

THE PEDAGOGICAL ENHANCEMENT OF CLASSROOM INTERACTION THROUGH THE USE OF CODE SWITCHING IN MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOMS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

Code switching constitutes one of many language contact phenomena and it can be understood by placing it in the double context of the speech economy of a multilingual society. It is a product of prolonged interaction among those who operate with shared beliefs regarding their own culture and communicating with others and is central to the understanding of human language and the making of meaning. The aim of this article is to explore whether code switching in the classroom environment can be an effective pedagogic tool to enhance teaching and learning and also expands the vocabulary of learners and the level of their communication in the classroom. The article also explores the distinctive nature of communication in the classroom environment by considering the different research paradigms and approaches that have been adopted in studying code switching in the classroom. The issue of code switching from the learner's first language (L1) and the second language (L2), which is usually the language of teaching and learning, is the focus in which this article is approached. This research study employs qualitative method in an attempt to interrogate the existing literature on classroom interaction using code switching as the basis of its argument.

Keywords: code switching, communication, multilingualism, learning, classroom

Introduction

Because of the multilingual nature of South Africa, multilingual classrooms are becoming more common in many schools as is the range of mother tongues that children have. The term multilingual has been defined differently by different scholars with different approaches. However, for the purpose of this discussion, multilingual should be

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understood as the ability to use two languages in some proportion in order to facilitate learning by learners who have a native proficiency in one language and are acquiring proficiency in another language. The learning of English has become an area of interest in English language teaching research in countries around the world (Gainer and Lapp, 2010) and this applies to the South African context as well. Gardner and MacIntyre (1991) have identified multiple factors involved in language teaching and learning, including cognitive and affective factors, and a range of miscellaneous factors that include the age and sociocultural experiences of the learners.

It is recognised that the effectiveness of the language learning process relates to learners' levels of first language acquisition (Wu, 2010; Gregersen, 2003; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Price, 1991). Classroom interaction amongst bilinguals and multilinguals can be stalled by the language used and learners' low levels of competency in the second language (L2). For the purpose of this research, multilingual classroom should be understood to refer to a situation of linguistic diversity among learners. In South Africa, multilingual classrooms are largely to be found in historically 'white' schools (English-and/or Afrikaans-medium) where there is an increase in the enrolment of learners from African language background. This article argues that code switching can be an effective tool for teaching multilingual classes, and that a better understanding of code switching and of bilingualism can have a beneficial impact both on the quality of teaching and on learners' performance. However, this depends on the linguistic competence of the speakers using code switching. Teachers who are educating non-native speakers of English encounter a number of challenges, especially as regards the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL). In most cases, they use the phenomenon of code switching or switching from one language to another in their lessons to enhance their teaching techniques. The study of code switching is often associated with second language (L2) learning in the classroom environment and it is at the centre of interest where bilingual and multilingual speakers are the focus of discussion. Important changes are taking place in learners' classroom environments globally and in South Africa, particularly as regards the question of language of instruction in relation to learners who are speakers of L2 languages. These changes are exerting some

language pressure on teachers and learners alike, and sometimes require a "cross-language" approach. This article sets out to address a range of issues encountered in classrooms where learners are not mother-tongue speakers of the language of teaching and learning. A cross-language approach involves the use of more than one language at the same time in the classroom where there is a lack of competency on the part of the learners and/or teachers in the language of instruction and/or the L2 language(s). The literature on classroom code switching will be explored, and where appropriate, used to support the arguments raised.

Research objectives

- i. To explore the use of code switching in classroom environments in order to enhance teaching and learning in multilingual classrooms.
- ii. To identify existing teaching and classroom management strategies used by teachers in multilingual classrooms.

Theoretical framework

The analysis in this article is grounded on a sociocultural view of language, backed by the theories of Bakhtin (1998) and Bourdieu (1991). The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and the Direct Method (DM) are also considered as theories that navigate the discussion closer to the classroom environment. The underlying assumption is that each learner in the classroom simultaneously constructs and is constructed by the discourses that surround him or her, and such communally constructed discourses define not only the group dynamic but also the individual identities of group members. The Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was in use in English Second Language (ESL) classrooms for some time, but the Direct Method (DM) has replaced it as perhaps the dominant approach to language learning. As against the latter two approaches, Nation (2003) introduces a so-called Balanced Approach, according to which teachers need to show respect for learners' L1 and to avoid behaving in ways that make the L1 appear to be inferior to their L2, which may often be English but it is the English teacher's job to help learners to develop their proficiency in English, and the importance of maximizing L2 use in the classroom is also emphasized.

