

Towards a Principled Use of L1 – Observing an EFL Teacher’s L1 Use in Rural Sabah, Malaysia

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Abstract. The article described a study to understand a teacher’s usage of first language (L1) in rural Sabah, Malaysia. Literature findings discovered a growing understanding that L1 should be used to assist a learner in learning L2 and that despite some studies done in Malaysian schools, none are based on English Language classrooms in rural Sabah, East Malaysia. Approximately 400 minutes of the teacher’s classroom sessions were recorded, and any use of L1 is coded, and then categorised, based on the coding system developed by Sali (2014). The codes revealed that L1 is primarily used for academic and managerial purposes, with more efforts made on giving instructions, talking about learning, and eliciting objectives in mind. There was also the use of languages other than L1, primarily the students’ ethnic tongue. Findings were compared against Principled Use of L1 (Cook, 2001), and suggestions were made to assist and further enhance the L1 use of the teacher, keeping in mind the contextual uniqueness of rural Sabah, Malaysia. A larger-scale study could be replicated to confirm the findings further, and to develop a principled use of L1 for rural Sabah ESL/EFL teachers to follow.

Keywords: foreign language teaching; rural education; Sabah, Malaysia

1. Introduction

For a learner to develop proficiency in a foreign language, there is a need to develop multiple abilities, knowledge, as well as utilising and using various strategies, such as using their first language (L1) (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Cook, 2017). It was found that a significant figure of Malaysian English teachers admitted that they employ L1 when they teach (Lim, 1994). Reasons for doing so range from helping students to comprehend English and to develop a better rapport with students (Darmi et al., 2018; Mohamed, 2011).

Many researchers supported the notion of using L1 to teach foreign languages; they do not see L1 as impeding to second language (L2) learning, but as a useful cognitive and efficient linguistic tool that can be used to improve and enhance the learning of L2 learners (De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Liao, 2006; Sali, 2014; Storch

& Wigglesworth, 2003). Some even supported the use of L1 in communicative classrooms (Auerbach, 1993; Cameron; 2011, Cook, 2010, Nunan; 2003). However, the previous studies do not notify that their support for L1 does not mean English Language Teaching (ELT) practitioners could use it freely – it should be guided and used only when necessary. Macaro (2001), as well as Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009), suggested that L1 should be utilised to its full potential. Cook (2001) even proposed a list of principled use of L1 to guide foreign language teachers on the subject. Therefore, in addressing both the needs of the teachers and the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, it is essential to discover how L1 is being used in rural Sabah, and to equate the practice with Cook's (2001) recommendations so that a middle, principled way could be developed.

This study aims to discover the use of L1 of an English teacher teaching in a rural area of Sabah. The findings will then be compared against the Principled Use of L1 developed by Cook (2001), and any discrepancies will be reviewed upon, and suggestions to improve them will be made. The results of the study could also be used as a basis for a larger, multi-subject study.

Many field studies performed on the use of L1 in language instructions were completed and published, with a variety of results (Canagarajah, 1995; Carless, 2007; Forman, 2012; Liu, Ahn, Baek & Ahn, 2004; Qian, Tian & Wang, 2009). As much as these field studies provide valuable and insightful perspectives that could guide this study, their findings do not shed adequate and sufficient light on ELT situations beyond the context in which they work. Some findings are sufficient only to explain English teaching in post-colonial contexts (Canagarajah, 1995; Lin, 1996), or university settings (Forman, 2012; Littlewood & Yu, 2011). Malaysia-based research, although sufficient, did not provide adequate coverage of the rural Sabah context. There is a gap in the body of knowledge, which creates an opportunity to explore the situation on the usage of L1 in rural Sabah classrooms.

This study is undertaken to explore the use of L1 by a teacher as he teaches English to students in rural Sabah. As such, the questions guiding the study are as follows:

1. How does this teacher use L1 in teaching English to students in rural Sabah?
2. What is the purpose of this teacher using L1 when teaching English?

