

## **Choice of the ideal proportion of mother tongue instructions in grammar Teaching.**

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**ABSTRACT:** This study explores the effect of the use of mother-tongue instructions in Grammar Teaching, teacher's qualification, and student's grammar competence and correlation between those in ESL classrooms. The effect of mother tongue is identified as one of the main barriers that hinder the process of learning English as a second language. Hence, aiming at wiping out the mother tongue completely from classrooms, many educational stakeholders implemented English only rule in their teaching methodologies. Teachers of English as a second language no longer admit the ban of the use of Mother Tongue which was a feature of more extreme structural approaches. Although some teachers use this as a freedom to switch back to the Grammar Translation Method, they should always be able to justify how profitable the use of Mother Tongue could be. This study is an attempt to highlight some benefits of the use of Mother Tongue in Language learning and teaching and specify the consequence of abundant use of both L1 & L2 as a medium of instruction. The study involved qualitative methods of data collection. The data collected from the subjects' responses were analyzed, and the findings were derived. The findings show that unnecessary Mother Tongue instructions can be avoided to improve students Grammar performance. The main objective is to suggest how to make the proper balance between L1 and L2 to diminish teachers' abundant use of it. Thus, a framework of the ideal proportion of L1 & L2 has been proposed as the outcome of the study. The research is not an attempt to measure the benefits of English-medium instruction and research findings do not automatically imply that English-medium instruction is harmful to the students. This study will provide information on how to avoid abundant use of Mother Tongue instructions. For instances this would educate teachers on how to use L1 limitedly.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Mother tongue or native language is what people acquire in the early years and it gradually becomes their natural instrument of thought and communication. Ashwoth (1992). Integrating the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in ESL classrooms has been a controversial issue discussed by many professionals. Some of them argued that L1 is beneficial to learn a second language whereas others saw L1 as a burden to learn L2. Although abundant uses of mother tongue in language classroom find to be ineffective, some amount of mother tongue is needed to avoid too many confusions and anxiety of beginners with low language level. This study may find the best way to use the mother tongue and propose the situations where the mother tongue should be avoided in order to develop students' language performance. This has ultimately become an attractive factor and it is always supported by the view that learning a second language is determined by the maximum exposure to that language. But this movement was criticized by several researchers accepting the inclusion of L1 in L2 teaching. So the main aim of this thesis to investigate the ideal proportion of the Mother Tongue and target language usage when teaching English as a second language to a group of secondary learners.

### **II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

During the process of learning a second language, teacher's use of mother tongue can influence the learner's acquisition of the target language. Role of mother tongue has been a very important issue in second/foreign language teaching. In this thesis my main objective is to investigate the ideal proportion of mother tongue and target language usage when teaching a second language. Generally, what I observed was that teachers tend to use Sinhala for all kinds of situations including giving instructions, doing translations and presenting English Language structures. This happens when teachers depend too much on mother tongue usage and believe that it could be difficult to make students taught without the use of mother tongue. I agree with the idea that mother tongue usage is beneficial in second language teaching process. So my aim is to propose the ways to reduce abundant use of mother tongue and propose the ideal proportion of use of mother tongue that could be used only for particular, selected situations.

### **III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Although the issue of using mother tongue dated back to the era of Grammar, Translation Method, still nobody has been able to provide a complete solution whether the mother tongue should or should not be accompanied in ELT. The linguist from all over the world are still arguing and researching about what is the best way. Although in the last few decades total elimination of L1 had been the trend, Alkinson (1993), Boroneva (1995) both holds the opinion that nowadays the debate is not whether mother tongue should be involved in the classroom but the issue is to investigate what proportion of L1 and L2 is most advantageous (optimal) when teaching English as a Second Language. So this issue has always been researched by many linguistic scholars, Lecturers, teachers and also undergraduate students to find a concrete solution to their research problem.

This research area is very significant for almost all language teachers who holds the doubts when, where and how much L1 should be used in L2 teaching. So the outcome of this research may benefit many who seek a proper answer to their confusion. Also this may provide positive feedback to private education stake holders and Government administrators to uplift the English Language Learning in Sri Lanka. The findings of this study might be a helpful source to identify which quantity of mother tongue use can be optimal to provide learners with proper understanding and good environment to acquire more English. So, this study will be beneficial to learners to better complete in English than now. In Sri Lanka some institutions have implemented 'ONLY ENGLISH' policy and some use excess Mother Tongue expecting better performance. In my opinion, both have failed to show improvement in all four skills, Speaking, Writing, Reading and listening. But most of the time only English policy improves more speaking skills while more mother tongue instructions improve more grammar and writing skills. Teachers have always failed to find the limit and to identify where to draw the line. The findings of this study may enable them to make an optimal balance between L1 and L2 to improve students' language performance. Suggested 'Framework of L1 & L2' proportion would provide teachers guidance on the classroom situation where integration of L1 & L2 and separation of L1 & L2 would positively enhance learner performance.

