Teacher attitudes and motivation concerning target language use

Lärarens attityder och motivation kring användandet av målspråket

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to investigate how the actual implementation of target language use might differ from the theoretical standpoint that is promoted in the curriculum in Swedish and teacher attitudes towards the suggested level of TL use. The paper will also investigate teacher motivations behind these differences. It has long been the tradition in language teaching to promote a sole use of the target language in order to expose students to as much of the language as possible. However, research shows that student’s first language (L1) is frequently used in foreign language teaching. The current study is qualitative and investigates four English teachers from three different schools in the south of Sweden, all teaching in K-3. In order to collect data, observations were conducted and a semi-structured interview with each of the participating teachers. The results present a limited use of the target language and a more extensive use of the L1 in class. The results regarding teacher attitudes and motivations towards the use of the target language emerged into three themes: Teachers’ use of the TL and L1; Facilitating young language learners; and Teacher experience and awareness. The study implicates that teacher language choices are highly affected by students understanding and teachers’ own experience with attitudes reflecting inclusion of the L1 and an enjoyable learning environment as the main target.

Key-terms: target language, first language, teacher beliefs, teacher attitudes, EFL
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Introduction

It is important for young language learners to be exposed to the target language (the language being learned) as often as possible and to use it in meaningful contexts (Pinter, 2006; Duff & Polio, 1990; Jingxia, 2010). Pinter (2006) explains that when allowing students to use the target language in a natural way and by interacting with others, the language learning becomes highly proficient and creates an interest for the language. There is a constant ongoing discussion concerning the sole use of the target language (TL) and whether or not the first language (L1) should be included or not when learning a foreign language. Jingxia (2010) is one of the researchers who promote the idea of a maximized use of the TL in order to maximize exposure to the language being taught, where the L1 should not interfere and undermine language acquisition. Although, a total exclusion of the L1 is not considered to be the most beneficial since that is unnatural in an environment where the L1 is shared among teachers and students.

When maximizing the use of the target language in the classroom, you provide the opportunity for the students to acquire intercultural competence and a confident and effective language use (Inbar-Lourie, 2010; Turnball, 2002). In a foreign language context the use of the target language can provide equity, allowing everyone to have a similar starting point (Pinter, 2006). Many researchers argue that the L1 should not be ignored but should instead work in collaboration with the target language (TL) so that the TL may benefit from the L1 (Turnball, 2002; Inbar-Lourie, 2010; Rabbidge & Chappell, 2014; Ho Lee, 2012). This has proven to be very effective in language learning, when using the native language as a support in the target language you create a safe environment for the students which allow a proficient language learning (Pinter, 2006; Jingxia, 2010). In order to create a balance you should maximize the use of the target language in class but not totally prohibit the use of the L1.

In Sweden, the syllabus for English (Skolverket, 2011a) is divided into three categories, all of which are derived from the guidelines of the common European framework (CEFR): The content of communication; listening and reading-reception; and speaking, writing, discussing- production and interaction. Critically, the fourth
category in the CEFR, mediation, has been left out of the Swedish syllabus. Mediation typically involves using the L1 to facilitate development and learning in the TL. However, Skolverket implies that use of the native language (L1) should be avoided stating: “Mediering är bortvald i kursplanen för att det ska vara möjligt att bedriva undervisningen helt på målspråket, något som kan underlätta för elever som inte har svenska som modersmål.” (p.12, Skolverket, 2011a). Instead, the syllabus for English promotes a maximized use of the target language in class.

However, my personal experiences during practical studies in the field have revealed that the mediated classroom approach is still used, at least in some contexts. In fact, these observations have some concrete support from the Swedish schools inspectorate. A report from the Swedish schools inspectorate (2011) shows that a majority of the schools included in the study teach the TL with the L1 as the main mediator, and that it is very common to face a more mediated classroom where the L1 is the main focus and the target language (TL) is barely visible. The report also shows that there is a lack of systematic quality work catering the English education and the lack of communication among English teachers creates gaps in the English language learning (ELL) teaching, which in turns gives unequal opportunities for the students to acquire the language. A study conducted by Lundberg (2007) argues the fact that the school subject of English is often neglected if you compare it to the time and work put in with the two other core subjects: Swedish (i.e. learners’ L1) and mathematics. The study provides insights regarding English teachers’ need to develop more knowledge concerning ELL teaching and a lack in teachers’ personal conception of their own competence in ELL and self-confidence when teaching young language learners.

The lack of time for scheduled English lessons in Swedish schools demands that the time available should be utilized to its fullest (Lundberg, 2007). Since the exposure of the target language is minimal in other situations then the actual English lessons this supports the argument that the target language should be the main focus during that time (Pinter, 2006; Lundberg, 2007). This view on English language teaching is in accordance with what you are taught as an aspiring teacher at Malmö University, according to my own experiences during the last 3.5 years. It is also a view on ELL
that to some extent is shared by the syllabus for English (Skolverket, 2011b). And yet, this approach is clearly in conflict with some research, and near exclusive use of TL during class presents a constant practical issue in the real life language classroom. Lundberg’s (2007) study shows that many of the teachers feel insecure with using the TL in class; they are afraid that their students will not follow or understand what they are doing in class. This conception can explain the worries amongst the teachers I have come across during my practical studies where the recommendation is often to not use the TL as a main mediator during English class since they feel that the students will not understand and that it is too hard for them to follow.