2. Literature Review

Reasons supporting and against L1

During the initiation of study on L1 use in L2 teaching, scholars like Chaudron (1988), Krashen (1982), and Macdonald (1993) have seen that exposure is significant – the more L2 they are exposed to, the better they stand a chance to be proficient in the target language. This view automatically assumes that L1 decreases the exposure to L2, and is an impeding factor in L2 learning. Such an assumption also draws inspiration from the popular understanding during that period – that language is best taught through a 'natural' approach, such as the Direct Method. Such an approach is also the basis behind the terminology 'monolingual fallacy' described by Phillipson (1992), i.e., the most suitable way to teach L2 is by teaching it alone, without L1. Many language teachers supported

the notion and tried to suppress L1 use. However, based on the study on second language acquisition, scholars agree that L1 is not to be fully blamed over learning challenges, as well as the errors learners make while learning L2 (Dulay & Burt, 1973; Johnson & Newport, 1994). For instance, Dulay and Burt (1973) reported that Spanish interlocutors who were learning English made only a mere 3% of mistakes due to L1 interferences.

Developments and innovations in ELT have led to various new approaches to language teaching, and soon the widely assumed understanding of 'natural approach' and L2 exclusivity is challenged. Pointing to discoveries brought forward by Dulay and Burt (1973), Turnbull (2001) concluded that teachers maximising the use of L1 is probably not as harmful as previously thought. Some see L1 not as an impeding factor to L2 learning, but as a useful tool that can be used to assist and scaffold the learning of L2 (Cummins, 2007; Macaro, 2001; Qian et al., 2009).

Macaro (2001) in his study observed that reducing the use of L1 induced a substantial surge in the usage of input modification techniques, for example, repetition, reducing speech speed to the point of losing naturalness, and syntax reduction. This could potentially lead to a decline in the quality of interaction, as these modification techniques reduce the realistic nature of the discourse, not to mention radically reduce the lexical diversity and complex syntax that a learner needs to be exposed to. Macaro (2001) supports the notion that input modification can support exchanges in L2, but warns against using it frequently – as it does not do much in assisting students acquiring competence on the more complex linguistic knowledge, such as vocabulary, phrases, and grammar, which are highly crucial in L2 proficiency.

Code-switching between L1 and L2, when utilised well during an interaction, has been proven to be a useful tool in a multitude of studies. Anton and Dicañilla (1998) reported that L1 could add value in the process of L2 learning by being a useful tool to support learners, whereby it provides cognitive scaffolding for students, as they work on tasks towards achieving their learning objectives. Donato (1994) concluded that utilization L1 helps learners of L2 in bridging their understanding in the target language by negotiating their understanding in L1 with their interlocutor, and that learners face a significant 'handicap' if they are to be denied opportunities to use L1 as they learn. The authors' claim was based on the interactionist learning theory by Ellis (2008), who proposed that relying solely on the input would not be sufficient to achieve language acquisition, except for input delivered over 'exchanges of meaning' between L2 learners and other interlocutors. Ellis saw that the 'magic' or learning and proficiency development happened over interaction, whereby learners and their tutors negotiate over the meaning and syntax content of the 'input' (Long, 1996), and then further negotiating over how the 'output' should be produced (Swain, 1995).

The use of L1 is also seen as a way to assist learners in cutting down their affective barriers, as well as developing their belief in their ability to successfully communicate in L2 (Cook, 2001; Kang, 2008; Meritt et al., 2004). A study done by

Seng and Hashim (2006) provided a clearer example of this viewpoint - they described how a lower proficiency student faces challenges in producing L2 with confidence and accuracy, as they lack the linguistic competence to do so. Therefore, they should be allowed to employ their proficiency in L1 to bridge the understanding gap with the L2. Such decision will increase their confidence, as well as reducing the difficulty these learners face as they learn the L2.

Several studies have proven the benefits of using L1 on both L2 instructions (Anton & Dica-milla, 1998; Borzogian & Fallahpour, 2015; Cohen & Brooks-Carson, 2001; Kang, 2008; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003;). Anton and Dica-milla (1998) observed five pairs of Spanish native speaking English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners engaging in writing activities, and described several ways L1 may potentially help in L2 learning, i.e., by fostering and keeping learners' interest in the task, and by motivating learners to perform challenging tasks in their L2 learning. Lally (2008) revealed that learners obtained higher credits for the organisation when using L1 to assist in writing-based lessons. Storch and Wigglesworth (2003) described that L1 expanded the quality of communications in classrooms, as well as the quality of the structure of the composition. Closer to the research context, studies conducted in Asia also seemed to support the usefulness and positive values that L1 could add into L2 classes. Liao (2006) observed how L1 supports Taiwanese college students, whereby he discovered three significant roles. Firstly, to memorise words, grammar, as well as syntax structures; secondly, as an anxiety reducer; and finally, in assisting learners to interact with each other, as well as with their teacher. Borzogian & Fallahpour (2015) also found that L1 supports learners as they learn L2, and that L1 should not be seen as 'evil', or removed from classrooms.

