learners realise they have progressed from word to meaningful sentence. They also enjoy helping and correcting each other, as well as experimenting with various sentence combinations. Having access to L1 assistance greatly enhanced all of these activities.

Content
A range of topics appropriate to these very low-level learners were covered in the class. These included: social dialogues, such as greetings, introductions, talking about what they had done at the weekend; and various interactive strategies, such as giving compliments to other people, making excuses for not being able to do something and apologies. In addition to being practised in the classroom, these were all recycled in class get-togethers and at morning teas.

We also covered a range of simple transactional dialogues, such as making simple requests (for example, in a shop), and enquiries about a variety of services and different locations. There was also some work included on orienting the learners to the centre in which they were enrolled, and this involved introducing vocabulary such as staff names and work titles (for example, Learning Advisor, Manager, Librarian) and forming sentences such as ‘Joan is the librarian’, ‘Lyndell is the learning advisor’. Centre excursions were very popular with this group and were followed up with various language-related activities, including dialogues which involved describing the weather and asking and giving opinions about a range of aspects of the excursions.

Language
L1 was used to fulfil a range of functions. Firstly, it was used to clarify the meaning of vocabulary items which were new to the learners. This is a common and useful use of L1 in the classroom, especially with very near beginners, as this group was. The L1 also proved very useful as a tool for surveying learner interests and to investigate their needs, particularly in relation to language learning and settlement issues, and to find out more information about their background and culture. L1 was also used to teach learners about, and encourage them to use, learning strategies which would be helpful with their learning. Thus, not only was the L1 used as a useful language learning tool, but it was also useful in getting to know the learners individually and helping them with the learning activities themselves. Finally, the L1 was useful for obtaining learner feedback about the class and activities in the class – always an important part of every course.

Evaluation of L1 use
Teacher perspective
This class of learners began as a very low-level class with limited literacy skills. By the end of the semester, some learners were ready to move up into the next level class. Some learners, however, withdrew from the class. The reasons for these withdrawals were those common to most new arrivals and included a range of factors such as settlement issues (difficulties in finding accommodation, finding jobs, etc), illness, pregnancy, employment and moving into higher-level classes.

Whenever I have had the opportunity to offer this type of program with bilingual support, it has confirmed my perception that this approach works because it returns the adult voice to the learners. They are empowered by being better able to communicate
their thoughts about the learning process and to make requests about their needs in terms of the learning process. This is crucial for adult learners who find themselves challenged by a lack of linguistic knowledge and unfamiliarity with the host culture.

Teacher perception of the learner response to L1 use

From my point of view as a teacher, the bilingual process allows me to find out more about the learners and respond by offering more customised instruction. I have always encouraged learners to use L1 in the class because of the positive classroom atmosphere it creates. It facilitates learners’ interaction with, and support for, one another.

Engaging with learners about their L1 is a simple and natural way to introduce meaning-making strategies. Teachers asking questions such as ‘What does this mean?’ ‘How do you say this?’ about L1 words and expressions models the strategy in a simple and natural way. When the teacher struggles to express herself in the learners’ L1, it leads into learner insights about intelligibility. It allows the learner to share a laugh with the teacher, and to realise that even teachers are not perfect learners.

Issues

Issue: Bilingual assistants provide a caring and valuable resource. However, they are sometimes unfamiliar with Australian classroom practices and norms. To some extent this is balanced by the assistance they are able to provide in conveying concepts and information for the teacher and the learner.

Response: There is an on-going need for training in order for the teacher to be able to make best use of the bilingual resources - both assistants and paper-based resources - so that both the teacher and the bilingual assistant can be confident about what they are doing in the classroom.

Issue: An issue I faced was the demand made on the assistants by others in the centre. Assistants were too often called out of class to assist with other learners or to interpret for a new enrolment.

Response: This is a difficult issue to deal with, but might be alleviated by simply discouraging others from calling bilingual assistants out of class except in an emergency.

Issue: There is an on-going need for bilingual materials for beginner learners with little literacy in their L1. These learners need bilingual audio rather than print resources.

Response: The excellent resource That’s life! (Hajncl and Livingstone 2002) could be modified to allow spoken word/picture matching rather than focusing on literacy. It would also be very helpful to have a bilingual audio version of Storyboard (WIDA Software 1987).