### **IV. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Among educational stages secondary school level is very significant because it is treated as a transitional stage, during which learners of age 14-19 get themselves ready to start higher education, training and then suitable employment. Everybody including teachers, students, parents, government and common public treat this as important. In Sri Lankan Private and Government education sectors high attention and focus is given to this level of education. At this stage student's knowledge is tested and evaluated using two most important Examinations, G.C.E O/L and G.C.E A/L Examinations. Grades obtained for English is treated as important to enter university education and to apply for jobs. PASS for A/L General English is a core requirement to enter university, where students mostly get to follow Degrees in English Medium. So, English as a subject in schools should be given more care and attention both by teachers and students, although in most cases it is neglected. Fluency in English is varied according to geographical diversity. Thus, English knowledge is relatively very low in some rural provinces where students are less privileged to learn English. Students are weak in English compared to other subjects they study for G.C.E. O/L. It is assumed that amethodological fault has been deeply rooted in the area of Teaching English as a second language. Thus, it is highly important to reduce abundant use of mother tongue in order to improve student's language performance. It has always been confusing and problematic to identify the correct proportion of L1 and L2. Thus, teachers end up practicing what they have been used to do so far despite the poor results if crates. Most of the previous studies had considered only the effect of mother tongue or whether to use L1 or L2. But poor attention is given to investigate the ideal proportion of it.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS.**

- To what extent students/teachers consider L1 and L2 instructions supportive to understand Grammar lessons?
- What is the perception of teachers and students on the influence of mother tongue on performance of English?
- What proportion of Sinhala/English do children expect their teachers to use and how much teachers actually use?
- Is Teachers' use of Sinhala in conscious or unconscious?
- What are situations that mother tongue use is optimal in Grammar performance?
- What steps can teachers take to avoid abundant use of mother tongue?

### **V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.**

This is a descriptive study which includes mixed method design, qualitative and quantitative data. Primary data is collected using four different research methods. First, the teachers and students were asked to fill a questionnaire and then a further research among two student groups is carried out through a teaching experiment and then an

evaluation test was conducted test to draw certain conclusions regarding their performance. Thirdly some selected teachers were interviewed in order to gather profound information. Open semi-structured questions are used for the interview. Finally, when some answers to certain research questions were inadequate to finalize some conclusions, certain observations were made by recording different teachers' use of mother tongue in the class. Then the collected answers were analyzed and presented in graphs. In the final discussion possible causes and suggestions were drawn from the gathered results. In the discussion I have proposed a Framework of ideal L1 & L2 proportion.

## **VI. LITERARY REVIEW.**

Mother Tongue Usually, the term (mother tongue) is used to refer as a child first language. It is the first and main language that is revealed to the surrounding of a child after he/she is born. Meanwhile, this language subconsciously helps the child to gain the fluently. Mother tongue helps a child to communicate with others by expressing their feelings, emotions and needs. It is also known as native language. Furthermore, it shows one's identity and nationalities, and it distinguishes people from their country of birth. An interesting relationship between use of mother tongue and learning Grammar has been visible in some methodology that developed from the very beginning of English Language teaching history. This is very evident from the "cyclical nature of teaching methodologies" (Douglas Brown 2000) that emerged about every quarter of a century. Albert Marakwordt (1972) saw this as "changing winds and shifting sands". So linguistics scholars has been investigating the best way to teach foreign languages as no single theory or paradigm is right or wrong. From the very beginning use of mother tongue has become crucial part that was subjected to the teaching methods and there by been criticized by many linguists and scholars time to time.

Teachers Language choice in the L2 classroom is considered as important by researchers. In many instances use of only second language in the classroom is treated as required or compulsory for the teachers. Cameron (2001) suggests that teachers should use target language as much as possible and ensure that the use of L1 supports the Children's language learning. He states that teachers do not feel confident enough or competent enough to use the L2 throughout the lesson. Answering to the crucial question whether 100% TL is possible in the classroom, Butzkamm (2003) states that monolingual lessons without the help of MT are extrinsically possible, but monolingual learning is an intrinsic impossibility because no one can simply turn-off what they already know.