Principled use of L1 (Cook, 2001)

Cook (2001) proposed four major mental anchors that teachers should be aware of when using L1 as they teach L2 – efficiency, learning, naturalness, and external relevance. To explain efficiency, Cook elaborated that L1 may assist in explaining abstract concepts, as well as complex vocabulary in a more time saving and efficient way. Naturalness ensures that teachers could build rapport by using L1 than it would be in the L2. For external relevance, Cook asked the L2 teachers to consider using L1 if the use of it will assist the learners to develop mastery on specific L2 structures that they may need in the environment outside of the classroom. All four elements, according to Cook, should serve as guidelines for helping teachers to decide whether they should use L1 as they teach. It is anticipated that the teachers incorporate a judicious, principled use of L1 into their teaching practice that will support their learners' L2 learning.

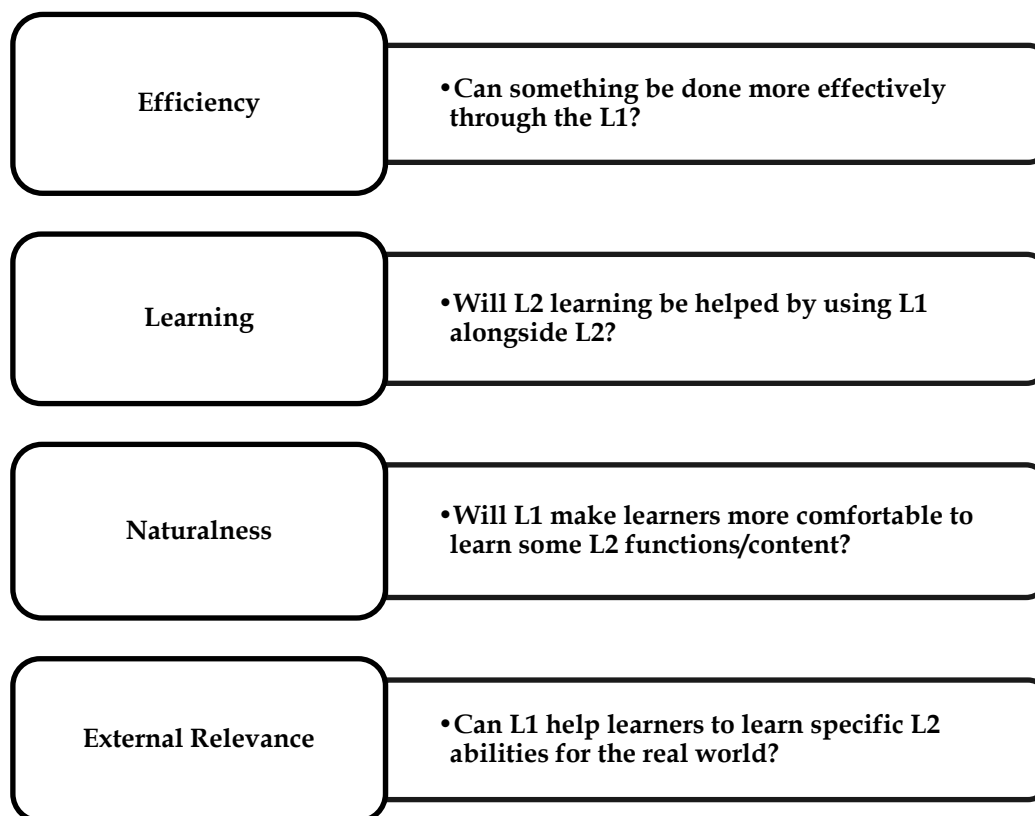


Figure 1: Principled use of L1 (Cook, 2001)

How are teachers using L1 as they teach L2?

Kang (2008) conducted a similar study as Liao (2006), but with a change in context (Korean, instead of Taiwanese students), and that he decided to focus on the teacher instead of the learners. Kang found that the teachers used L1 for pedagogical purposes, i.e., explaining language features, organising tasks, and implementing tests. Learners expressed appreciation in the teacher's use of L1, as it helps them to develop L2 proficiency faster, and keeping their interest and motivation high.