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In all the discussions of code switching, the role of the mother tongue in foreign language classrooms is crucial (Butzkamm 2003). Other important factors are the extent to which students use their mother tongue in a task-based classroom (Carless 2007), L1 use in the L2 classroom (Edstrom 2006), bilingual pedagogy in EFL (Forman 2010) and first language and target language in the foreign language classroom (Littlewood and Yu, 2009).

Turnbull (2001) claims that support for the exclusive use of the target language in the classroom is losing ground and that many researchers are now in favour of the appropriate use of the L1 in ESL classrooms when it is understood to be the facilitator of learning. According to this view, the use of L1 by L2 learners enables them because in it, they already possess a language system with its many levels of communicative and functional usage. Auer (1984) acknowledges the positive role of the mother tongue in the classroom, arguing that it supports many learning functions, including more effective classroom management, better language analysis, a greater understanding of rules-governed grammar, room to discuss cross-cultural issues, the giving of instructions or prompts, explaining errors and checking comprehension, among others. Despite the fact that code switching is one of the significant and idiosyncratic features of bilingual behaviours, its use has often been regarded negatively, particularly in educational scenarios. However, there is a perceptible incongruity between the code switching that is routinely observed to occur in bilingual communities and the focus on avoiding opportunities for code switching that has been common in educational settings.

Literature on classroom code switching

Code switching in this article will be defined very broadly as the use of more than one language within a single utterance, irrespective of the level of integration between the languages. There is a distinction in the literature between code switching and borrowing, also referred to as “transference,” in which a single lexical item appears in a sentence or utterance otherwise entirely offered in one language (Clyne, 2000). There is some debate in the field about how to distinguish code switching from borrowing. Research has been conducted to understand

and explain the functions of code switching in wider social contexts (Calteaux 1994; Finlayson & Slabbert 1997; Kamwangamalu 1998; Mesthrie 1995; Makoni 1999). Few local studies have been carried out on the role of code switching in education in South Africa (Adendorff 1993; Kieswetter, 1995; Du Plessis 1995; Setati, 2002, 2005). If all learners in a conversation share linguistic background, there is no problem envisaged or communication breakdown caused by the use of code switching. However, code switching becomes a source of problem only when one party is not privy to the meanings of the words or phrases used in all languages. In such a case, learners will, from time to time, repair a code switch by repeating their utterance in the language that other learners will comprehend.

Myers-Scotton (1997), Poplack (1980) and Sankoff and Poplack (1981) have attempted to identify and model formal linguistic constraints on code switching. Other researchers, among them Gumperz (1982) and Myers-Scotton (1993), have investigated code switching in social terms, with the aim of explaining the sorts of linguistic choices that people make when they use two languages. From a cross-disciplinary perspective code switching can be regarded as an interaction between speakers in the course of a single communicative episode, and the use of more than one language. Scholars such as Auer (1984), Gumperz (1982) and Myers-Scotton (1993) have investigated language alternation from a socio-functional perspective, arguing that the use of two languages in the same conversation performs specific interactional tasks for speakers in a conversation, and is not a random phenomenon.

Evolving dynamics of code switching

Code-switching demonstrates that fluent bilinguals use code-switching as they use many other linguistic resources, drawing on both (or all) of the codes available to them in patterned and structured ways in order to express their meanings (Chung, 2006; Clyne, 2000; Myers-Scotton, 1995; Poplack, 2000). Code switching can occur wherever there is a question of contact or interaction between speakers of different languages, or of the use of different codes by bilingual or multilingual speakers. Simply put, code switching may occur in any situation in which more than one language is used in the same place at the same time. Since the earliest systematic investigations of the phenomenon, research aimed at describing and explaining the features and

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manifestations of code switching has produced a number of more detailed definitions varying in specificity and using a range of theoretical models.

