

The Effectiveness of Using L1 in Teaching L2 Grammar

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Abstract

The present paper investigates the use of the students' mother tongue, the Arabic language (L1), in teaching grammar topics and constructions of the English language (L2) to find out whether the use of L1 in teaching the grammar of L2 affects the students' comprehension and learning outcome. The participants were 26 level two male students of the English Program at Buraydah Community College, Qassim University. They were divided into two groups; the experimental group studied in L1 teaching context and the control group studied in the usual L2 teaching context. The grammar lesson, "the passive and the active voice" was chosen as the grammar topic. Data was obtained through pre-post tests, students and teachers feedback. The statistical analysis and the comparisons of the scores of the two groups show that the use of L1 in teaching L2 grammar does not benefit the students since the scores of the control group members (who were taught in L2) are higher than those achieved by the experimental group members (who were taught by the use of L1).

Key Words: using L1, teaching grammar, L1 and L2, learning outcome.

1.0 Introduction

The use of students' first language (L1) in teaching a second language (L2) has been debated for many years. During the last fifty years, the use of L1 in teaching (L2) has been an active area of debate among methodologists as well as teachers and professionals. (Auerbach 1993, Atkinson 1987, Haycraft 1978, and Harmer 1997, among others). The question that has been investigated by those writers and others is whether to activate the use of the native language (L1) in teaching the target language (L2) or to prohibit it.

Many methodologists and teaching professionals have adopted the general assumption that L2 ought to be learned not by the use of L1, which has to be prohibited in the classroom. Among those are Ellis (1984) and Bouangeune (2004). On the other hand, other teaching professionals have advocated the assumption that the use of L1 in teaching L2 is very useful in increasing both comprehension and learning, or serves a supportive and facilitating role in the classroom (see Cook, 2001 and Tang, 2002).

The present paper discusses the general assumption that has prevailed for sometimes in the literature, which states that English language should not be taught by the use of L1, which has to be prohibited in the classroom. In fact, some teachers have expressed the fact that the students cannot appreciate the target language when they are exposed continually to their L1 (Bouagneune 2009).

2.0 Research problem

The problem of the use or non-use of L1 in teaching L2 is still controversial. As mentioned above, some researchers, on one hand, still adopt the view that L1 can be effective in the process of learning L2 and the occasional use of L1 by both teachers and students increases both comprehension and learning of L2. Moreover, the frequent use of L1 allows the students to be aware of the similarities as well as differences between cultures and linguistic structures and improves their translation skills (for more details see Wells, 1999; Cook 2001 and Tang 2002).

On the other hand, some teaching professionals still maintain the assumption that learning L2 has nothing to do with the use of L1; subsequently, the continuous use of L1 in the classrooms hinders the process of learning and comprehension of the students. Moreover these professionals stress the fact that L1 has no essential role to play in learning L2, conversely, the use of L1 may deprive learners of valuable input in the L2 (see Bouagneune, 2009 and Ellis, 1984 for further details).

The present study endeavors to investigate the validity of the use of L1 (the Arabic language) in teaching L2 (the English language) in the Saudi tertiary context which to the best of my knowledge has not been dealt with in depth in previous studies.

3.0 Objective of the study

The main issue of the present study is to provide tangible evidence for using or prohibiting L1 in teaching the grammar of L2. To achieve this purpose, the study will attempt to answer the following questions:

- 1- Does the use of L1 (i.e. Arabic) in teaching L2 grammar facilitates or hinders the process of understanding English grammar lessons?
- 2- Does the use of L2 only (i.e. English) in teaching L2 grammar facilitates or hinders the process of understanding English grammar lessons?

4.0 Research hypothesis

In order to answer the previous questions, the present study will try to prove or disprove the following hypothesis: "The use of L1 in teaching the grammar of L2 has a positive impact on the students' process of understanding."

5.0 Limitations of the study

- 1- The population of participants is not large.
- 2- The gender is limited to male students only.
- 3- Only one grammar subject was selected.