Sali (2014) explored the L1 use of three EFL teachers in Turkey. She reported that the teachers used L1 in their effort to explain content (academic) and to manage procedures in class (managerial). She also found that teachers employ L1 to develop rapport, albeit at a frequency lesser of findings from Liao (2006) and Kang (2008). Forman (2012) also investigated teachers' usage of L1 in a Thai university. He concluded that L1 is mainly used for six purposes; to animate, translate, explain, create, prompting, and dialoguing. He also found that research subjects often 'string' their strategies in a specific order; animate, and then explain before creating meanings. These findings could shed some light into the possible situation in interior rural Sabah classrooms, as the contexts have some proximity, where the research was conducted in South East Asia. De La Campa and Nassaji (2009) embarked on an observation study, looking at several German-native speaking teachers teaching German in university classes as an L2, and discovered that L1 is used mainly to translate, provide instruction, give personalised feedback, and to show instructor as bilingual.

L1 in Malaysian ESL/EFL Classrooms

L1 use has been reported in Malaysia, with some of it conducted in rural Malaysia. Ahmad and Jusoff (2009) discovered that almost three-fourths of teachers code-switched into L1 when making simple difficult concepts, elaborating classroom management, as well as explaining and highlighting contrasts between English and Malay grammar. They also discovered that teachers use L1 up to 60% at a time when establishing rapport with learners and giving instructions for tasks. The learners, when asked, expressed positive support for their teachers to use L1, with 69% of the learners enjoying their teachers' approach. A study done by Lee (2010) was perhaps, contextual wise, the closest to the conditions of this paper – Lee investigated how EFL teachers in Sabah used L1 as they teach, not in the rural area, but the urban area in Sabah. He reported that teachers use L1 to address anxiety in learners, explain new words, explain new grammar items, and to save time.

3. Methodology

Due to the study's exploratory and experimental nature, data is best collected in both numbers, as well as in narration. This study emphasises on the quantitative data (frequency and types of L1 usage), with the qualitative data (utterance style and choice of words) playing a secondary role. As much as this study wished to go deeper into the richer corpus data recorded in this research, the study was more interested in discovering the teacher's use of L1 in his English instruction. Hence, the description and discussion of frequency and types of L1 used will take precedence, with the qualitative data used as a supplement to provide stronger evidence for the findings.

The results of this study were derived from analysis of data collected through an audio recording, as well as the personal reflections from the research subject – the researcher himself. The data was then analysed and reflected upon, taking into account the findings, as well as the local ELT situation. The reflection was then further interpreted into teaching considerations, establishing a principled L1 use in rural Sabah ESL/EFL classrooms.

Participant

The respondent is a Malaysian English teacher. His teaching experience involved working with students with excellent, almost native-like proficiency of English, as well as students whose English skills are just evolving. Most of his ELT career was spent with the students learning English in the interior and rural regions of Sabah.

Data Collection

The study took place in two selected classrooms in government secondary schools in a rural area in Sabah, for a month. Data for the research was collected by an audio recording of 10 teaching sessions. As every teaching session was 40 minutes, 400 minutes of audio interactions were recorded.

Students were informed before recording that they were involved in the study. The learners were told that the study contained only classroom interactions and that their responses and behaviour would not be evaluated in this study. All they

have to do was act naturally. Throughout the recording, the teacher taught, as usual, carrying out lessons as planned. The use of L1 and English from the teacher was neither controlled nor managed.

Procedures

The recording was transcribed, whereby the transcription of the audio recording followed the recommendations and method by Walsh (2011). The method was adopted for this research because it is suitable for the classroom condition, where overlapping conversation and simultaneous utterances were normal. All utterances were transcribed into text, with L1 utterances italicised. Transcription did not begin until after all 400 minutes of recording was made. This is to prevent the researchers from discovering the patterns in the earlier recordings – it is of concern that the new understanding could indirectly restrict in future transcribing and coding process.

Once completed, the transcription was analysed and coded, following a specific coding system, adapted from Sali (2014) who developed hers from other previous studies (Canagarajah, 1995; Macaro, 2001). The coding system adopted provides a list of 14 L1 functions, organised into three major categories; Academic, Managerial, and Social/Cultural (Figure 2). The researchers read through the transcription, identify L1 utterances, consider the context of its use by looking at the utterances before and after the L1 utterance, and then decide the actual intended use. A code was then be assigned to the L1 utterance. An utterance consists of a ‘stream’ of linguistic output that occurs within one intonation, starts and ends with pauses, and forms a single semantic unit (Sali, 2014). The coding process was repeated twice to encourage more accurate coding. Findings from both coding sessions were then averaged.