It has become common recently for English First Language-EFL teachers to use the students' mother tongue as a tool for conveying meaning. Research has shown that a complete deletion of L1 in an L2 situation can be inappropriate (Butzkamm, 2003; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Nation, 2003; Schweers, 1999). There are some benefits in the use of L1 for learners who are not proficient in L2. Brown (2000) indicates that the use of a first language can be a facilitating factor for effective learning, rather than acting as interference to learning. Schweers (1999) encourages teachers to incorporate a relevant native language in their lessons to encourage an effective classroom dynamic, and also suggests that starting with the L1 provides learners with a sense of security while also validating their lived experiences and allowing them to express themselves. It has been shown that excluding a student's L1 for the sake of maximizing his or her exposure to the L2 is not necessarily productive (Dujmovic, 2007).

However, recent research on the use of L1 in the classroom context has revisited this position, and considered the possibility that integrating the L1 in classroom communication might in fact accelerate L2 learning (Turnbull 2001). Researchers tend to agree that the L2 can be used in teaching. The question at issue here concerns the role of the L1 and the extent to its use might be beneficial to learning, and on this matter we find a range of views (Turnbull and Arnett 2002).

Furthermore, recent years have seen a growth in the influence of poststructuralist accounts that see language not as a set of static "codes" with solid boundaries but rather, as a collection of fluid resources in meaning-making practices (Pennycook, 2010). These views, which are part of a scholarly trend with regard to L2 learning, have been expressed in a number of different ways and with the use of different technical terms, but they converge on a shared idea, that the process of learning a language is aimed at achieving the ability to use it effectively as a means of argument and persuasion.

Canagarajah (2011) uses the term “code-meshing”, whilst García, (2009) and Creese and Blackledge (2010) prefer the term “translanguaging”. They use these terms to reconceptualise the term “code switching” as a social practice that forms part of the everyday social life, but they are part of a wider trend in this direction. Indeed, Lewis, Jones and Baker (2012:649) identify an overabundance of terms that are currently in use or which have been advanced as denotations for the phenomenon now often referred to as “translanguaging”:

A plethora of similar terms (e.g., metrolingualism, polylinguaging, polylingual languaging, heteroglossia, codemeshing, translanguaging practice, flexible bilingualism, multilinguaging, and hybrid language practices) makes this extension of translanguaging appear in need of focused explication and more precise definition. Such varied terms are competitive with “translanguaging” for academic usage and acceptance.

As it has been noted, a variety of terms have been suggested by a number of scholars, but for the purposes of this discussion the term “code switching” is used as an operational term to refer to this phenomenon. Further complicating the picture, it is noted that a number of different terms and phrases are used in academic discourse to refer to the distinction between speakers’ home languages and those they learn in the classroom. Turnbull and Dailey-O’Cain (2009) write about first language (L1) use in second- and foreign-language (L2) classrooms, while Mahboob (2011) writes about the use of local languages in English classes and Brooks-Lewis (2009) writes about the incorporation of L1 in foreign language teaching and learning.

Code switching as a tool in the classroom

Code switching has been understood to be an important part of the debate about bilingual and multilingual classrooms for almost three decades. According to Martin-Jones (1995), research on code-switching has necessarily been cross-disciplinary in nature, involving a range of areas including educational research on classroom interaction, conversational analysis, language pragmatics and the ethnography of communication. Code switching is common in classrooms all over the world, but it is sometimes met with negativity or outright disapproval. Influential pedagogical theories have argued that mixing languages in

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the classroom context is strongly contraindicated because it involves a contamination of the languages so used, and therefore jeopardizes learners' opportunities to acquire a different language, and this view has been widely adopted by educational authorities. Some have even argued that code switching is a dysfunctional form of speech behaviour (Ferguson, 2009). In some places, such as Hong Kong, there have been official calls for teachers to refrain from what is called "mixed code" teaching (Lin, 1996).

For example, the teacher can use code switching when presenting new concepts to learners in biology lesson. The learners can illustrate the breathing system using a biological model constructed from improvised materials. The teacher explains the system as follows:

I-inhalation *yindlela yokudonsa* i-oxygen *kanti* exhalation *yindlela yokukhipha* i-carbon dioxide.