Atkinson (1989) proposes several classroom activities in which use of Mother Tongue benefits the learner. He says that to be more economical and save lot of rare time it is better to allow students to ask questions in Mother Tongue. Further Mother Tongue use could be more effective if it is used for checking comprehension. Giving instructions is one of the natural ways of interaction and it provides learners with the opportunity to develop communicative competency. Therefore, Atkinson (1989) recommends using mother tongue for students with low language level and when students acquire basic rules gradually increases the use of target language. Similarly, Prodromou (1995) says that although hearing instructions in English can be an effective source for learning that language, teachers should be able to use it appropriately. According to learners' level of language mother tongue can be effective when explaining difference between two grammatical items. Brown proves that by saying "if the teacher has just been presenting the difference between present perfect and past simple as in "John has gone to Paris" and "John went to Paris" asking the class to give quick translation into the mother tongue will enable the teacher to be absolutely sure that the concepts have been understood". Gill (2005) suggests few other situations where use of mother tongue is much necessary. "Information provision, classroom management, scene setting, discussion of cross cultural issues, explanation of errors, using bilingual dictionaries, work with dual language texts" are among those situations.

Linguistic researchers such as Atkinson (1987), Cook (2001), Cristova (1996) were among those who were enthusiastic to investigate the influence of L1 on L2 teaching. According them the main reason to prevent the use of mother tongue is that it discourage the learner to use L2 in the classroom and when teacher use L1 it deprives the learner of input in the target language. As Ellis (1997) suggests, mother tongue should be avoided in the classroom because of the "transfer" by which L2 learners get confused when they do not find similarities between language structure of L1 and L2. This is referred to as negative transfer and Ellis future mentions that the habits of L1 discourage students' learning habits of L2. Kresan (1987) agreed with the same idea in his second language acquisition theory and stated that a learner needs to be maximally exposed to L2 in order to make the acquisition process a success. So more they expose to L2 more they learn L2. In order to prevent students from using L1 in the classroom teachers should follow some techniques Cook (2010) says such teaching techniques help the

prevention of L1 in L2 classroom. Teachers can avoid use of L1 through facial expressions, gestures or visual aids.

The term language transfer is first introduced by Robert Lado (1957). James C (1980) defined it as affection of first language in learning second language. Ellis (1990) defines transfer as the process of using knowledge of the first language in learning a second language. According to them the main obstacle of new language learning is interferences from the prior knowledge. Among various definitions Odlin's (1989) definition was sufficient and clear. He states that transfer is the influence which result from the similarities and differences between the target language and the language that have been acquired before. It was mentioned that there are two types of transfer as positive and negative. When learning of one situation supports the learning of another situation positive transfer is occurred and when one situation obstructs someone's performance in a second situation, negative transfer is occurred. As Schmidt and Young (1987) says foreign language learners usually apply patterns of speech production of native language so it provides them with a foreign account. Code-Switching (CS) and Code-Mixing (CM) are most important features in multilingual communities. Both utilize the term "code" which refer to "a mechanism for the unambiguous transduction of signals between systems". Further, term "switching" refers to alternation between different varieties used by the bilingual during the conversational interaction. The concept of CS is often used interchangeable with Code-Mixing (CM). Teachers translate words on a regular basis (Bunyi, 2005) CS-CM can be used to emphasize a particular point, to substitute a word in place of unknown word in the target language, to convey a concept that has no equivalent in the culture of the other language, to reinforce a request. Holmarsdottir (2002) observe that, teachers who have been trained in subjects than language subjects are normally more concerned about teaching the subject matter to students. They often CS-CM to make students understand the content. This solution however, creates another problem. Students understand when teachers use Kiswahili but teachers have to set all test and examinations in English and students answers have to be in English. Mwinsheikhe (2001) on her analysis notes, 80% of teaches who encountered examination questions answered in Kiswahili awarded them a zero mark as per government regulations. When teachers and students fail to interact and communicate effectively during English lessons, they get demoralized and frustrated, conditions which impair teaching and learning EL. Krashen (1985) adds that, poor performance in the language of instruction in our case English, results in poor performance in EL.