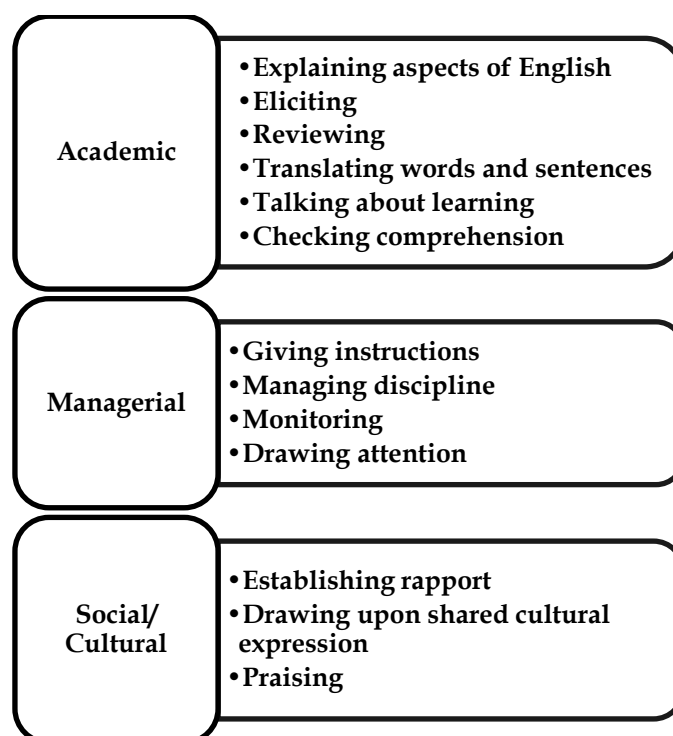


Figure 2: Coding system for L1 used by Sali (2014)

The finalised coding from the transcription was analysed quantitatively. The outputs (numbers) were then used as the basis for comparison with the findings from other studies. Patterns and unique findings from quantitative data were then analysed deeper, using qualitative data obtained from the transcription. Reflections and considerations of L1 use were then proposed, based on the recommendations by Cook (2001).

To increase validity and reliability, several steps were taken. First, the recording of the classroom sessions was done in 40-minute blocks, randomly selected over 30 days. This study also ensures the emergence of a stronger set of analysis by ensuring that the process of transcription coding done twice by the researchers. The figures were then added up and averaged. Averaging is a strategy supported by Berg and Lune (2012), as it takes out the extreme ends of the data; thus, ensuring further validity and reliability.

Another researcher was requested to help analyse up to half of the transcription in the study. This is to introduce another input in the data analysis, i.e., encouraging triangulation and also to establish external and inter-rater reliability. Any discrepancies were discussed upon until an 85% agreement was reached, a percentage adapted from the study done by Sali (2014). Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) as well as Cresswell & Clark (2011) supported such an approach, seeing it as a way to develop accuracy with the data.

4. Results and Discussion

Presentation of quantitative data

Analysis of the 400-minute audio recordings revealed a total of 1253 L1 utterances. Academic use of L1 emerged as the majority, with a frequency of 527. L1 use for managerial purposes came second with 477 uses, and L1 use for rapport was the least, at 249.

Table 1: Use of L1 by functions.

Categories of L1 Use	Occurrences	Percent
Academic	527	42.0
Explaining aspects of English	92	7.0
Eliciting	152	12.0
Reviewing	6	0.4
Translating Words and sentences	90	7.0
Talking about learning	137	7.0
Checking Comprehension	48	4.0
Managerial	477	38.0
Giving instructions	211	17.0
Managing Discipline	16	1.0
Monitoring	206	16.0
Drawing Attention	44	4.0
Social/Cultural	249	20.0
Establishing Rapport	197	16.0
Drawing upon shared cultural expression	42	3.0
Praising	10	0.7

The quantitative findings were in agreement with the studies by Sali (2014), Forman (2012), and De La Campa and Nassaji (2009), whereby some of their descriptions of L1 use were consistent with the findings here. Sali, in her research, found that the use of L1 for academic purposes recorded the highest frequency, with the managerial second, and rapport the least frequent. Forman (2012) found that teachers animate, translate, explain, create, prompt, and converse the most when they teach in EFL classes in Thailand. All six techniques described by Forman are part of the academic use of L1 in the category system introduced by Sali. Similarly, De La Campa and Nassaji (2009) reported that 54% of EFL teachers used L1 for academic purposes. The findings were also consistent with reports from Ahmad and Jusoff (2009), who stated that the highest usage of L1 is for actions such as ‘checking comprehension’, ‘describing new words’, and ‘explaining difficult concepts’, whereby all these actions are part of L1 use for academic purposes in this study. The report will now describe the top 5 of 15 functions of L1 use, together with examples extracted from the transcript of the audio recording.