"Inhalation is the process of breathing in oxygen and exhalation is breathing out carbon dioxide."

But applied linguists have taken a different view on code switching. Adendorff (1993:142), for instance, regards classroom code switching as a useful communicative resource, particularly when learners lack proficiency in subjects that pose challenges for them. He views code switching as a communicative resource that enables teachers and learners to accomplish a range of social and educational objectives. On this view, classroom code switching can enable learners to grasp lesson contents that are taught in a language with which they are not familiar. If code-switching helps students to better grasp an idea, then it should be encouraged (Low, 2013).

This is another example that could be explored. The teacher uses this type of code switching during the lesson to give information to the students.

Akesibuke at the breathing *ngezinsizakusebenza azibambile uLinda*.
When *udonsa* iplastic, i-ballon *iyafutheka* and this is the way *esingenisa ngayo umoya*. *Akunjalo yini?*

“Let us look at the breathing apparatus that Linda is holding. When you pull the plastic bag downwards, the balloon relaxes, and this is the way to breathe in. Isn't it?”

Ferguson (2003) proposes three functional categories of code switching in subject classrooms as part of his argument that the practice has a communicative value. Firstly, code switching can be useful for constructing and transmitting knowledge. This idea is based on the premise that it is difficult for learners to understand new concepts if the language of instruction and of the texts used is one with which they are not proficient. Teachers who employ code switching in such situations are able to explain written texts and provide instruction in a language with which students are familiar.

Secondly, on Ferguson's view, code switching has a pedagogic function in that it facilitates classroom discourse. And thirdly, he suggests that code switching is effective in interpersonal relations and it therefore offers opportunities to humanize the classroom, which is seen not only as a place of formal learning, but also as a social and affective environment where teachers and learners negotiate relationships and identities.

Recent research on code switching in bilingual circumstances has, however, shed light on the function of code switching as a communicative resource. Studies by Lin (1996), Rubdy (2007) and Moodley (2007) of typical classrooms in multilingual societies outside the United States of America have demonstrated that the monolingual ideology of the classroom and the multilingual linguistic reality of the world around it were in conflict, and that this was evident in the code switching that teachers and learners actually produced in classrooms. Rubdy (2007) describes how a monolingual ideology was resisted in one particular classroom and provides a view of code switching as a useful pedagogical resource.

The function of L1 in an L2 classroom

In the classroom context, code switching forms an important part of the debate on second language acquisition. Studies of language acquisition, second language acquisition and language learning use the term “code

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switching” either to describe bilingual speakers’ or language learners’ cognitive linguistic abilities, or to describe classroom or learner practices involving the use of more than one language (Romaine 1989; Cenoz & Genesee 2001; Fotos 2001).

Bucholtz and Hall (2005) base their own work on language and identity in socio-cultural linguistics, a broad interdisciplinary field concerned with the intersection of language, culture and society. From this point of view, a teacher may use code switching in class when teaching, but this is not necessarily conscious act, but rather an unconscious effort to accommodate learners who are struggling to grasp the sense of the lesson. It is an attempt to overcome the challenges that learners face when they encounter difficulties in learning the material of a lesson due to a language barrier. According to this view, language should always be understood in terms of its functions, its roles in making meaning, for all language use involves meaning-making (Levin 2011:36).

Recent research shows that that the use of L1 can actually provide more time to practice L2 because the use of L1 can help to achieve a more rapid comprehension of the material. L1 can be used as an alternative language for clarification purposes, especially after attempts to communicate ideas in L2 have not yielded positive results. The idea is that L1 can play a supportive and facilitating role in the classroom (Tang, 2002), even if is not the primary language of communication. Hamin and Majid (2006) investigated the effectiveness of the use of L1 to generate ideas for second language writing, and found an enhancement in the writing performance of learners who used their first language to generate ideas; their explanation for this was that using L1 helped to trigger learners’ background knowledge. Elementary learners who are not proficient in L2 must always think before they speak and this inner speech happens in L1 (Auerbach, 1993).

