

## Appropriate Use of L1 in the Second and Foreign (L2) Language Classroom

Use of L1 in the L2 classroom has long been debated and is mostly frowned upon when it comes to effective language teaching. Good language teachers should use the L2 in order to provide as much input as possible to students. However, there may be certain contexts in which use of L1 is appropriate and sometimes even necessary. Research has shown that occasional use of L1 may actually play a facilitating role in students' development and understanding of the L2 and lower anxiety. On the other hand, teachers should be careful not to let using the L1 become a crutch, which can ultimately limit students' development in the L2.

Some appropriate uses of L1 by teachers:

- **Eliciting Language**  
"한국말로 'cat' 을 뭐라고 하지요?" for English speaking learners of Korean
- **Checking comprehension**  
"한국말로 'I've been waiting for ten minutes' 를 뭐라고 하지요?" (Also used for comprehension of a reading or listening text.)
- **Giving complex instructions to basic levels**  
Lengthy and complicated explanations beforehand can raise teacher talk time. It can also detract from the purpose of the activity
- **Explaining classroom methodology at basic levels**  
For better learning, teachers can explain the goals of activities and class, anticipated learning processes that are noteworthy in L1.
- **Explaining good learning strategies**  
A teacher can give learners opportunities to share their preferred strategies in L1 so that learners can find strategies that work best for them.
- **Using translation to highlight a recently taught language item**  
Highlighting a target item briefly by using L1 can draw learners' attention from meaning-oriented mode to form\*-oriented one, resulting in better learning of the target item.
- **Checking for sense**  
If students write or say something in the L2 that does not make sense, have them try to translate it into the L1 to realize their error.
- **Testing**  
Translation items can be useful in testing mastery of forms and meanings.
- **Developing circumlocution strategies**  
When students do not know how to say something in the L2, have them think of different ways to say the same thing in the L1, which may be easier to translate.

- **Technical explanations** (may lead to a clearer realization of the form and meaning of the language)
- **Cultural explanations to basic levels**
- **Lowering anxiety**  
Occasional use of the L1 may lower student anxiety and actually increase retention of concepts.

Some appropriate uses of L1 by students

- **Asking questions and confirming comprehension**
- **Co-operating in groups.** Learners compare and correct answers to exercises or tasks in the L1. Students at times can explain new points better than the teacher.

Sources:

<http://www.betterlanguageteaching.com/esl-articles/66-lone-in-the-classroom>

<http://coerll.utexas.edu/methods/modules/reading/04/>

<http://eca.state.gov/forum/vols/vol37/no2/p6.htm#Table%201>

\*Form

In language learning and teaching, form means grammar structures, vocabulary items, and pronunciation points that are targeted directly or indirectly by teachers and learners.