The teacher carries a great responsibility when it comes to creating a learning environment suitable for the students. Since the exposure to the English language is limited, the English lessons and the teachers’ way of using the language is fundamental (Pinter, 2006; Rabbidge & Chappell, 2014; Turnball, 2002). You have to know how to make the most of the time you have and know how to cater for your students in order to make the exposure to the English language most effective (Pinter, 2006). According to the syllabus for English (Skolverket, 2011a), the teacher is responsible for creating motivation to learn and an interest and self-confidence to his/her own ability concerning English language learners. It is therefore of great importance that the teacher is well aware of his/her choices concerning teaching. However, a majority of teachers in Lundberg’s study (2007) expressed their concerns of their own lack in competence and knowledge in English language teaching. This may contribute to the shifting standard and unequal opportunities regarding English language teaching.

**Purpose and research questions**

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the actual implementation of TL use might differ from the theoretical standpoint that is promoted in the curriculum in Swedish and teacher attitudes towards the suggested level of TL use. It will also investigate teacher motivations behind these differences. The study will carry out observations in order to find out to what extent the target language is used in the English language classroom and in what situations (i.e., for what functions) the TL is used, and why. My own experience and Lundberg’s (2007) study shows that the TL is
often left out because of teachers’ insecurity concerning students’ understanding and knowledge. Although aspiring teachers are being taught to use the TL as the main mediator, which is also what a long tradition of research is preaching, this does not reflect reality and how the lessons are being carried out. Thus, in order to find out whether the TL use in class is affected by the lack of competence among teachers or if it is a personal standpoint, the study will also investigate how teachers motivate their own language use in class.

Research questions for the study:

1. When and in what situations is the target language used in class in K-3?
2. What are teachers’ attitudes concerning the use of the target language in class?
3. What motivates teachers’ language choice in the K-3 classroom (why are they making the choices they are making)?
Literature review

Controversy concerning use of the target language and first language

The sole use of the target language (TL) in second- and foreign language teaching has long been considered as the tradition in language teaching and education (Hall & Cook, 2012). Although, the matter of the use of the TL and the first language (L1) has been widely discussed and in research the pros and cons is still being argued. The time for exposing students to the TL is often limited and it is therefore seen as a universal agreement amongst teachers and researchers, that teachers should maximize the use and exposure of the TL (Littlewood & Yu, 2011). Since the monolingual approach has been the norm in language teaching and learning for rather some time, the controversial discussion often origins in the use of the L1.

Although a maximized or even sole use of the TL is the approach being promoted, research has shown that a majority of teachers uses the L1 in their practice (de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Lundberg, 2007; Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Duff & Polio, 1990). As a matter of fact, the use of the TL varies from total exclusion (although it is very uncommon) to a use of 90% in class during second- or foreign language teaching (Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Duff & Polio, 1990). Some of the most common explanations from teachers extensively using L1 is that the L1 functions as a support for the students and sometimes even relieves anxiety when it comes to learning the new language (de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Hall & Cook, 2012). In order to process the different aspects of the research related to the issue the following part will be divided into three different sections; why use the TL, why use the L1 and teacher impact and language choices.

Why use the target language?

As mentioned in the previous section the sole use of the TL has long been considered the tradition in language learning and teaching. Duff & Polio (1990) conducted a qualitative study in order to collect data concerning teachers’ use of the TL in a foreign language context. Collection of the data was carried out through observations
and interviews in thirteen different language classes on UCLA University where the results showed a range of 7-99% concerning use of the TL. Their findings suggest that foreign language learners should be exposed to as much language as possible, with different functions and in different situations in order to allow the learners to acquire the TL to its fullest. Hoo Lee (2012) present a study where he examines four different approaches connected to the monolingual approach in TL teaching; monolingualism, naturalism, native-speakerism and absolutism. The study argues whether the “TL-only” approach can be adapted into the language classrooms we meet today; the bilingual classroom. Hoo Lee argues that in order to maximize the TL; teachers must be allowed to use code-switching (e.g., use of both the L1 and the TL), in order to contribute to the development of TL learners’ bilingual competence.

In accordance to the study conceived by Duff & Polio (1990), Hoo Lee’s (2012) study concerning different aspects of the use of the TL, argues the tradition of the importance of TL interaction and input as sufficient and crucial needs in order to conceive a good TL acquisition for the learners. With that being said, the input from the learners’ L1 in TL acquisition can be seen as unnecessary to meet a good learning outcome. Hoo Lee argues that the bilingual approach, allowing code switching meets the needs in today’s school situation in a more beneficial way than the monolingual approach (TL-only).