L1 use for academic purposes

Explaining aspects of English. This function primarily deals with purposes such as explaining grammar in the target language, correcting mistakes, giving examples or guiding, as indicated in Table 2. The teacher uses L1 to simplify complicated areas of English for the learners by reducing the difficulty in their learning process. Table 2 shows the use of L1 by the teacher to explain complex grammatical issues, such as differentiating between subject and object.

Table 2: Explaining aspects of English

No	Excerpts
1	<i>...subject ini biasanya orang, object ini biasanya benda tidak bernyawa...</i> [Subjects are usually human beings, objects are usually inanimate objects]
2	<i>...kenapa kata kerja, sebab berjalan itu boleh dilakukan.</i> [Why is this a verb, because ‘walking’ is an action that can be acted out]

Eliciting. Eliciting is one of the most-recorded function of L1 usage, where it is used to prompt and encourage more reaction and output from the learners; hence, has a direct effect on increasing learner’s engagement, as can be seen in Table 3. The teacher employed L1 in the classroom to bridge the students’ difficulty when they faced challenges to produce L2 output. It could be possible to say that such a prompting strategy made learning less intimidating for his learners.

Table 3: Eliciting

No	Excerpts
1	<i>...Memakai, wear ini adalah kata ker? ja.</i> [‘wear’, this word is a... verb].
2	<i>...Jadi pagi itu ad...jective.</i> [so, the word ‘morning’ is an ad...jective].

Translating words and sentences. This strategy is also employed by the teacher, as shown in Table 4. The teacher used L1 to provide the translation of certain words and sentences to assist comprehension. He also used L1 to translate the classroom instructions frequently, especially in the sections where he guides the learners to a specific part or element of the content they are learning. All translations were an attempt to increase the efficiency of the classroom, where the teacher can use less time explaining to each student, allowing him to assist more students within a short period.

Table 4: Translating words and sentences

No	Excerpts
1	...Robber is steal, ok. <i>Perompak mencuri</i> . [robber is stealing].
2	... <i>No Folding, Jangan ada lipat-lipat</i> . [Don't fold (the task sheets)].

L1 use for managerial purposes

Giving instructions. The teacher used a lot of L1 when starting a new task with the students, briefing his students what to do or to keep the students focused and engaged. In Table 5, the teacher directs the students to remain focused and how to manage their workbook in L1.

In the example below, L1 supports and makes the teacher's instructions clearer; hence, improving efficiency. It also supports learners who are struggling to understand instructions in L2.

Table 5: Giving Instructions

No	Excerpts
1	... <i>Cari isi dulu, jangan sibuk sambung</i> . [Look for the points first, don't be busy joining (the sentences) yet].
2	... <i>Kamu potong keluar task five ini... bagi balik dengan saya</i> . [Cut out task five (from the task sheet), and give it back to me].

L1 use for rapport purposes

Drawing upon shared cultural expressions. The subjects at times used discourse markers or expressions in the dialects of Sabahan Malay, Sungai, Rungus, and Suluk, which were a shared cultural characteristic in the classroom. Excerpts from Table 6 indicate such L1 usage. This could be seen as more of an effort to build on shared linguistic, social and cultural identity between the teacher and his students, with less focus on language learning.

Table 6: Drawing upon shared cultural expressions

No	Excerpts
1	<i>Mana pincil saya? Adui, obolou sudah matoku</i> . [where's my pencil? Oh, I must be blind].
2	<i>Mikirayou juga kamu ini kan?</i> [you can be amusing and annoying too right?]

5. Discussions

Higher use of L1 in 'non-conventional' areas (Giving instructions and monitoring)

The quantitative analysis into the transcripts discovered that the top three uses of L1 of this teacher were giving instructions, monitoring, and establishing rapport. L1 was used for giving instructions at 17% of all L1 uses, monitoring was also at 17%, and establishing rapport at 16%. When combined, these three uses comprised of a total of 50% of all L1 use of the teacher.

