Introduction

This chapter examines languages in the young learner classroom. Specifically, it explores how both the learners’ first language (L1) and the second language (L2) have been used as pedagogical tools and the rationales for and effects of doing so. It begins by giving a historical overview of classroom language use before turning to critical issues such as translanguaging. Current contributions particularly in the field of young learner research are then introduced and suggestions made for how teachers might decide how and when to use the L1 or L2. Finally, it will provide a future research agenda for this topic, which includes a focus on classroom data.

Definitions

In this chapter, we use the term L1 for the first language of students or the mother tongue (MT). The language children are learning at school is called the L2, which can also be called the target language (TL). Some children learn two (or more) languages from birth: these children are bilingual (BL). Children and adults can also become bilingual through learning a second language at school or in a social environment. Bilingualism does not therefore mean that control of two languages is flawless (see Conteh and Brock 2006, 2011; Murphy, this volume) or that bilinguals can do the same things in both languages to the same degree (e.g., it is rare to find a bilingual who can write an academic essay in two languages to the same level).

Terminology is generally contested and this is true for the terms introduced here. For example, Hall and Cook (2012) prefer the terms ‘own language’ for L1 and ‘new language’ for L2 because the order of learning does not necessarily represent the priority a person gives to each language. Mother tongue has been critiqued because it suggests that it is only the mother who speaks to a child and that other parents or carers do not have input. In terms of bilingualism, García and Kleifgen (2010, cited in Palmer et al. 2014) suggest that the term dynamic bilingualism more accurately describes the repertoire of related language practices available to people using more than one language. While we welcome the nuance that this
term provides, for simplicity we use bilingualism in this chapter to describe those who have some capacity in two or more languages. We also prefer L1 and L2 as they are most commonly used in the literature and because in many classroom contexts children are indeed learning a second language.

**Historical perspectives**

In this section we will provide a brief overview of how L1 and L2 have been used in classrooms over the years in line with classroom methodologies and shifts in emphases. It is a broad stroke description, and it is important to acknowledge that theory and practice did not always coincide; teachers did not always do what the method demanded in terms of classroom language. The discussion takes a broad view before focusing in specifically on young learner classrooms.

Children have always learnt languages, but not always in a classroom context. Indeed, wide-scale, school-based language learning is a fairly recent phenomenon in Europe at least, starting as it did in the eighteenth century (Howatt and Smith 2014) (previously, students had studied the classical languages, Latin and Greek, but not what we would recognise as ‘modern foreign languages’; see Singleton and Pfenninger, this volume). Whether and when to use the L1 or L2 to teach the target language has in part been directed by the methodological approach that teachers have followed over the years. In the early days, it was likely that most language teaching used the grammar translation (GT) method as this was used to teach the classical languages, where the focus was on reading to understand texts, and writing to some extent, but not on listening and speaking. Translating texts from one language to another was a regular feature of grammar translation classroom practice, as was a focus on the grammar and vocabulary of a language. Students also memorised chunks of texts, such as poems, and learnt rules, such as how tenses are formed and used (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson 2013). In GT, where it was important to know about the language as well as how to use it, the teacher would use the students’ L1 as the medium of instruction (EMI), explaining concepts and syntactical patterning and giving L1 equivalents for new words (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson 2013). Of course, teachers and students would use the L2, but in general it was a controlled use, for example when they read texts out loud, performed translations or asked and gave answers to comprehension questions.