Rabbidge & Chappell’s (2014) study was carried out in four different elementary schools in South Korea where the TETE (teaching English through English) approach is applied in the syllabus. The study was conducted in order to find out why South Korean teachers did not apply the approach of TETE in their teaching and to what extent the TL was actually used during class. The result presented in the study showed, in accordance to previous research, that the TL was barely used. The resistance to TETE was mainly because of teachers’ attitudes and beliefs concerning foreign language teaching. Rabbidge & Chappell (2014) argue that the exclusive use of the TL is necessary to provide a meaningful and authentic context, which then will provide learners to communicate in the TL in a more meaningful and authentic way. It is equally important to use the TL in every situation that may occur in a classroom, in order to make the TL use “all-round” according to Rabbidge & Chappell (2014). However, the sole exposure to the TL is not enough for the learners to acquire the
language and make it their own. The learners have to be given opportunities, in different situations and context, to interact and use the TL in order to acquire and adopt the language for their own communicative and sociocultural needs. One of the biggest concerns with a “TL-only” approach is that the exclusion of the learners’ L1 will hurt the learners’ identity and unable them to create a positive attitude for the new language (Inbar-Lourie, 2010; Hall & Cook, 2012; Rabbidge & Chappell, 2014). The study conducted by Inbar-Lourie (2010) investigates EFL teachers in a young language learner context, with different linguistic backgrounds and their language patterns and L1 use. The results of the study show a different outcome than previous research, presenting young language learner teachers’ beliefs and reasoning. In contrast, Inbar-Lourie’s study shows that teachers with a high use of the TL in their teaching claims that a positive attitude and an affective relation to the TL can be conceived with a sole use of the TL, without the L1 interfering (Inbar-Lourie, 2010).

Rabbidge & Chappell (2014) points out that a TL-only approach in the classroom gives a positive outcome by providing students with a positive role model (i.e. the teacher). If the teacher only uses the TL in “real life” the learners get a sense of relief by giving the opportunity to see that it is possible to use the language in different context and situations.

**Why use the first language?**

A study presented by de la Campa & Nassaji (2009) was conducted in two second-year German conversation courses in a foreign language context. The study investigates the amount of the TL/L1 (i.e. English) use, for what functions the TL/L1 was used and the teachers’ (instructors) reasoning behind their L1 use. In order to collect data observations, interviews and stimulated recall sessions was used. The result showed a frequent use of the L1, with one of the most common reasons was to use the L1 as a facilitator to the L2. As stated earlier, the use of the L1 during TL teaching has been frowned upon amongst language researchers claiming that the L1 should not interfere with the TL (de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009). Although this has been the approach of language teaching for the last hundred years, some researchers argue the fact that it is not validated enough in form of what actual benefits the sole TL use provide and what impact the L1 interference might have in TL teaching and learning (Hoo Lee, 2012; Inbar-Lourie, 2010; de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009). Hoo Lee
(2012) brings up the fact that a sole use of TL cannot simply be seen as superior because of tradition. As a matter of fact, a bilingual surrounding is often the reality we face in today’s classrooms and should therefore be seen as the future in ESL/EFL teaching. A new light has been shed on ESL/EFL teaching and a total abandon of the L1 is now being questioned. The use of the L1 can be seen as an effective tool in order to create a good learning environment and learning outcome (de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009).

Rabbidge & Chappell (2014) puts the discussion concerning total exclusion of L1 in another light by stating that this is simply not necessary, as long as the function of the L1 has a genuine role in your teaching. Although the L1 input can devalue the TL input by making it “less important” for the learners to comprehend, the benefits of L1 inclusion can still profit the total learning outcome. Hall & Cook (2012) argues that the sole use of the TL has not been the tradition in all parts of the world; the inclusion of the L1 has been considered the norm amongst some. The difference lies in the recent occurring of a more positive view on L1 use and the acceptance of a more open discussion of the matter. Studies concerning teachers’ attitudes towards the use of the L1/TL, especially amongst young language learners, show that a majority claims that total exclusion of the L1 is nearly impossible (Rabbidge & Chappell, 2014; Ho Lee, 2012; Inbar-Lourie, 2010). The L1 has a sociocultural and cognitive role in language acquisition, with an affectionate and identity bound role for the learners. Hall & Cook (2012) suggest that language teaching should apply the approach of “TL-mainly” instead of “TL-only”.

**Teacher impact and language choices**

The teacher’s role as a facilitator and role model in the language classroom is important and the teacher carries a great responsibility in order for the language acquisition to be successful (Rabbidge & Chappell, 2014). Crawford’s (2004) study investigates teacher attitudes towards the TL in the foreign language classroom. The findings show that the L1 is frequently used since teachers find the L1 to be a useful tool in classroom practice. The teachers’ own language proficiency had some influence on the teachers’ language use, but as found in the study, experience in the target culture showed even more influential. Crawford questions how a confident TL
user can be created without any opportunity to encounter the language in use in the life of the classroom. The teacher should promote the TL and create a secure environment for the learner. In the earlier grades, teachers feel that the main goal is to provide exposure to the TL and create a positive attitude towards the language (Inbar-Lourie, 2010). In the study conducted by Crawford (2004), where teachers’ attitudes concerning TL use were researched, it was found that a majority of the primary teachers participating do not promote a use of the TL in class. Only 10% of the teachers participating in the study used the TL more than the learners’ L1 during their lessons. The ones that had a positive view on the use of the TL explained that their use was in the purpose of 1) wanting to maximize the learners exposure and experience of the language and/or 2) because they felt confidence in the learners ability to acquire the new language through the TL (Crawford, 2004). The teachers catering for the younger students, however, did not seem to attain this confidence in students’ ability.