6.0 Review of literature

There are two dominating attitudes that prevail in the literature of the un/availability of L1 in teaching grammar issues of L2. The first attitude calls for the importance of the use of L1, even in limited

situations, in teaching issues of L2. On the other hand, the second attitude bans the use of L1 in teaching issues of L2. Nunan & Lamb (1996), Tang (2002), Cook (2001), Wells (1999), Auerbach (1993), and Atkinson (1987) represent the first attitude. They all have emphasized the importance of the use of L1 in teaching L2 as this may facilitate learning and comprehension on the part of the students.

Nunan & Camb (1996) stress the impossibility of non-use of the mother tongue in English classrooms. Tang (2002) argues and claims that L2 is best learned through massive exposure to L1, whereas, Cook (2001) and Wells (1999) stress on the occasional use of L1 by both teachers and students to increase both comprehension and learning. Auerbach (1993) suggests that the use of L1 provides a sense of security and validates the learners' lived experiences, allowing them to express themselves. The learner is then willing to experiment and take risks with English.

Both Atkinson (1987) and Auerbach (1993) list the appropriate uses for the L1 in the L2 classroom. They suggest some possible occasions for using the mother tongue such as negotiation of the syllabus and the lesson; record keeping; classroom management; scene setting; language analysis; presentation of rules governing grammar, phonology, morphology, and spelling; discussion of cross-cultural issues; instructions or prompts explanation of errors and assessment of comprehension.

The other opposing attitude is represented by Haycraft (1978), Hubbard et al. (1983), Harmer (1997), Bouangeune (2004), Brown (2000), and Krashen (1981). They have banned completely the use of L1 in L2 classes. Haycraft (1978), Hubbard et al. (1983) and Harmer (1997) adopt the belief that the mother tongue does not play an important role in foreign language teaching. Bouangeune (2004) goes further to express his wonder of how students can truly appreciate the target language exchanges if they are continually relying on their L1. Harmer (1997) shows that the use of L1 in English teaching classrooms started to be seen as uncommunicative, boring, pointless and irrelevant. Moreover, Brown (2000) suggests that "Grammar – Translation" method was challenged for improving students' communication ability. Krashen (1981) rejects the idea of using L1 in teaching a foreign language. He argues that the non-use of L1 leads to achieving language competence.

The above opinions focus on the use or non-use of L1 in teaching L2. They discuss the advantages or disadvantages of L1 in teaching L2 as a second language. However, the effect of the use or non-use of L1 in teaching specific topics in English such as grammar is seldom mentioned. The present study, different from the other contributions focuses on the validity or non-validity of using L1 in teaching the English grammar.

Nazary (2008) conducted a study on the Iranian university students' attitudes and awareness of the use of their mother tongue (Farsi) in their English classrooms. The study reported the students' reluctance to use their L1 in learning L2. They expressed their negative view and rejected L1 use. The research findings of Stapa (2009) reveals the fact that the use of L1 in teaching L2 is harmful among the low proficiency students. Moreover, Storch & Aldosari (2010) confirmed the students' awareness of avoiding the use of L1 in L2 classes.

Song (2009) showed that the teachers had slight tendency to disagree with the use of L1 in teaching L2. A second study conducted by Mouhanna (2009) stressed the fact that the teachers have warned of the detrimental effects of over-using the L1 in teaching English language for foreigners.

7.0 Methodology

7.1 Participants

The participants for the present study are 26 male students in level two. All the students of this level are enrolled in the English Program, at Buraydah Community college. They have studied English for a period not less than six (6) years, before studying at the college level. (3 years in the middle stage and other 3 years in the secondary stage). The students were divided randomly into two groups. Group (A) was assigned to be the control one and has thirteen (13) students. Group, (B) was assigned to be the experimental group and has thirteen (13) students. Students of level two were chosen because of their lower-intermediate English proficiency level and thought to benefit more from using L1 in teaching some topics of L2 because of their limited knowledge of L2.

7.2 Topic being taught

The investigation of the hypothesis in this study is based on a grammar lesson entitled "Active and Passive" which is included among other topics in the English grammar course taught to the students of level two in the English Program. It is taken from "Fundamentals of English Grammar" by Betty Azar, and is written for "lower-intermediate and intermediate English as a second or foreign language."

The lesson has been chosen specifically because the process of passivization as a grammar topic is a thorough review of all the tenses of the English language. In addition, passivization is a grammatical feature that requires a background about the active structure of the clause in the English language as well as the different derived forms of the clause. Moreover, it is essential for the student to know the different forms of tenses (e.g. to be familiar with simple tenses and complex tenses). Therefore, the choice of the lesson "Active and Passive" for analysis in this study is a choice of the grammar of tenses of the English language.