Constructive analysis and Error analysis have been regarded as main obstacles of second language learner. Language acquisition is the process by which a language capability develops in human. Although first language acquisition concerns with language development in children, second language acquisition focuses on language development in adults as well. Learner's mental organization supports him to use a set of processing strategies to produce utterances in the target language. Contrastive analysis is defined as "the systematic comparison of two or more languages with the aim of describing their similarities and differences" (Johonson 2007) Different linguists such as Fries (1945), Weinreich (1953) and Lado (1957) accepted and developed this trend with their studies. Charles Fries (1945) states that "the most efficient materials are those that are based upon scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with parallel description of the native language of the learners"

## **VII. RESEARCH PROCEDURE**

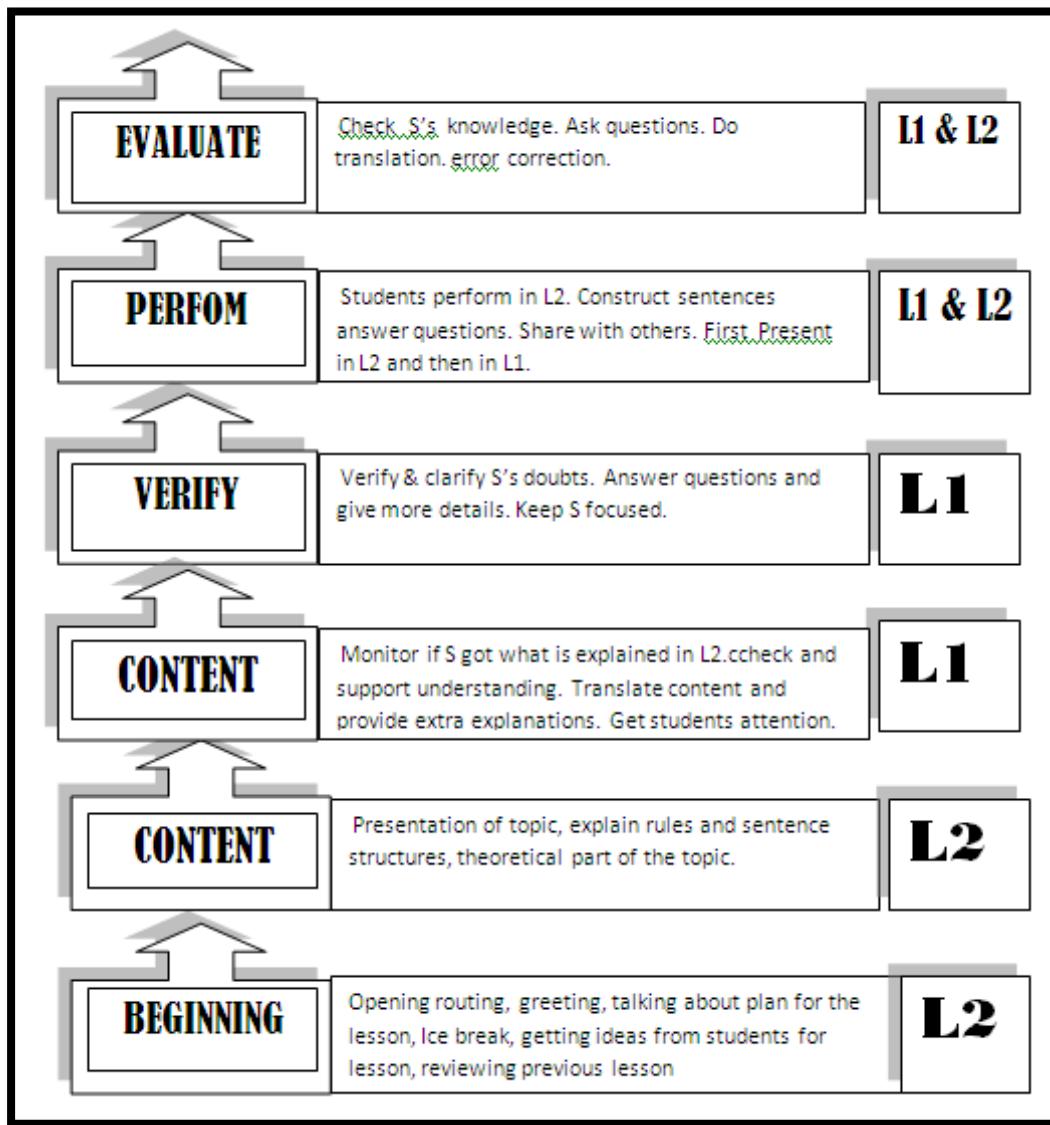
The objective of survey method is to collect quantifiable information by using a structured questionnaire. Both questionnaires that I used in my study also include structured close ended questions which enabled me to gather quick answers from a large group. I have designed two questionnaires, one for students and one for teachers. Students questionnaire is in contrary simple and easier to understand. Teachers' questionnaire includes some semi-structured questions in order to obtain adequate data to achieve research objectives. Teachers are comparatively advanced in their knowledge of language. So, some terms and concepts related to English language teaching is also included in the questionnaire. The interview guide was prepared after a careful study of my research questions. The interview guide is attached in appendix. It is not rigid but flexible. Information gathered from interviews was not adequate to measure students' performance. So I used a classroom test to evaluate the effect of mother tongue on students' performance in Grammar lessons specifically. According to the definition given by Kvale (1994.14), an interview is an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of a mutual interest. I preferred this oral face to face interview because it provided me with sufficient information for my analysis.