I also recommend the use of:

- more audiovisual readers using the format of Pictures to words (Power and Davies 1996)
- more bilingual volunteers
• more video material with a local focus to complement a settlement-focused language program.

References
Section 3

Where to now?
Chapter 17

Implications for L1 use - where to now?

Denise E Murray - Macquarie University, Sydney
Gillian Wigglesworth - The University of Melbourne

This volume has provided snapshots of several different adult ESL classes where first language support has been used effectively to help learners both to acquire English and to settle into their new country. A number of issues have arisen from the teachers’ action research – issues that have broad implications for the use of L1 in adult English language learning contexts. These include issues around:

• changes of attitude to the use of L1
• who provides L1 support and to what extent
• how to provide L1 support for changing client populations and the equity that follows lack of provision for all
• how L1 use provides a supportive environment for language learning.

Change of attitude to use of L1

Since the advent of audio-lingualism and increasingly widespread moves toward communicative language teaching, English language education over the past couple of decades - especially in mixed-language, ESL contexts for adults - has focused on learners using English as much as possible in the classroom. This insistence on using English was a reaction to earlier methodologies such as grammar translation. While bilingual programs have been offered for children and youths, the purpose of the use of L1 has been to help learners access the core school curriculum, not to support the learning of English.

As Zsuzsa (Chapter 7) notes, the attitude to the use of L1 in the AMEP has begun to change, largely because of the large numbers of learners arriving with no or very low English proficiency, often without literacy in their L1 and with minimal levels of schooling. Teachers, frustrated with their efforts to help these adult learners not only learn English, but also settle successfully in a new country, have seen the use of L1 as an important tool to achieve these two goals.

The settlement issues that face migrants to a new country are considerable and present daily challenges. These issues are far more complicated and difficult to deal with when they have to be negotiated in a language in which migrants have very limited proficiency. Some of the previous chapters (Chapters 14–16) describe bilingual input sessions that specifically address particular settlement needs. These provide a valuable resource for learners, and can then be followed up in regular class time.

Who provides L1 support and to what extent is it provided?

In the previous chapters, three major issues emerged around provision: who provides the L1 support and to what extent and to whom is it provided.

In four classes, L1 support was provided by the teacher and learners’ peers only. In seven classes, one or more bilingual assistants were available, and in four of those
classes a teacher was also bilingual (although Zsuzsa was also a bilingual teacher, in her case, her language was not one used by learners). In all classes, most learners were able to use their L1 to support each other. In some cases, there was cascading L1 support, as, for example, in the class team-taught by Ngoc Bui (Vietnamese/English bilingual teacher) and Patricia (English-only teacher) discussed in Chapter 9. In this class, Patricia often had her instructions translated by Ngoc Bui in Vietnamese and the Vietnamese/Khmer bilingual learners relayed the instructions in Khmer to the Mandarin/Khmer bilingual learner, who in her turn relayed the instructions to the Mandarin speakers in the class. In other classes, faster learners helped slower learners (for example, Ngoc Bui’s bilingual class in Chapter 5).

In six classes, teachers had the help of one or more bilingual assistants. One teacher (Zsuzsa) used her research project to examine the role of the two assistants in her class, finding that they needed (and wanted) instruction in classroom methodology and also an opportunity to improve their own English language skills. Several teachers noted a concern about the training of the assistants – both in English and in pedagogy. In Jacky’s class (Chapter 13) the assistants were at the same time enrolled in a training course. However, in the other five cases, assistants were drawn from previous students or bilinguals who had some educational training in their former countries (for example Bunna, in Chapter 9, who had been a teacher in Cambodia).

An issue that all teachers and learners identified was the extent to which the L1 was used. All agreed that the goal of instruction was to learn English and that L1 use was a support in that endeavour. They agreed that learners should not become over-reliant on being given explanations and help in L1. In some cases – such as Ella’s class (Chapter 3) – learners, while expressing relief at being able to understand difficult citizenship content through their L1, regretted that they couldn’t use English more. One aspect of this concern was that while teaching about the language (for example, grammar, vocabulary) was an important part of instruction, using the language was equally important and learners should have the opportunity to practise English.