Teachers’ beliefs and its effects in TL/L1 use is a multi-rooted issue (Hall & Cook, 2012). There are numerous factors that play in when it comes to teachers’ language choices. Inbar-Lourie (2010) describes the matter as a subjective and individual matter with influences from own personal opinion, experience and context. In his study, the language use among the teachers participating could be divided into three categories; mostly L1 use, combined L1 & TL use and mostly TL use. Although a pattern could be perceived concerning the amount of L1/TL use, the reasons where the teachers motivate their language use were wide spread and the majority of the participants were unaware of their actual use of L1/TL. The results in the study by Inbar-Lourie (2010) motivates that the use of L1/TL is individualized but shows differences concerning the teachers in the earlier grades; they were the ones well aware of their language use and were able to motivate their use as an active choice. An overall tendency amongst the teachers teaching young language learners seems to be an inclusion of the L1 rather than excluding (Crawford, 2004; de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Inbar-Lourie, 2010; Hall & Cook, 2012). Some researchers might argue that the choice of including the L1 in TL teaching is in connection to teacher proficiency or experience; this has proven not to be in direct correlation with teachers’ language choice (Duff & Polio, 1990; Crawford, 2004).
Lundberg (2007) conceived a study with 123 participating English teachers across Sweden in order to find out how English teacher felt about their practice and what they might want to improve or felt a lack of. One of the major concerns among the participants was their insecurity on how to conceive a good learning outcome for young language learners in the English language classroom. A need for teacher education and training in order for the teachers to become self-confident and competent educators in the English language with young language learners seems to be an urgent need that many teachers express (Lundberg, 2007; Inbar-Lourie, 2010; de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009). Many teachers feel that it is hard to motivate their actions and teaching methods and would like to feel confident in their choices and develop their knowledge.
Methodology

In order to investigate the research questions, interviews and observations will be used as methods. By using interviews in combination with observations, the target is to get a nuanced view on the matter. The study will have a qualitative approach since that allows for an overall look instead of only focusing on finding numerical patterns and similarities (Alvehus, 2013). Taking the ten weeks we have in order to conduct our study in consideration, and the availability of teachers for interviews, it would be feasible to interview and observe 3-4 teachers in grades K-3. The qualitative approach allows taking the different points of view of the matter in consideration. When conducting a study like this one you have to take your personal values and interpretation into an account (Alvehus, 2013). The focus of the study is the teachers’ own personal view and their reasons behind their actions which makes the interview method an effective method of choice.

Participants

The participants of this study are 4 teachers from three different schools in the south of Sweden from similar areas. The teachers participating in the study all reached the criteria of 1) sharing the L1 with the students, and 2) teaching English to students in K-3, this in order to minimize contextual factors. The participants of the study are all females, this was not intentional, but the possible effect of gender is not investigated as a factor in this study and will not affect the outcome of the study.

Teacher A is a homeroom\textsuperscript{1} teacher in a grade 2 with 21 students. She has been a teacher for 18 years with experience teaching English in grades 1-3 and 6-7. Teacher A has formal education teaching English up to grade 7. They have English once a week, for about 30 minutes, although this can differ from week to week.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{1}] A Homeroom teacher cater the students in all subjects except those requiring special facilities.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Teacher B is a homeroom teacher in a grade 2 with 32 students divided into two groups during lessons. She teaches English to a grade 1 once a week, where the students are divided into two groups of 12 students each. Their time during English lessons is limited, mostly because of logistics factors, but the intention is to carry out the lesson for 30 minutes. Teacher B has formal education teaching English in grades 1-7.

Teacher C has English lessons with a grade 2 once a week for approximately 30 minutes. The lessons are carried out with the whole class of 24 students. She has been working as a teacher for 11 years, with 5 years’ experience of teaching English in grades 1-3. However, Teacher C has no formal education for teaching English.

Teacher D has 8 years of experience teaching English in grades 1-6, although she is legitimate to teach in grades 1-7. The students are in grade 2 and Teacher D has been their homeroom teacher since grade 1, teaching most of the subjects. Teacher D has a class of 18 students with 30-60 minutes of English a week.

**Materials**

**Observations**

In the ESL/EFL classroom observations is of common use and a useful mean in order to collect data that contains in-depth information concerning the phenomena that occurs in the classroom (MacKey & Gass, 2005). Observations were used in the study in order to collect data of teachers TL/L1 use during class; both concerning to what extent TL/L1 is used and for what functions it was used. With the research goals in mind, the use of an observational scheme seemed appropriate for the purpose and to ensure consistency during my visits. As explained in MacKey & Gass, the use of observational schemes can promote valid findings and ease the data collection process but needs to match the research goals to be productive. Since one of the focuses of the observations is for what functions teacher use the TL/L1, the “functions of utterance” (de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009) were used as a part in the scheme, as presented in Table 1.
Table 1.  
*Functions of Classroom Utterances.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function of utterance</th>
<th>Definition/Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Translation</td>
<td>L1 utterances that translated a previous TL utterance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. L1-L2 contrast</td>
<td>L1 utterances used to contrast TL forms or cultural concepts with L1 forms or concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Evaluation</td>
<td>Utterances used to evaluate students’ contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Activity instruction</td>
<td>Utterances that provided activity instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Activity objective</td>
<td>Utterances that described the objective of an activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Elicitation of student contribution</td>
<td>Utterances that elicited student contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Personal comment</td>
<td>Utterances that expressed the instructor’s personal take on events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Comprehension check</td>
<td>Utterances that checked students’ comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Classroom equipment</td>
<td>Utterances that dealt with classroom equipment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Administrative issues</td>
<td>Utterances related to administrative issues (e.g., exam announcements)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Repetition of student L1 utterance</td>
<td>L1 utterances spoken by a student and repeated by the instructor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Reaction to student question</td>
<td>Utterances the instructor produced in response to a student question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Humor</td>
<td>Utterances in which the instructor made a joke intended to make the students laugh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Arbitrary code-mixing</td>
<td>Utterances containing instances of the instructor mixing L1 and TL words randomly, including false starts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. L1 words from L1 culture</td>
<td>L1 words from L1 cultural context that the instructor incorporated into TL speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Reprimanding students</td>
<td>Utterance used to reprimand students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Duff & Polio’s (1990) classification of utterances was used in the observational scheme to establish a set of criteria for how much TL/L1 was used during my observations. These classifications are presented in Table 2. The complete observational scheme used for the observations (see Appendix 1) was first conducted and used by Dahlberg (2015).