L1 use in thinking allows students to become more aware of the similarities and differences between cultures and linguistic structures, and thus help to improve the accuracy of their translations between L1 and L2. By using L1 alternatingly with L2, learners may perform cognitively better in linguistic tasks than when they were limited to communicating only in the language they are trying to learn. L1

vocabulary allows learners to use levels of expression that they may not yet possess in L2, and they may need to do so to process ideas more effectively and reach higher levels of understanding. Alternating between L1 and L2 also allows learners to repeatedly evaluate and clarify communication with regard to choice of content and register appropriate to the task (Wells, 1999).

The effects of L1 in the classroom environment

L1 language plays an important role in teaching language skills and sub-skills and also in classroom activities. Use of L1 offers the teacher a wide range of functions that can provide learners with a learning environment that enables them to be successful. Butzkamm (2003) believes that successful learners capitalize on the vast amount of linguistic skills and world knowledge they have accumulated via the mother tongue, and that the use of code switching in the classroom can significantly boost learners' performance.

Mattioli (2004) lists five positive functions of the use of L1 in an EFL classroom. These functions are:

i. Explaining vocabulary

Clear explanation helps learners to understand better. An item can be defined in familiar terms in L1 for learners who are not familiar with a particular term used in L2. For example, a science teacher who is trying to explain a Square Kilometre Array (SKA) to a class consisting of Nguni language learners could define and describe the installation in a Nguni language so that learners are able to understand it.

This might be a description such as the following: 'Uhlelo lokusakaza oluqoqa ulwazi lweSayensi ibanga elithi alibe yisikwelekhilomitha esisodwa' (A radio telescope project that has a total surface area of approximately one square kilometre). In this way, Nguni language learners in the classroom can impart to learners an idea of a large telescope project. Further explanations might help them to understand that the project addresses a broad range of questions concerning the evolution of the galaxy, general cosmology, fundamental physics and astrobiology.

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ii. Giving instructions

Sometimes it might appear that learners are not doing what they are asked to do, or that they are not performing as expected because they are defying the instructions given.

“Sipho, put the palms of your hands at the side of your chest, breathe in deeply and breathe out. What happens to your chest?”

Sipho responds to the instruction given by the teaching by putting his hand on his stomach and does not breathe in and out as instructed. However, it might be that he did not understand the instructions given to him because it was were given in L2. Giving learners instructions in a language that they understand better would help them to follow instructions more easily. For example: Sipho, *beka izandla zakho* at the side chest, *bese udonsa umoya*. What happens *esifubeni sakho*?

iii. Reprimanding students

A formal expression of disapproval of a learner’s wrongdoing can also be more effective in a language that he or she understands readily. A reprimand is a severe rebuke, the more so when it is issue in a formal context by a person who is in authority.

Please *thulani umsindo* now *ukuze nikuzwisise kahle lokhu*.

“Please be quiet now so that you can understand this.

iv. Talking to individual students.

When learners are addressed in a language that they understand what they are told “goes to their heart” – it means something to them in a more direct way. Using a language with which they are more familiar helps to foster a sense of belonging in learners and it also easier to reassure by using their language. When teachers switch to the language of their learners, they are able to reach them and to put across their message more effectively.

L1 and code switching in context in the classroom

There is a new emphasis on the relevance and pedagogic purpose of using L1 in the classroom context. However, a haphazard use of the mother tongue may be an unwanted side-effect of an effective monolingualism, and it is often employed today by disaffected teachers (Butzkamm 2003).

A succinct description of the role of L1 in an EFL context is presented by Larsen–Freeman (2000). Larsen–Freeman (2000) supports the role of the mother tongue in the classroom procedures and summarizes the role of L1 in various ELT methods. It is worth mentioning that not all the methods suggested by Larsen-Freedman will be considered in this discussion. Only those that contribute to the enhancement of classroom communication are discussed.

i. Grammar Translation Method

According to this method, the meaning of a term in the target language will be made clearer to learners by translating it into their native language. On this approach, the students' native language will in fact be the one mostly used in class. This method depends on the teacher's competency in the students' mother tongue, of course, but it can assist students to grasp content more quickly.

ii. Silent way

This method supports the use of the students' native language in that it can be used to give instructions when necessary, and to help a student improve his or her pronunciation. The native language is also used (at least at beginning levels of proficiency) during feedback sessions.

iii. Suggestopedia

According to Larsen-Freedman, this method makes use of native-language translation to make the meaning of a dialogue clear. The teacher also uses the native language in class when necessary. Stages are identified in which the translation into the native language can be discontinued. As the course proceeds, the teacher uses the native language less and less.