Teachers and bilingual assistants used L1 for a variety of functions, such as giving instructions, explaining vocabulary and grammar, administration and for clarifying cultural issues. Ella (Chapter 3), for example, explained difficult vocabulary about reconciliation before learners read, discussed and translated a passage on this topic. This is in contrast to Ngoc Bui (Chapter 5) who presented material in English initially, using L1 to clarify. Mei Fong (Chapter 4) found she needed to explain the differences between teacher/student roles in Chinese education and in Australia.

L1 support for whom?

Two related issues emerged regarding who should receive support – ability to provide L1 support and for what level.

Within the AMEP, learner language backgrounds have changed markedly over the past decade, with new learner groups arriving from Africa and the Middle East who are presenting providers with new and different challenges to those from previous immigrant groups (Wigglesworth 2003). One challenge for providers is how to facilitate L1 support for such learners, especially since many of the learners from these emerging groups also have low literacy in their L1, and sometimes quite minimal levels of schooling. Thirty-four different languages were represented in the fourteen classes in this study. Clearly, it is not possible for bilingual assistance to be provided for all these languages, especially as the numbers of learners speaking some languages were quite
small; for example, there was only one speaker of each of the following languages: Croatian, Indian, Macedonian, Polish, Somali, Tamil and Thai.

The four bilingual classes did not necessarily represent the four most common languages amongst learners in the AMEP – the four most common languages being Mandarin, Arabic, Vietnamese and Cantonese, which accounted for 44.3 per cent of learners in 2003–4. Russian, on the other hand, accounted for only 2.5 per cent of the learners. However, what this indicates is that bilingual teachers may not always be available for all learners. Indeed, bilingual classes have not been offered for many of the most needy learners because of the lack of bilingual teachers of those languages (for example, Dinka, Amharic).

In seven classes, there was L1 support for a large variety of languages, including Arabic, Farsi, Khmer, Vietnamese, Assyrian, and Spanish. However, the choice of language for L1 support is an important issue and often means that teachers and providers need to know quite a lot about the learners’ language background in order to make appropriate choices. Several teachers reported that some learners preferred more scaffolded support in English, rather than bilingual support in a language they considered to be a colonial or oppressive one because of civil war in their country between linguistic groups. For example, in Susan’s class (Chapter 16), the Nuba speaker did not wish to use Arabic even though the Sudanese bilingual assistant spoke Arabic as well as Dinka (the language she was using with the Sudanese class members). Similarly, Anna (Chapter 12) found her Sudanese learners were reluctant to use Arabic.

Moreover, the southern Sudanese learners remarked that the dictionaries provided to them used ‘Lebanese Arabic’. The vocabulary and terminology used was unfamiliar to these southern Sudanese learners and they claimed that they were not ‘Arabic’. Salwa (the bilingual assistant) believes that Egyptian Arabic dictionaries would be closer to the Arabic used in Sudan and, hence, more appropriate.

These kinds of issues place additional planning burdens on the classroom teachers who need information not only about who needs L1 instruction, and what language(s) the learners speak, but also about what language is the most appropriate and acceptable for each individual learner.

Even where bilingual assistance was available, assistants were often required for other projects at the language centre or their days were changed – often with little warning – making lesson planning difficult for teachers. One teacher (Zsuzsa, Chapter 7) always arranged time with her two assistants prior to class, but this required her and them to be available outside their working hours.

Teachers and learners alike raised the issue of equity. Teachers who did not have L1 support for all learners in their class were very conscious of the need to provide additional support for those learners. Bilingual assistants were also aware of this, often helping learners in English, when they didn’t share a common language. Zsuzsa (Chapter 7), who had two bilingual assistants, used classroom arrangement as a way to ensure greater equity. She placed the groups of Chinese and Arabic speakers on each side of the classroom, with the mixed language group for whom there was no bilingual assistant in the middle, so she could focus her attention on these learners.