Table 2.  
*Classification of coded utterances.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coded utterance</th>
<th>Definition/Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>The utterance is completely in Swedish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1c</td>
<td>The utterance is in Swedish with one word or phrase in the TL.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mix

The utterance is, approximately, an equal mixture of Swedish and the TL.

TLc

The utterance is in the TL with one word or phrase in Swedish.

TL

The utterance is completely in the TL.

**Interviews**

In order to answer the research questions regarding teacher attitudes and motivations concerning the TL use in class and their own perceptions, interviews were conducted. The interviews were carried out in Swedish and later translated to English. The aim was to investigate teachers’ own personal conceptions and reasoning behind their TL use. When adding a more qualitative component to a more quantitative one, you create conditions for finding out why and gaining additional information to the quantitative data (Dörnyei, 2010). A semi-structured interview was the method of choice since that allows for flexibility during the interview in order to gain a good outcome. Nunan (1992) also explains that a semi-structured interview can make the interviewee feel more powerful and therefore, opens up for a closer relation and answers that are more personal.

In the process of constructing the semi-structured questions, considerations concerning relevance to answering the research questions and room for flexibility with open-ended questions and follow-up questions were taking into account. In order to facilitate the processing of the data, the questions were sorted into four higher levels of categories: 1.) Background, 2) Teacher attitude, 3) Language use and 4) What motivates teacher’s language use/language choice. Each of the four categories feed into one or more of the research questions. The questions included under category 1 provides with an overall look on teacher background and education.

**Procedure**

The first step in the data collection was sending out emails to teachers and principals in schools located in the nearby area. In order to find teachers willing to participate in the study, an email was sent out with a short description of the intention of the study.
The aim of the research was not included since that may have had an effect on the outcome of the study, giving the participants opportunity to change their set-up. Four teachers responded and matched the criteria of participating in the study. The four participants all teach English in the earlier grades, i.e. grades K-3, which is the target group of this study, and share the L1 with the students.

All of the meetings were scheduled through email. Before the first visit, their teacher informed the students that a visitor was going to observe the lesson. When arriving for the observations, a brief conversation with the teacher preceded the lessons to see that everything was in order. The observations were carried out in one grade 1 and three of the observations were carried out in grade 2. The teacher decided where to best be seated in the classroom to minimize interference with the lesson. A simple recording device was properly placed to recall when the teacher was in action. During the lessons, the observational scheme was used and every teacher utterance was tallied.

As an observer, especially in the younger years’ classroom, you should be aware of how you might influence the lesson. Young learners are not often exposed to the type of situation that an observation may create; they are often curious of what is going on around them (MacKey & Gass, 2005). Before the first observation in each class, a mutual understanding concerning how the observation was best carried out was made between the observer and the teacher. In that way, no time was taken from the lesson in order to explain the situation because the students were prepared. To be able to make corrections and double check the data collected from the observations; all of the observations were recorded. All of the participants were informed of this beforehand.

The recording of the lesson was used as a support after every lesson to see that nothing was overlooked. To get similar and transferrable data from the observations all of the lessons was recorded and tallied for 25 minutes each. Three of the lessons had a total time of 32 minutes, one had a total time of 30 minutes, and the four remaining all differed between 25-30 minutes.

After conducting two observations in each class, an interview of 30-45 minutes was conducted with each of the teachers. All of the interviews were done within one week after the last observations. The interviews were recorded, so that full attention could be directed to the interviewee, in order to create good follow-up questions and
clarifications concerning their answers. One concern with the semi-structured interview is that the interviewee may feel that they need to adapt their answers in order to “answer correctly”. With that in mind, the importance of creating a relaxed and open relation during the interviews was catered for. The participants were not informed about the purpose of the study until both the observations and interview was completed. Therefore, it would be highly unlikely that the participants were able to change their contributions in order to fit the purpose of the study.
Results and Discussion

In this section, the results of the data collection will be presented and then followed by a final discussion and analysis of its implementations. The observation data is presented first, followed by the interview data.

Observation data

In order to investigate teachers’ amount of TL-usage during class, the different categories of utterance were used. The total amount of teachers’ use of the different categories is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Teachers' total percentage of use of L1 by usage category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>L1</th>
<th>L1c</th>
<th>Mix</th>
<th>TLc</th>
<th>TL</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>63.00</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>10.50</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>16.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>52.00</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>73.00</td>
<td>7.70</td>
<td>11.70</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.60</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher D</td>
<td>24.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>18.00</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>46.00</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to answer what function teachers’ language use have during lessons, the functional categories are presented in Table 2. During the observations four of the categories were not represented, 1) L1-TL contrast, 2) classroom equipment, 3) arbitrary code-mixing and 4) L1 words from L1 culture. Therefore, these four categories are not presented in Table 2 and the analysis only deals with the 12 remaining categories.