There are other reasons which may justify the choice of that lesson. First, passivization is a grammatical feature that requires an intermediate proficiency in English on the part of the student. Seemingly, the students are expected to have a background about the active structure of the clause in English language as well as the different derived forms of the clause. Second, it is essential for the students to know the different forms of tenses at this level. Third, the students are required to be familiar with simple tenses such as present, past and future tenses, and complex tenses such as progressive, perfect and perfect progressive tenses. Fourth, the students are required to know that the change of the active clause into a passive construction is achieved through a varied and systematic application of specific rules that vary according to the tense of the clause

To sum up, it can be said that the choice of the lesson "active and Passive" for the present study is a choice of the grammar of tenses of the English language.

7.3 Teaching Process

Being divided into control and experimental groups, each group was taught separately and in a different teaching context. When teaching the control group, Group (A), a restricted instruction of not a single word in L1 was allowed to be used. The class was conducted completely in L2 whether in explaining the items of the lesson or performing general tasks such as greeting, students' attendance, reference to exercises or pages numbers and giving notice or instructions.

On the other hand, teaching the experimental group, Group (B), was conducted in a different procedure. The lesson was conducted in L2 with the use of L1. The use of L1 was allowed to achieve different tasks. The students of the experimental group were allowed to use L1 to ask about different things (e.g. the subtitles of the lesson, the exercises and pages numbers, the repetition of a part of the lesson or an exercise, the meaning and different functions of tenses, the meaning of words or idioms, the answer of an exercise and to use words that express their follow up or understanding). Moreover, L1 was allowed to be used to achieve other tasks such as greetings, students' attendance and giving general instructions.

8.0 Data collection

8.1 Pre and Post Tests

The students of the two groups were subjected to pre and post tests (see Appendix 1). The test items were taken from (www.englishteststore.net). This test was chosen since it covers all the parts of the topic students were taught. The pre and post tests consist of 30 sentences which cover the tenses concerned; simple tenses, progressive tenses, perfect tenses and auxiliary forms. The students were asked to complete the missing parts of the sentences. The test aims to measure the students' knowledge of the feature of passivization and to test their grammatical competence. All students of both groups failed to get any correct answer for all of the fifteen items that constituted the test. After six weeks of teaching the lesson of "Passive and Active", the students were given the same pre-test. The results of the two groups varied.

8.2 Students' Interview

Immediately after the post test conducted an interview with all the 26 students was organized. It focused on the students' opinions about learning the grammar of L2 in their native language compared with learning it using the target language.

8.3 Teachers' Interview

The nine teachers in the English Program were interviewed individually asking every one of them about his opinion and experience of using the L1 in teaching the grammar of the L2. Arabic is not the native

language of six of them although they know some Arabic, whereas three teachers speak Arabic as it is their native language.

9.0 Results

The comparison between both the control group, Group (A), and the experimental group, Group (B), after the post-test disconfirms the hypothesis of this study; namely, the use of L1 in teaching grammar of L2 has a positive impact on the students' process of learning outcome as well as their comprehension.

Any student answered 50% correct would pass the test. With regard to the results of Group (A), where L2 was permanently and principally used, the students achieved the following scores, as Table (1) shows.

Table 1 Post-test results of the control and experimental groups

Group	N. students	Students passed	Students Failed
Control Group (Group A)	13	4	9
Experimental Group (Group B)	13	2	11

On the other hand, the participants of the experimental group, Group (B), failed to achieve the same score of Group (A). Looking at Table (1) above we find that only 2 students passed the post-test, whereas, 11 students failed to pass the test, though L1 was used principally in the class. The scores, as shown in the above table, reject the hypothesis investigated in this study. Moreover, the scores discourage the use of L1 as a facilitating process for the students' learning and comprehension of L2.