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iv. Community Language Learning

Larsen-Freedman says that this method supports the use of L1 because a student's sense of security is initially enhanced by using their native language. The purpose of L1 is to provide a bridge from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Directions in class and sessions during which students express their feelings and are understood are conducted in their L1.

The functions of code switching in a classroom

As it has been noted, code switching can play a positive role in the classroom. The first function of code switching is the speaker's choice of a linguistic code. The conversation between the speaker and the addressee is usually determined by the choice of words used by the speaker because the speaker's word choice reflects his or her understanding of the language used by both the speaker and the addressee. In this case, teachers in a multilingual classroom tend to choose words that they think will be easily grasped by the learners to understand the content of the lesson.

Scotton (1983:116) says that the choice of one code rather than another is driven by the "negotiation principle", which underpins code switching as follows:

Code switching directs the speaker to choose the form of your conversation contribution such that it symbolises the set of rights and obligations which you wish to be in force between Speaker and Addressee for the current exchange.

The linguistic code is chosen on the basis that the speaker is fully aware that the addressee will not encounter difficulties in grasping the sense of an expression used. In a classroom situation, the teacher can regard switching from one language to another as a tool that will assist learners in understanding the content. As Myers-Scotton (1998:152) asserts, code switching is both a tool and an action by which a result is brought about.

Gumperz's second function of code switching is interjection.

Interjection in a classroom situation, especially in multilingual classrooms, occurs when a linguistic term is not known and its use could hinder learning. In such situations learners will, from time to time, purposefully interrupt the teacher in order to bring to his or her attention their difficulty in grasping the sense of a particular linguistic term used of the teacher. Code switching is an available solution.

A third function of code switching is repetition. Teachers use repetition to emphasise a particular term for the benefit of the learners in their classrooms. For example, if learners seem to struggle to understand a term used in English, the teacher can code switch to the learners' L1, repeating the term several times for the benefit of the learners.

Moodley (2007) explored the classroom environment in South Africa, in particularly the situation in which many learners of English as a second language have been immersed in English-medium classrooms because the education policy in place insisted on this approach. Moodley found that learners' code is switched for several reasons: to seek clarification, for elaboration, for reiteration, in the interests of group management, to express their answers to questions and their points of view and to "claim the floor". On this basis, Moodley proposes that code switching can be "strategic" even though it is an "automatic" phenomenon in classrooms where the majority of learners are multilingual.

Conclusion

The ethnographic observation used as a base for this discussion indicates that code switching in the language of the classroom is conditioned by people's ideas as regards dealing with oral and written language. Events of literacy are carried out mostly in the "acceptable", standard language, while oral events are mostly subjected to linguistic variation. Having considered the literature on classroom code switching, it has emerged from this discussion that code switching can contribute immensely to learners' comprehension of the content taught when it is used in a classroom environment with learners from different language backgrounds. Code switching in the classroom environment can be an effective pedagogic tool in that it expands the vocabulary of learners and the level of communication between the teacher and the learners, especially in multilingual classrooms. It is very difficult to prevent the use of code switching in classrooms and possibly

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detrimental, and its value for teaching and learning is becoming more and more evident. Indeed, code switching can be seen as a linguistic tool that multilingual speakers have available to them without its having been explicitly taught to them or their being consciously aware of it. Educators need to be aware of the widespread nature of the phenomenon (Kieswetter 1995; Kamwangamalu 1998).

The use of L1 in the L2 classroom by both teachers and students can be beneficial in the language learning process and may even be necessary for increased comprehension and acceptance of the new language by the language learners. L1 should be used only for purposes of clarification and should not be the primary mode of communication either by the students or teacher(s) in an L2 classroom. When an appropriate balance between L1 and L2 is achieved, the use of L1 may enhance an L2 classroom.

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