Table 4. Teachers total percentage of use by functional category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions of utterance</th>
<th>Teacher A</th>
<th>Teacher B</th>
<th>Teacher C</th>
<th>Teacher D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Translation</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>15.50</td>
<td>11.00</td>
</tr>
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<td>2. Evaluation</td>
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<td>4.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>6.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Activity instruction</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>16.80</td>
<td>17.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Activity objective</td>
<td>14.00</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>11.60</td>
<td>18.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Elicitation of student contribution</td>
<td>11.90</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Personal comment</td>
<td>7.70</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>9.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Comprehension check</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Administrative issues</td>
<td>7.70</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>8.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teacher A was observed using the L1 63% of the total time and the TL for a total of 16%. The most common functions of utterance were the ones involving giving instructions and helping the students.

Teacher B had a 52% use of the L1 and only 6% of the total time was carried out in the TL, although, a 25% use of mixing the L1 and TL was observed. Teacher B often used utterances for translation, activity instructions, activity objectives and reprimanding students.

Teacher C used the most extensive amount of the L1 with a total of 73%. The TL represent 2.6% and Teacher C uses a mix of the L1/TL 11.7% of the total amount. The most common functions of utterance were activity instruction, activity objective, translation and personal comments.

Teacher D shows the most extensive use of the TL with a total of 46%, 18% of mixing and a 24% use of the L1 follow this. In accordance to the other participants, the most common functions involve activity instruction, activity objective, and translation.

Discussion of the observation data will be delayed until the Summary section below, where the implications will be integrated in and discussed alongside the interview data.

**Interview data**

In order to answer my second and third research questions concerning teacher attitudes towards using the TL and what motivates their use of the L1/TL, different patterns and connections deriving from the answers of the interview are presented in the following section.

Teacher A expresses a positive attitude towards using the TL in the primary
Her attitude is highly reflected on exposing the students to the TL as much as possible, stating “with the amount of English students receive in different contexts, in- and outside of school, it feels natural for the English start to be as early as possible”. Teacher A put a lot of emphasize on communication and talk, “you have to encourage the students to talk, it feels different, but it is very important to gain the courage to talk”. However, Teacher A only used the TL 16% during the observed lessons, while the amount of L1 was considerably higher (63%).

During the lessons observed, the students carried out a great amount of pair work, where the teacher acted more as a scaffold for the students. Teacher A uses activity instruction, activity objective and reaction to student question as the most common functions of utterance. This can explain why the L1 was mostly used during lessons; the teacher often used the L1 to explain activity instructions and objectives so that the students could carry out the tasks successfully themselves. Teacher A does not feel that excluding the L1 benefits the students’ learning, “students sometimes have low self-esteem when it comes to learning and acquiring something new. They often disconnect if I talk too much English, I need to talk Swedish in order to make them understand and learn”.

Teacher B expresses that the most important thing when teaching English to younger students is “to approach the new language in an enjoyable and playful manner”. She understands the importance of exploiting the students to the TL but feels that it is equally important to include the L1, “it is up to the teacher to decide how much Swedish is needed in order to carry out the lesson”. She shows one of the higher amounts of translation regarding her function of utterance, with activity instruction, activity objective and reaction to student question as the most common functions.

Teacher B has a 6% use of the TL and represents the highest amount of mixed utterances in the study, using 25%. The observed lesson included a lot of teacher talk and instruction, which can be connected to the amount of mixing the L1 and TL, since Teacher B often translated her utterances. There can also be a connection to her most common functions of utterance since they were often carried out in the L1, sometimes with the exception of a following translation. She motivates her language use as an active choice stating, “Every teacher has to weigh in the group, knowing and catering for the need of those individuals. If they demand an explanation in Swedish, then you
will have to provide them with that”.

Teacher C used the highest amount of L1 (73%) during her lessons. Teacher C feels that it is hard to exclude the L1 since “the students in K-3 need the Swedish language as guidance and support”. Her lessons started out with a gathering, with everyone sitting in a circle in front of the whiteboard. During that moment teacher C lead the lesson, while the students only gave answers to questions. Teacher C uses the highest amount of translation, with activity instruction, activity objective and reaction to student question also being represented as the most common functions of utterance.

After the gathering, the students started working individually while the teacher walked around the classroom, helping the students. During that moment, the teacher almost exclusively used the L1, which can explain the result. A connection between the most common functions of utterance can be viewed in relation to the extensive L1 use since the activity instruction- and objectives as well as reaction to student question were carried out with the L1.

Teacher C expresses that it is hard to “always monitor yourself”, saying that she finds it hard to constantly make “good” language choices in class. Her attitude towards the use of the TL is on a good note according to herself, although she feels it hard to carry out lessons with a maximized use of the TL.

Teacher D’s observed lessons followed the same pattern; a common chant/song to start the lesson, teacher talk and activity instruction/objective followed by students working on their own. The 46% of TL use can be connected to the overall use of the TL; Teacher D does not always rely on the L1 to create understanding. Her use of activity instruction and activity objective were the most common functions of utterance, and most of the time carried out in the TL. She states that creating an environment that allows for an extensive use of the TL requires patience saying, “it is not something that happens overnight”.

Teacher D expresses a very positive attitude to the use of TL, even among younger students. She motivates her extensive use of the TL stating “once the students get it, they do not loose focus for a second; it is too much fun learning a new language”.