Moreover, the statistical analysis of the results achieved by both the experimental and control groups has confirmed the invalidity of the hypothesis that L1 has positive impact on teaching English grammar topics. This can be shown in Table (2) below:

Table 2 Mean, S. D, and (T) Value of Pre-Post Evaluation Test Score

Test	N	Mean	V.	S.D.	C.V.	T	df	(t)	Sig.
Pre	13	4.19	14.29	3.78	0.90	0.6	24	0.5	0.9
Post	13	4.96	14.59	3.82	0.77	1			

As shown in the above table, the mean scores of the experimental group is (4.19) which is lower than the control group (4.96). This implies that the use of L1 in teaching English grammar is invalid.

Moreover, the variance in the experimental group students (14.29) is lower than that of the control group students (14.59) and consequently, the coefficient variation of the experimental group students (0.90) is lower than that of the control group students (0.77). This statistical analysis stresses that L1 is not valid in teaching the grammar of L2. Moreover, the T value is greater than the tabulated T. That can lead to conclude that teaching the grammar of L2 can be conducted without the use of L1 which is also confirmed by the big value of $p > .05$ as there is no significant difference.

10.0 Discussion

The analysis of the results obtained by both control and experimental groups stress and confirm what was expressed by teaching professionals such as Haycraft (1978), Hubbard et al. (1983) and others that mother tongue does not play a positive role in foreign language teaching.

As the present study shows, the participants' scores of both the control and experimental groups varied in their post-test. Looking at the two tables below we can see that the use of L1 in teaching the grammar of L2 has no essential role and positive effect on the students' understanding.

Table 3 Post-test scores of the control group (Group A)

Marks obtained	Number of students	Percentage
More than 50%	4	30.77
Less than 50%	9	69.23

Table (4): Post-test scores of the experimental group (Group B)

Marks obtained	Number of students	Percentage
More than 50%	2	15.39%
Less than 50%	11	84.61%

The percentage of the participants of the control group who passed the post-test were 4 participants, with the percentage 30.77%, whereas, the participants of the experimental group who passed the post-test were only 2 with the percentage 15.39%. On the other hand, the number of participants in group (A) who failed to pass the post-test were 9 with the percentage 69.23%, whereas, 11 participants in group (B) failed in the experimental group with the percentage 84.61%.

As the above tables show, the wide gap between those who passed and those who failed in the post-test in Group (A) and Group (B) reflect the fact that the use of L1 in teaching grammar topics of L2 is not essential or vital, as was expressed before.

To sum up, the comparison between the results of both the control and experimental groups, as shown in the above tables, disagrees with the hypothesis of the study that L1 has an essential role to play in the process of learning and students' comprehension regarding grammar of L2 teaching.

10.1 Students' feedback

The students of the experimental group were asked about whether the use of L1 in teaching grammar of L2 is beneficial. The students' feedback indicated their preference to the use of L2 in teaching the grammar of the English language. 76.92% of the experimental group students recognized the importance of the sole use of L2 in teaching not only the grammar course but also other courses of the English language. However, 23.07% of the students encouraged the use of L1 to confirm and secure their understanding. The first percentage of the students had the attitude that the continual use of L2 in the class helped them to adapt to a learning atmosphere that is different from what they experienced in the secondary level education. 84.62% of the students agreed that L2 must be used as a medium for teaching English grammar. They recognized that the use of L2 helped them to be familiar with the idioms and expressions of grammar rather than to be known in L1.

Compared to the experimental group, feedback obtained from the control group are almost the same. 84.66% of the students agreed that L2 should be used as the sole medium for teaching grammar and other courses. On the other hand, 15.38% of the students wanted to use L1 for clarification and understanding of ambiguous or unclear exercises. Moreover, 76.92% of the students appreciated the fact that the continual use of L2 in the class gave them an elevated feeling of being different from students of the secondary school stage, where the use of L1 in teaching English classes was done often.

10.2 Teachers' feedback

The English language teachers of students were also interviewed to get their opinions about the use of L1 in teaching the grammar of L2. Their feedback confirmed the present results of the research, as mentioned above. 66.5 % of the English teachers working in the Department are non-native speakers of Arabic, though they know little Arabic. Those teachers adopted the view that L2 is the best medium for teaching the grammar of English. 37.5% of the teaching members are native speakers of Arabic and they agreed that L2 should be used solely in teaching. All teaching members agreed that the use of L2 would achieve positive objectives. Of these objectives are the familiarity of students with the method of the university teaching, compared to teaching in pre-university levels, the students' understanding and comprehension of L2, the development of the students' ability to communicate in L2, and the acquisition of the different forms of constructions related to L2.