When compared against prior studies, the findings from this study are uniquely different, where other studies did not record higher usage of L1 for managerial purposes, as this study does. Sali (2014) discovered that the top three uses of L1 with Turkish teachers were to explain, elicit, and give instructions, while similar L1 category in this study such as 'giving instructions' or 'monitoring' only recorded 14% and 3% respectively. A study done by Forman (2012) highlighted the top three uses of L1 as animating, translating, and explaining – a usage much more academic than managerial. Meanwhile, De La Campa and Nassaji (2009) described that the top three L1 uses were to translate, give instructions, and provide personalised feedback. Even when compared to studies of closer contexts, the results are different. Ahmad and Jusoff (2009) found that teachers use L1 to explain difficult concepts, elaborating on classroom management, and explaining differences between English and Malay grammar. Lee (2010) discovered that the top three uses of L1 of the teachers whom he studied were to address anxiety in learners, explain new words, and explain new grammar items. When scrutinised, the most prominent use of L1 in previous studies are related to academic use, not managerial.

Perhaps one way of explaining such differences in the findings are due to the differences in contexts. Since it is possible to claim that the same research methodology, if applied in different settings and contexts, would yield different results (Berg, 2009), it is also possible to lay such claim here as well. Differences in settings often involve variance in ideas and expectations towards instruction and acquisition of L2 amongst teachers and learners; thus, explains the difference in results. Sali (2014) based her research in Turkey, where she observed the ethnic Turkish English teachers teaching Turkish high school students, whereas De La Campa and Nassaji (2009) observed German L2 teachers teaching university students. These two studies were based on contexts very different from the current study; therefore, it is not surprising that the findings were also different. Closer to the current research context were the studies by Forman (2012), who focused on Thai university lecturers; Ahmad and Jusoff (2009), who worked with West Malaysian English teachers; and Lee (2010), the closest of them all, studied Sabahan English teachers, albeit urban school settings.

Principled L1 use, as described by Cook (2001), indicated that any L1 usage in a language classroom should assist the learning of L2. Although she supports the use of L1 for other purposes like managerial or rapport building, the focus should always go back to academic purposes – it is where L1 use is much more beneficial to learners' acquisition of L2. Therefore, it is best for the teacher to look for ways

to first minimise L1 use in rapport building – the least helpful in learners’ acquisition of L2.

High use of L1 for managerial purposes

L1 use for managerial purposes in this study comes up to 38% of L1 use. Compared to reviewed previous studies, the findings were found to be different, whereas other studies did not report such high percentages of L1 usage for managerial purposes. Sali (2014) stated that 27% of the Turkish teachers whom she observed used L1 for managerial purposes when all four categories of L1 were totalled up. De La Campa and Nassaji (2009) reported a total of 19.9% L1 use in managerial purposes of all L1 uses. Whereas Ahmad and Jusoff (2009) revealed that teachers use the least L1 when performing managerial tasks. Lee (2010) showed that the teachers he studied mostly selected ‘sometimes’ when using L1 for managerial purposes, which is lesser than the findings of this study.

The high use of L1 for managerial purposes, to the degree that it constitutes 38% of all L1 uses, does not fit well with the principled use of L1, as espoused by Cook (2001). Cook has opined that despite L1 could be used for four major situations, it is still imperative for teachers to keep in mind that their main task is to teach L2, and the usage of L2 should be made a priority. L1 use should always contribute to the learning of L2. The subject could consider reducing L1 use and attempts to manage his learners more in L2.

Usage of students’ ethnic tongue to build rapport

The quantitative data also revealed another finding worthy of a deeper discussion. Of the 197 rapport building utterances in L1, 47 of them were done in the students’ native tongue of Sungai, Rungus, Dusun, and Tausug. These native tongues are the languages spoken within the ethnic community of the students and are not to be considered part of Malay language, as the first three are Dusunic, and the latter Visayan (Smith, 1984).

There was an instance where the teacher was learning how to speak Rungus from his students, as detailed in Table 7.

Table 7: Usage of L1 to build rapport

Person	Excerpts
Learner	<i>Apa mister mau Tanya?</i> [What would Mr. like to ask?]
Teacher	<i>Kalau peluh itu apa?</i> [how do you say sweat?]
Learner	<i>Umos</i> [sweat]
Teacher	<i>Aduina, mamut aku. Umos?</i> [oh my, im hot. Sweat?]
Learner	<i>Umos, umosana</i> [sweat, sweating]
Teacher	<i>Adoina. Mamut aku, Umosana aku...</i> [oh my. Im hot, I am sweating]

Previous studies reviewed in this research (Ahmad & Jusoff, 2009; De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Forman, 2012; Lee, 2010; Sali, 2014) did not make any reference to the usage of languages other than L1 in their study. Therefore, this particular

finding has no other previous studies to be compared with. This finding could well be a distinctive breaking characteristic of this study.