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Final discussion

This section will discuss the implications of the observation and interview data in order to relate the findings to the research questions. The study set out to examine TL use during English lessons in a K-3 context in the Swedish primary classroom and teacher attitudes and reasoning behind their language choices. The interview data conducted for the study offer insights in teachers’ beliefs, approach to teaching, how they see YLL and their own use of the L1 and TL when teaching English.

The four teachers participating in the study all had a positive attitude when it comes to using the TL but felt that the L1 was necessary in the YLL context. The findings concerning the first research question, shows that the TL use range from 2.6% to 46% in the total amount of teacher utterances. The teachers express the importance of own experience in regard to their own beliefs and way of teaching English and the importance to cater for the YLL you have in your class, saying that no method fits all.

From the collected data, different themes emerged connected to the research questions. The themes deal with teacher attitudes concerning the use of the TL, trying to answer why they make their choices the way they do and how that may affect their own teaching.

**Teachers’ use of the target language and first language**

The data presents a range from a 2.6% use to a 46% use of the TL. This result is in accordance with similar studies conducted (Duff & Polio, 1990; Crawford, 2004; Inbar-Lourie, 2010), where a great range concerning the TL use is presented. The inconsistency presented, can be seen in relation to teachers’ L1 use and their attitudes and motives related to their language use. Although a long tradition of the sole use of the TL has been promoted by researchers (Hall & Cook, 2012), the study indicates that this may not be the case when it comes to teacher practice.

All of the four participating teachers express a need for including the L1 in order to attend the goals and aim of their teaching. In Rabbidge and Chappell’s (2014) study the participating teachers state that it is impossible to exclude the L1 in everyday class situations. In contrast to the teachers participating in this study, the teachers in
Rabbidge and Chappell’s study felt resentment towards a sole use of the TL, while the teachers in this study had a more open-minded attitude towards a sole use of the TL. In order to teach according to the Swedish syllabus, you have to include every student, no matter what that demands of you as a teacher. The most common motive for including the L1 in ELT is to gain understanding and being able to cater for the whole group of students (Ho Lee 2012). This was a common argument used among the four teachers in the study as well, claiming that the use of the L1 is a tool that can gain benefits to accommodate a good learning outcome.

Although all of the four teachers express that the ultimate way of teaching English is by maximizing the TL use during class, they also points out that they feel that a total exclusion of the L1 is impossible. Three of the teachers expressed they had problems reaching out to the students at all times when only using the TL. This problem is also expressed in the study conducted by Inbar-Lourie (2010), with teachers feeling that the L1 needs to be included in the YLL context. There is not much research concerning the TL use in an YLL context, although, a demand seems to be occurring. Applying an “English- mainly” approach instead of an “English-only” approach (Hall & Cook 2012) would be in accordance to the findings in this study.

**Facilitating young language learners**

A common concern when it comes to teaching English to YLL is to focus on making the learning enjoyable, without pressuring the students. As expressed by Teacher B, “my beliefs are that the learning (of English) should be enjoyable from the start in order to create an interest and curiosity among the students”. This is a concern represented in previous research as well (de la Campa & Nassaji; Hall & Cook, 2012; Inbar-Lourie, 2010), often in connection with L1 use, since the L1 is viewed as a facilitator to accomplish an enjoyable environment. The learning goal is not centered on gaining massive amounts of knowledge and skills concerning the English language, but rather to get the students engaged. “My goal is to get the students to talk, and use the language as much as possible, they should be exploited to the language and be given opportunities to try it out”, as stated by Teacher A. In Inbar-Lourie’s (2010) study, one of the teachers expressed a similar attitude, saying that her role as a teacher is to facilitate and provide exposure to the language, rather than to teach the language.
Teacher B also expresses the importance of progression, “I want the students to see their own progression (when learning a new language) and for them to see the great use of gaining an additional language to their own language”. Student motivation is one of the most common explanations to why teachers use the L1. This is in accordance with Rabbidge & Chappell’s (2014) study where teachers expressed a need for the L1 in order to give the students motivation to learn. Although the sense of progression is important, the level of challenge seems to be equally important as Teacher C explains “learning should be fun, but at a reasonable level”. Teacher D also discusses the importance of “introducing the students to the new objective in a reasonable amount, in order for the learning to still be fun”. In Crawford’s (2007) study, 61% of the participating teachers agreed that the use of TL reflects teachers’ confidence in the students’ ability to learn. The study further discusses that a great lack of confidence in this ability is particularly visible among teachers in the lower grades.

**Teacher experience and awareness**

“I think that the students influence me to a great extent, I adapt very much according to them”. Teacher C highlights the fact that her way of teaching is very student centered and many of her language choices are steered by the students’ comprehension and needs. It does not seem possible that all can agree on a perfect amount of TL use, that might even create more pressure for teachers, including more rules to follow (Littlewood & Yu, 2011). This is in agreement with all of the four teachers and further pointed out by Teacher B saying, “it all depends on your students and what kind of group you are facing”. When promoting an approach that excludes the L1, like the TL-only approach, teachers are often stressed and feel guilt when using the L1 (Ho Lee, 2012; Inbar-Lourie, 2010). This was not visible among the teachers in the study, except for one of the teacher expressing that she “should use the TL more”, without any confidence concerning her language choices. The three other teachers participating felt confident enough to motivate their language choices, stating that own experience and knowledge concerning “what works in a classroom situation” were two of the main factors. The findings concerning the teachers being aware of their language choices in the classroom is in accordance with Inbar-Lourie’s (2010) study, where the amount of the L1 is individual and subjective, but they all state the L1 use as an “active-choice” without feeling ashamed.
Conclusion