The teachers also agreed that L1 use was most appropriate for pre-beginner and beginner learners, especially slower-paced learners who may have had limited previous schooling, and that gradually L1 support should be removed. Older learners in particular seemed to both benefit and appreciate bilingual support with Ella (Chapter 3), Mei Fong (Chapter 4) and Sooi Lin (Chapter 11).
The affective dimension of L1 use

All teachers and bilingual assistants noted how learners’ confidence increased as a result of the use of L1 and how the use of L1 made language learning less stressful for these learners. Both Ella (Chapter 3) and Mei Fong (Chapter 4), for example, noted that learners lacked self-esteem because they were older than students in general classes and felt they could not compete with younger learners. Teachers (see for example Susan, Chapter 16) noticed that learners were able to engage in topics beyond their current level of competence in English, which helped them to perform as intelligent adults. This was especially the case for the high content citizenship course Ella taught. Teachers felt that retention rates were higher in classes with L1 use because the learners were more comfortable, could contribute more and also discuss their personal wishes for their classes. Mei Fong felt they had a better sense of belonging as well as increased self-esteem which contributed to retention, while both Bunna (Chapter 9) and Salwa (Chapter 10) – the bilingual assistants in their respective classes – observed that the learners felt they had someone they could trust in their new country when they had a bilingual assistant in their class. Sooi Lin (Chapter 11) also found L1 explanations led to learners’ acceptance of new teaching methodologies, such as role-play, in which they were at first reluctant to participate.

The acceptability of the use of L1 in the classroom encouraged more advanced or experienced learners to assist their classmates where they shared the same L1. As Sooi Lin (Chapter 11) explains, this engendered in the classroom a very positive team spirit, which contributed significantly to the learning environment.

Micro- or macro-scaffolding?

This project was conceived theoretically through the lens of scaffolding, with the belief that using the L1 to scaffold into English learning would facilitate that English learning. Recent research in Australia (Hammond and Gibbons 2001) has identified two types of scaffolding – pre-planned and contingent, which they call macro- and micro-scaffolding. They found that:

the hallmark of effective teaching lies both in teachers’ abilities to plan, select and sequence tasks in their programs in ways that take account of different levels and abilities of specific groups of students, and in their ability to make the most of the teachable moment. (pp 10–11).

These two types of scaffolding interact to provide effective pedagogical practices. Most uses of L1 by teachers and bilingual assistants in the classes reported on here could be described as micro-scaffolding; that is, scaffolding that occurred in situ as teachers and learners interacted in the teaching/learning enterprise. Zsuzsa (Chapter 7), for example, insisted that the bilingual assistants did not volunteer L1 help, but wait until learners explicitly requested help. Some teachers did preplan specific activities that would use L1 (for example, Forough’s worksheets for identifying signs, Chapter 8; Ella’s staging of L1 and L2 use, Chapter 3; and Ngoc Bui’s ‘on the phone snakes and ladders’ material in Vietnamese, Chapter 5). However, most teachers did not use the type of scaffolded strategies suggested in Chapter 2. One reason for this was the somewhat ad hoc nature of bilingual assistants’ availability mentioned above. A major reason for this uncertain availability is that providers are not specifically funded to provide L1 support and so have to use volunteers, or try to make use of staff in the centre who...
may also provide other services (for example, administration). One effect of this was to make the planning of macro-scaffolding activities difficult since the availability of bilingual assistants was sometimes erratic with teachers sometimes finding, as indicated by Ngoc and Patricia (Chapter 9), that their assistants had been called away to other activities in the centre, leaving them to deal with a lesson that was too complex for learners without some level of assistance. Macro-level scaffolding is also difficult to achieve where not all learners in a class have access to bilingual assistance, as was the case in several of the classes reported here (see for example, Sooi Lin, Chapter 11, and Shahan, Chapter 14).

In addition to this, there is very limited, if any, access to specific professional development in the area of bilingual assistance and first language use in the classroom - and this is perhaps an area that could be developed, particularly if appropriate funding were available.

Where to now?
This project clearly identifies that the use of L1 in the English language classroom assists learners in their acquisition of English, particularly because it reduces the stress of language learning, helps them deal with difficult concepts and explanations of teaching procedures, and provides a shortcut to understanding grammar and vocabulary. Extrapolating from the case studies reported on here, L1 support appears to be most appropriate with learners with low literacy in their L1 and for pre-beginners and beginners. As discussed in Chapter 1, however, there is currently a body of research which suggests that the use of L1 even in higher level classes might have beneficial effects, allowing learners to function at a higher cognitive level and to interact with tasks and activities in more depth. This is an area that has previously been addressed in foreign language classes and that could be further explored in the context of immigrant language programs.