One possible explanation for the high usage of native tongues in the classroom could be down to a simple reason – modelling. The teacher has no prior knowledge of his students’ native tongues. However, the teacher, after interacting and learning the native languages of his students, is now able to utter sentences or phrases in Rungus, Sungai, or Dusun. This serves as a showcase and example to his learners that it is possible to learn and be proficient in a new language, not to mention the rapport the teacher stand to gain with his students.

Another point to highlight in the teacher’s use of his learners’ L1 is the error he makes. As much as it is humorous to his students, it also shows that learning a language involves making mistakes, and constantly making corrections. This reduces the pressure in the learners to be perfect in their L2 use, and thus build up their confidence to speak English, as they would have less fear of making mistakes.

Aside from the findings above involving high usage of the native tongue, it was also found out that the teacher frequently uses L1 to bring humour into the classroom. Quantitative analysis of the study revealed that 89% of humour throughout the recordings were made in L1 and that these humorous utterances constitute 37% of the total use of L1 for rapport. The jokes ranged from employing local expressions, as well as telling analogies. Table 8 presents some of the few samples of humorous utterances made in L1 by the teacher:

Table 8: Usage of L1 for humour

No	Excerpts
1	<i>Mana pincil saya? Adui, obolou sudah matoku.</i> [where’s my pencil? Oh, I must be blind].
2	<i>Aik, fikir siapa mengelamun? Cowok di Kampung Taka sana?</i> [Hey, dreaming about who? Your boyfriend from Taka village?]

L1 humour serves to relieve the tension and strain in the classroom. L1 humour was chosen as the students could comprehend humour in their L1 better, besides the teacher having an excellent grasp of the language, as well as the speech community too.

Perhaps the more important points to explore are; how far should the teacher go with the practice of these methods and when will these methods start to impact the learners’ learning of L2 negatively. It is essential to seek a balanced approach to these practices, as it is very easy for the teacher to be overzealous at learning the learners’ native tongue and spent too much time learning from his students, resulting in a ‘coup d’état’, where the students ended up teaching the teacher instead of the other way round. Perhaps a simple suggestion of using only the final five minutes of each learning session for the teacher to learn native languages should suffice – that way, the teacher has a solid and clear approach to the process of learning the learners’ native tongue, and he could still model the process of

language learning to his learners, providing a much-needed boost to his learners' motivation.

The same is suggested to the practice of use L1 for jokes and humour. It is suggested that the teacher starts using several L2 jokes and gauge the students' understanding. If the students could not comprehend, the teacher could then employ L1 to explain the jokes. This allows the teachers to introduce jokes and expressions in English to the students slowly, as well as acknowledging that the class is an English classroom, where students should be exposed to as much English as possible, though L1 could still be employed (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Macaro, 2001). Since L1 humour is found to be very effective, it is suggested that the teacher keeps using L1 humour, but to slowly bring in L2 jokes and expressions as well.

6. Conclusion

This study attempted to analyse the use of L1 of a teacher as he teaches English to his learners in the rural of Sabah. The analysis drew the conclusion that the subject used L1 for mainly academic purposes, i.e., Giving Instructions and Managing. Besides answering the research questions, the study has also unearthed several findings on the use of L1 that are worth discussing. The study also compared the findings to principled use of L1, as suggested by Cook (2001), and proposals were made to bring the L1 use in rural Sabah closer to the suggestions put forward by her.

The study also generated several directions for future studies. First, the same model of study could be replicated, but on a larger scale. The current study recorded 400-minutes of classroom interaction of a single teacher. Future research could consider expanding the scale of the study, such as increasing the number of teachers and the minutes of interaction. It is also possible to further study this area through teachers groupings such as pre and in-service teachers, and also how usage of certain teaching materials affect a teacher's use of L1.

Finally, this study has also discovered that more languages other than L1 were used in the classroom. This in itself is a breaking feature of the study – indicating the unique context in which this study is based on. So far, there has been little, if any literature, that discusses on the usage of languages other than L1 in the classroom, where most studies and discussions were focused on the usage of a single L1 in EFL instruction. It could be a worthy endeavour to embark a similar study in similar contexts – a classroom of learners from rural, multi-ethnic, multi-tongue society that learns English as an L2 to see if similar results emerge. The findings could then be used to make an informed description, and arrive at the suggestion on how to use more than a single L1 in classrooms judiciously.

7. References

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