There was a requirement to measure student performance in connection to given mother tongue instructions. This is one of the core objectives of my study. In order to draw proper conclusions, it was essential to investigate whether proportion of mother tongue instructions cause any difference in grammatical competency of the students. Thus, a classroom test was conducted to check if the presented intervention program has had any effect or not.I

have divided the students into two groups. Group A is the experimental group and Group B is the controlled group. Experimental group was given instructions with right proportion of mother tongue use.

**DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE :** Usually the analysis of data is done in connection to the research questions. Quantitative information was organized and then they were summarized using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages. Those analyzed details were presented through tables and bar graphs and pie charts. I have incorporated these simple descriptive statistics because as suggested by Gay (1996) when presenting results to different type of readers, simple statistics such as percentages are considered more optimal than complex statistics. Section c Q 7 and in students' questionnaire and section C Q4 in teachers' questionnaire were designed to measure the extent of influence of mother tongue on performance of English. When the response SA is given it meant that the item greatly influence on performance of English where as the response SD says that the item had less influence on performance. This study is an analysis of proportion of teachers' use of mother tongue instructions and its effect on students' grammar competency. In the background to the problem, it was claimed that many linguists agreed that mother tongue can be implemented as a useful factor in order to develop/ improve students' grammatical awareness. In contrast it was proved that only English instructions retarded the learning/ understanding process. Although Grammar is treated as important language skill most of the students found it difficult. Five research questions were used in the study and collected data was analyzed to present findings. Use of L1 in learning L2 was the main cause of the topic and it has been highly debatable in the field of teaching English as a second language due to its high influence on students' performance.

**STUDY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION:** The study found that majority of teachers and students approved that teachers use L1 in Grammar lessons. More than 80% of both teachers and students treat L1 as a necessary factor when teaching English as a second language. Then the research Question 2 investigated the adequate proportion of L1 instructions that is necessary to create an improvement in students Grammar awareness. After analyzing the gathered data, it was found that although L1 proportion vary according to various other factors more than 80% of the students and 100% teachers agreed that too much L1 and too much L2 deteriorate the learning process. Most of the students believe that other than most required situations in all other situations L2 should be used to increase students' exposure to target language. The study found that both low level and higher-level student groups expect L1 instructions when they have a doubt. Teachers should make them free of doubts. The research question 03 was to find out whether the mother tongue instructions improve students grammar proficiency. Through the experimental test it was found that comparatively there was a significant growth in students' marks when they receive both L1 and L2 instructions .80% of the students and 100% teachers agreed that giving instructions in Mother Tongue improve students' Grammar Knowledge. Fourth research question aimed at finding various other factors that decide teachers' use of L1. It was found that students language level force teachers the most to switch from L2 to L1. 100% of the teachers agreed with that. Study showed that Secondly it was the complexity of the lesson which compel teachers to assist students in L1. The fifth question was to investigate whether students see only English instructions as something that distracts them from learning it. Study results showed it truly does because 70% of the students agreed that use of L1 help them to divest themselves of unwanted shyness and stress. Hence, I have suggested a framework for ideal proportion of L1 & L2 involved in English language learning process. This helps enhancing students' grammar competency.



**Figure 10- Framework for ideal proportion of L1 & L2.**

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** The study claims that although students find L1 as a useful recourse when learning English, abundant use of L1 has to be reduced in order to improve students' grammar proficiency. Thus the study presents some suggestions and recommendations.

- ✓ Teachers should be aware of the situations in which use of L1 would be productive and useful to the learners.
- ✓ While use of L1 should be encouraged among teachers for explanation purpose Use of L2 should be encouraged among students for communication purpose.
- ✓ Teachers should put forward grammar teaching methods that are interactive and make students more entertained even though they are taught in L2.
- ✓ Use of L2 constantly and freely should be implemented as a practice and teacher do error correction using both L1 and L2.

- ✓ Grammar mistakes that occur due to Interference of L1 should be eluded by explaining grammar differences clearly even in L1.
- ✓ It is advantageous if teachers interact in English with their students by adjusting their speech by speaking slowly and simplifying or reducing what they said.
- ✓ Including and Emphasizing Meaningful Expressions in order to interact easily might help learners to better compete in language.
- ✓ To support the communicative process, participants often can paraphrase what was said, provided examples, synonyms or clues to imply things better.

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