The current study also demonstrates that teachers and bilingual assistants face considerable challenges as they attempt to use learners' L1. These challenges include equity for all learners; planned, structured L1 support through bilingual assistants being consistently in class; accurate bilingual materials; and, particularly, language and methodology training for both bilingual assistants and for the classroom teachers who work with them, as well as professional development activities directed at the teachers of bilingual classes (such as those reported in Chapters 3–6). All the teachers and bilingual assistants who were involved in this project, and whose reports are included in this book, were highly motivated and dedicated teachers who made the most of their ability to interact in more than one language. However, it should not be assumed that just because a teacher or bilingual assistant has access to two languages they are fully aware of the optimum ways in which to incorporate these skills into the classroom, or that they are familiar with the various theoretical positions that could be taken with respect to when, where and how to use the learners' L1. All these issues need to be addressed through professional development activities which will enhance the expertise of both teachers and bilingual assistants, in addition to encouraging optimal levels of learning.

Ideally, and particularly in the current climate of changed immigrant groups, we would recommend that centres be funded to provide specific L1 support for their most needy clients, and to provide training programs for both bilingual assistants, and for
bilingual teachers. Centres need to provide professional development opportunities for teachers who work with bilingual assistants and materials so they can make the best use of these resources. Additionally, materials writers need to produce more accurate bilingual materials, additional research could fruitfully be conducted on the use of L1 with higher level learners and more fine-grained analysis of classroom L1 and L2 discourse in adult language learning settings could be undertaken.

References


Section 4
Sample activities
When’s your birthday
你的生日是哪天？

My birthday’s 14th May.

Ask your friends and neighbours.
向朋友及鄰居查詢以下情況

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Birthday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Label the pictures. Use the words in the box.

用方格內的生詞，形容圖中人物的關係。

- mother
- children
- husband
- brother
- sister
- father
- wife

mother
What time is it?
現在幾點?

Tick the correct time.
在正確時間的方格內打勾

1. [ ] 4.15 [ ] 2.40 [ ] 9.20
2. [ ] 5.05 [ ] 8.55 [ ] 11.15
3. [ ] 1.30 [ ] 6.00 [ ] 5.05
4. [ ] 8.10 [ ] 2.44 [ ] 9.20
5. [ ] 6.12 [ ] 10.06 [ ] 2.30
6. [ ] 4.50 [ ] 11.05 [ ] 5.45
Sample activities

on the Phone
### Teaching in Action 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>No. of students: L1 - Chinese</th>
<th>No. of students: L1 - Arabic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Focus of lesson segment:**

- **Translating instructions:**

- **Translating word meanings:**

- **Explaining grammar structure:**

- **Helping with pronunciation:**

- **Explaining cultural differences:**

- **Other questions/requests:**

- **Comments/suggestions made by BSA:**
Sample activities

- Trains
- Airport
- Hospital
- Parking
- Go out
- English school
Teaching in Action 1

Telephone

Information

Go in

Stop

No drinking

College
Sample activities
Sample activities

- Single (độc thân)
- Divorced (li di)
- Separated (li thân)
- Widowed (góa)
- Married (có vợ / có chồng)
single

divorced

separated

widowed

married
Marital Status
BRAČNO STANJE

single
NEOŽENJEN / NEUDATA

divorced
RAZVEDEN / RAZVEDENA

separated
NE ŽIVE ZAJEDNO

widowed
UDOVAČ / UDOVICA

married
OŽENJEN / UDATA
Bilingual Session 5

The Cancer Council of Victoria

What does the Cancer Council Community Education Program do?

Who is the program for?

What did you find out about?

How can you get more information?
Bilingual Session

In language groups answer these questions.

1. What are your teachers’ names?

______________________________________________________

2. Who is your bilingual assistant?

______________________________________________________

3. Who is your Learning Advisor?

______________________________________________________

4. What is a Learning Advisor?

_________________________________________________________________________________

5. What days is she available?

_________________________________________________________________________________

6. How do you make an appointment to see her?

_________________________________________________________________________________

7. How many hours of English can you have?

_________________________________________________________________________________

8. Who pays for your classes?

_________________________________________________________________________________

9. What do you do if you want to stop classes?

_________________________________________________________________________________

10. What other learning options do you have?

_________________________________________________________________________________

11. If you miss a class, what should you do?

_________________________________________________________________________________

12. What telephone number do you call if you can’t come to class?

_________________________________________________________________________________

13. Who can you talk to if you have a problem?

_________________________________________________________________________________

14. Do you have any questions you want to ask?

_________________________________________________________________________________