11.0 Conclusion

The present study sets to validate the hypothesis that grammar of L2 can be taught through the use of L1 to benefit L2 learners. The results show that the frequent use of L1 in teaching L2 grammar has no observable or tangible positive effect on the students' learning and comprehension. After being subjected to pre and post tests, the students' results were analyzed and compared. The analysis and

comparison showed that the L1 use has no effective role on teaching the grammar of L2. This conclusion was also confirmed by students` and teachers` feedback.

12.0 Suggestions and Recommendations

1- Replicating the study taking into consideration overcoming the limitations of this study mentioned previously

2 Conducting more studies with translation and vocabulary courses which might show different results.

4- It is though that a study which might be carried out with beginners may show different results when using L1 to teach some L2 topics.

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Appendix 1: Pre and Post Test Sheet

Fill word(s) into the gap to complete the sentence.

- 1- Fortunately, they did not pull down this old theatre.
Fortunately, this old theatre _____ down.
- 2- The hotel manager requests the guests to leave the rooms by midday.
The guests _____ to leave the rooms by midday.
- 3- How did you make this delicious meal?
How _____ this delicious meal?
- 4- The mechanic did not repair my car on time.
My car _____ on time by the mechanic.
- 5- Frank Robinson gave the name Coca Cola to the drink.
The name Coca Cola _____ to the drink by Frank Robinson.
- 6- Where did they hide all sports equipment?
Where _____ all sports equipment hidden?
- 7- They do not permit smoking in auditorium.
Smoking _____ in auditorium.
- 8- Why does he water these plants so rarely?
Why _____ so rarely?
- 9- people in our country know Mrs. J K Rowling`s books very well.
Mrs. J K Rowling`s books _____ in our country
- 10- His elder bother taught him how to ride a bike.
He _____ how to ride a bike by his elder brother
- 11- The audience is not listening to the speaker.
The speaker _____ by the audience.
- 12- They are showing the last part of "Lord of the rings" in many cinemas now.
The last part of "Lord of the Rings" _____ in many cinemas now.
- 13- The coast guards were stopping and searching every car that left the ferry
Every car that left the ferry _____ by the coast guards.
- 14- The butler was taking Lady Astrid`s Dalmatians for a walk every day.
Lady Astrid`s Dalmatians _____ for a walk every day by the butler.
- 15- They are holding the elections next week.
The elections _____ held next week.
- 16- Three inspectors were investigating the crime when the criminal gave himself up to the police.
The crime _____ by three inspectors when the criminal gave himself up to the police.
- 17- What skirts are girls wearing this spring?
What skirts _____ this spring?
- 18- Don`t lose this chance! They are offering you a really good job.
Don`t lose this chance! You _____ really a good job.
- 19- I can assure you sir that we are looking into your complaints very carefully.

- I can assure you sir that your complaints _____ into very carefully.
- 20- You can't enter the kitchen now. They are preparing a surprise for you.
You can't enter the kitchen now. A surprise _____ for you.
- 21- A few groups of tourists have already visited this modern wonder of the world.
This modern wonder of the world _____ by a few groups of tourists.
- 22- After last bombing, Lebanese authorities must rebuild and expand Beirut airport.
Beirut airport _____ after the last bombing.
- 23- You mustn't remove the oldest volumes from the library.
The oldest volumes _____ from the library.
- 24- Someone will probably mug you if you walk in that part of the town alone.
You _____ if you walk in that part of the town alone.
- 25- You should send your children to a boarding school, my dear.
My dear, your children _____ to a boarding school.
- 26- You can use a coin as a screwdriver, if you haven't got one.
A coin _____ as a screwdriver, if you haven't got one.
- 27- At the beginning of this experiment, you should prepare a large quantity of hot water.
A large quantity of hot water _____ at the beginning of this experiment.
- 28- You can't wash woolen clothes in too warm water or they will shrink.
Woolen clothes _____ in too warm water or they will shrink.
- 29- Someone has put fresh flowers on all the tables.
Fresh flowers _____ on all the tables.
- 30- They won't take a decision until the next meeting.
A decision _____ until the next meeting.