



To use or not to use the learners' own language ...

Aim

This resource aims to: present different views about the use of the learners' own language in the English language class encourage teachers to critically examine their current classroom practices, particularly the use of their learners' own language for classroom management purposes Time: 15 minutes

Suitable for trainee teachers and new teachers working with monolingual classes at low levels, and who can speak their learners' own language.

Part 1

Many teachers think the learners' own language (L1) should be used in the English language classroom. Others believe only English should be used.

Some experts (Levine, 2003; Mitchell, 1988; Widdowson, 2003) believe that learners normally use their own language to help them learn English. If teachers try to stop them from using their L1, learners will continue to use it to learn English anyway. Also, using English all the time can be too much for learners at low levels, so using L1 helps them feel less anxious about learning English.

Others, however, believe that it is unnecessary to use the learners' L1, because learners can (and should) learn English in English from the start. If teachers and learners use the learners' L1, this does not encourage the learners to communicate in English.

Part 2

Do you think it's a good idea to use your learners' L1? Or do you feel it should never be used in the classroom? Whatever your views, what matters is to help learners learn English, and make them feel comfortable using English. Here are two ideas to help low-level monolingual classes follow your lessons.

1. Language bath

This involves using mostly English for classroom management. This is possible if you:

- give instructions using short, simple, easy sentences in English
- show your learners what you want them to do.
- give clear examples.



2. Sandwiching

Suppose your learners don't understand what you are saying. You can use *sandwich language* to help them understand. This involves:

- saying the phrase that your learners don't know in English, e.g. A word is missing.
- translating it quickly into their L1, e.g.: (in Spanish) Falta una palabra.
- repeating it in English, e.g. *A word is missing.*

It is important to use this technique carefully as it does not mean translating everything all the time.

Both techniques *Language bath* and *Sandwiching* appear in Cook, G (2010) *Translation in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Task: Using L1 in my teaching

The aim of this task is to give you an opportunity to:

- analyse your current practice in terms of the language(s) you use for managing your class(es)
- think about the reasons why you use English and/or your learners' own language

Work through the worksheet given overleaf.



Worksheet – Which language do you use?

Which language do you use to do the following things in the classroom? Choose the alternative that best reflects how you manage your classes by ticking the appropriate box on the second column of the table below. Then think of the reasons why you use the language you use, and write your ideas on the third column.

Classroom activities	Language(s) you use	Why do you use English or the learners' L1?
1. Greet learners	Only English <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly English <input type="checkbox"/> 50/50 <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly my learners' L1 <input type="checkbox"/>	
2. Explain the aims of the lesson	Only English <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly English <input type="checkbox"/> 50/50 <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly my learners' L1 <input type="checkbox"/>	
3. Give instructions	Only English <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly English <input type="checkbox"/> 50/50 <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly my learners' L1 <input type="checkbox"/>	
4. Check that learners have understood your instructions	Only English <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly English <input type="checkbox"/> 50/50 <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly my learners' L1 <input type="checkbox"/>	
5. Monitor the learners while they are working on a task	Only English <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly English <input type="checkbox"/> 50/50 <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly my learners' L1 <input type="checkbox"/>	
6. Signal transitions (e.g. tell learners to stop what they're doing)	Only English <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly English <input type="checkbox"/> 50/50 <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly my learners' L1 <input type="checkbox"/>	
7. Present new language (e.g. grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc.)	Only English <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly English <input type="checkbox"/> 50/50 <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly my learners' L1 <input type="checkbox"/>	



Classroom activities	Language(s) you use	Why do you use English or the learners' L1?
8. Check or test learners' understanding of what you have taught	Only English <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly English <input type="checkbox"/> 50/50 <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly my learners' L1 <input type="checkbox"/>	
9. Correct errors and give feedback	Only English <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly English <input type="checkbox"/> 50/50 <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly my learners' L1 <input type="checkbox"/>	
10. Answer learners' questions	Only English <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly English <input type="checkbox"/> 50/50 <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly my learners' L1 <input type="checkbox"/>	
11. Chat, joke, etc. with the learners	Only English <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly English <input type="checkbox"/> 50/50 <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly my learners' L1 <input type="checkbox"/>	
12. Control or discipline the learners	Only English <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly English <input type="checkbox"/> 50/50 <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly my learners' L1 <input type="checkbox"/>	
13. Set homework	Only English <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly English <input type="checkbox"/> 50/50 <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly my learners' L1 <input type="checkbox"/>	
14. Other (please specify):	Only English <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly English <input type="checkbox"/> 50/50 <input type="checkbox"/> Mostly my learners' L1 <input type="checkbox"/>	
Overall, I use: only English <input type="checkbox"/> mostly English <input type="checkbox"/> 50/50 <input type="checkbox"/> mostly my learners' L1 <input type="checkbox"/>		

Read through your choices and your reasons for these choices in the table above. Could you do anything in a different way to make sure you help learners and make them feel comfortable using English?