The aim of the paper is to see how the actual implementations of TL use might differ from the theoretical standpoint that is promoted as well as teachers’ attitudes towards the suggested level of TL use and their motivations behind these differences. The observations conducted for the study contributes with an overall look on how much the TL is used during class and for what functions. The data collected for the study shows a huge range concerning the matter of the TL use in class, with a range of 2.6%- 46%. Teacher attitudes towards the use of the TL were highly affected by own experience and students’ understanding. The study also presents results implicating that the use of the L1 is motivated as a necessary mean in order to cater for all the individuals represented in a classroom.

The findings in the study do not indicate that there is a negative attitude towards using the TL. All of the teachers participating felt secure in their English language use during class and had no problems communicating in the TL. The data collection points to a use of both the L1 and the TL in all of the four classrooms, giving the sense that the “TL-only” may not be a realistic approach to strive for.

There are some limitations to the study that should be brought up. The sample size of the data collection is small, with four participating teachers, which means that the study is not to be generalized. When conducting the observations and interviews, a great effort to not interfere or affect the outcome was made. However, the observations and interviews cannot be proven to not have been affected by the situation. The study is qualitative, which contributes with the opportunity to perceive a personal take on the matter from the participants. The aim of the study is not to find something applicable in all situations; the intention is to give an idea, background and deeper understanding of teachers’ TL use and the attitudes and motives behind their actions.

The national curriculum does not state a perfect amount of TL use when teaching a foreign language. However, as mentioned previously, the commentary does state that mediation should be avoided and a maximized use of the TL should be applied in order to cater for every student (Skolverket, 2011a). The data collected for the study
shows variation when it comes to the use of the TL, leaving students with unequal opportunities to exposure of the language. As a teacher, it is important that you have the opportunities to form and use own perceptions of what will work in your own teaching practice. In accordance with the national curriculum, the participants of the study were very concerned to apply methods and make their language choices in a way that was beneficial for the students and their learning.

During my time at the teacher educational program, a maximized use of the TL has been promoted and in some cases even the “TL-only” approach. However, catering for the individual learner, promoting inclusion instead of exclusion and the importance of self-reflection and evaluation has been equally important throughout. This seems to reflect the on-going conflict in Swedish primary schools. The teachers are aware of the importance and benefits with a maximized TL use during class, while at the same time doing their best to include all of the 20-30 individuals in one class. This is a constant balance act in order to create a good learning environment that caters for everyone’s needs.

Whether the TL or the L1 is most commonly used, there has not proven to be a right way for everyone. As the teachers in this study express, experience and own beliefs, without settling and shutting the door for new ideas, is the way to go. In order to support the research concerning L1/TL use it would be interesting to see what effects teacher language choices have on students’ learning outcome. This could provide information on how you can use the L1/TL during class in order to create a good learning outcome and pave the way for new methods to practice out in the EFL primary classrooms.
References


Appendix 1

Observational scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function of utterance</th>
<th>TL</th>
<th>Tlc</th>
<th>Mix</th>
<th>L1c</th>
<th>L1</th>
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<tr>
<td>Translation</td>
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<td>L1-L2 contrast</td>
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<td>Evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity objective</td>
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<td>Elicitation of student contribution</td>
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<td>Personal comment</td>
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<td>Comprehension check</td>
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<td>Repetition of student L1 utterance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reaction to student question</td>
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<tr>
<td>Humor</td>
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<td>Arbitrary code-mixing</td>
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<td>L1 words from L1 culture</td>
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<td>Reprimanding students</td>
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</table>
Appendix 2

Interview questions

Background
How long have you been teaching English? In what grades do you teach?
What education do you have concerning English language teaching?
In what grade do you start teaching English at your school? Why?

Teacher attitude
Would you like to start teaching English earlier/later? Why?
What are the most important aspects of English teaching to you? What is most important for pupils in grade K-3?
How do you feel about using English/Swedish in your English teaching?
What are your beliefs concerning language teaching? What has influenced your language teaching?
Do you believe that others have influenced you and your beliefs? For example: School policy, colleagues, steering documents, own experience, etc.? Why? Has this been helpful/detrimental to your teaching?

Language use
Do you feel that you teach according to your own principles? Explain.
How would you motivate your English and/or Swedish use?
Do you use Swedish in your English teaching? What purposes do your use of Swedish serve? Any situations in particular where you feel that it is needed? Why and when?
Do you feel satisfied with your language choices? Would you like to do anything differently? What and why?
Are your language choices intentional or unintentional? Do you feel like you are aware of your language use in class?

What motivates teacher’s language use/language choice?
How do you motivate your language choices in the classroom? Do you ever reflect or/and evaluate on your language use?
When do you feel the need to talk Swedish? Is it for example in a certain situation or/and with a certain pupil? Is it possible to only talk English? Why/ why not?
Do you feel that your language choice affects students’ attention? Why? What do you do to catch their attention again?
Have you ever felt that your own language proficiency is an obstacle (makes it hard to proceed the way you like to)? Do you feel comfortable communicating in English?