Not all children went to school in the eighteenth century, so learning a foreign language formally remained the privilege of the wealthy until the mid-twentieth century, at least in Europe and the USA. During this time, language learning pedagogies were undergoing significant changes as they were influenced by both advances in understandings of psychology and changes in the social world. In terms of the former, behaviourism (Skinner 1938) had a very strong influence. Focusing on how we learn a first language, Skinner suggested it was a result of positive and negative feedback (Brown 2007). In terms of the latter, the United States was at war in Korea and required soldiers to learn the language of both its allies and its enemies. Drawing on behaviourist theory, the America Army developed the audio-lingual method (AL), which was very different from GT (Brown 2007). The method encouraged speaking and listening, focusing on social, everyday language, such as greetings, asking questions and getting things done. Indeed, in some classrooms, reading and writing were not permitted, at least until after a word or phrase had been introduced, practised orally and memorised (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson 2013). In AL classrooms, teachers were encouraged to use the L2 to communicate with students and to present new language items to them. The students were discouraged from using their L1 and to immerse themselves in the L2.
In the late 50s and into the 60s and 70s, AL was very popular and was adopted in many schools in the UK and the USA (Fiona’s first French lessons were delivered through an AL approach). However, by this time Chomsky had debunked many of Skinner’s ideas. He posited that rather than stimulus-response being responsible for language learning, it was an inevitable result of being human as we are all born with the capability to learn languages through what Chomsky called our language acquisition device (LAD) (Chomsky 1965): we need only to be put into the right environment in order to do so. Krashen (1987) drew on Chomsky’s work to develop his own theories of and pedagogies for language learning. A key feature was the notion of comprehensible input (CI). CI posits that exposure to language (‘information’ in Krashen’s terms) is central to language learning but that any new language must not be too difficult or the student will not be able to draw on what he or she knows in order to make sense of it. Learners can be supported in this sense-making, through, for example, the teacher using gesture, visuals and repetition. Creating comprehensible input requires the teacher to use only the target language with students, although this must be made comprehensible through modification (sometimes called ‘grading’ language) in order not to overwhelm students and to ensure that they are able to understand most of what the teacher is saying (Krashen demonstrates this approach in a video on YouTube: https://youtube/lxKvMqPl6j4).

Krashen was one of the first scholars to study what has become known as second language acquisition (SLA) and he developed theoretical positions which the next wave of SLA researchers empirically tested (see Ellis (2015) for an overview). A number of his ideas were challenged through this research, and scholars went on to suggest other language learning theories. Interactionism (e.g. Long 1996), for example, drew on Vygotskian ideas of social constructivism (e.g. Burr 2003, 2015) and posited that second languages were learnt through students using the TL in interaction with others. This theory supported the development of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and a number of hybrids (e.g. Task based learning [TBL]). Proponents of AL and CLT share a belief that recreating a target language world within the classroom can provide learners with maximum opportunities to hear and use the language. Therefore, the L2 is used as much as possible, for classroom management, for doing ‘chit-chat’ and for explanations of grammar and vocabulary, even when they are quite complex. Struggling to make and understand meaning is believed to be key to learning, and mistakes are considered to be further evidence of progress, hence the focus is on fluency rather than accuracy. Although CLT was originally developed for adult learners in small classes (see Holliday 1994, for a critique) in recent years, CLT has been introduced into classrooms around the world, including the young learner classroom (see Garton et al. 2011).

More recently, CLIL (content and language integrated learning) has been growing in popularity, particularly in young learner classrooms (e.g., Anderson et al. 2015; Pinter 2017). In CLIL, teachers use the target language to teach a different area of the curriculum, such as history or math (see Coyle et al. 2010 for a detailed explanation; Ellison, this volume). You can see a typical CLIL classroom at this YouTube link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=kR6OnEqq1Fc. The focus is therefore on teaching the topic effectively rather than explicitly on learning language. CLIL offers an interesting contradiction in terms of classroom language. As we have explained, the class is taught through the target language; however, the teacher is often not an expert user of the language but rather an expert in the content area (he/she may be assisted by the language teacher to prepare materials and to deliver the lesson). Therefore, although he/she is using the target language, he/she may not always be accurate. Proponents of CLIL suggest that the subject teacher provides a strong role model.
to students of what can be achieved if you are prepared to ‘have a go’. They also suggest that underachieving students are well served by this approach to subject teaching as the teacher(s) have to work hard to make meaning clear, often introducing a range of visual aids (Hellekjær 2010) and staged tasks (Grandinetti et al. 2013) to support this. Recent iterations of CLIL have described a somewhat more relaxed view of introducing the L2 into classes than was encouraged in the earliest iterations of the methodology (see Ellison, this volume).

As indicated at the beginning of this section, what we have presented so far is a Western-centric view of L1 and L2 use in language classes and also an idealised one in that teaching and learning rarely proceed in line with a given methodological orthodoxy. The history of language use in the English language classroom in other contexts is less documented. However, in countries in southeast Asia, such as China, Japan and South Korea, where English has been part of the school curriculum for some years, there have been various approaches to classroom language use.

Traditionally in Japan, for example, English has been taught using an approach called yakudoku, which is similar to grammar translation. As English has been considered an academic subject, rigorously examined through reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary tests, this approach has been considered appropriate. In yakudoku, teachers generally use Japanese as the medium of instruction (Nishino and Watanabe 2008). In China, performing well in assessments is also the paramount concern of students, and English is treated as a subject for study instead of a way of communicating (Pan and Block 2011). Therefore, Chinese is mostly used to deliver English classes, which is especially true in Mainland China, even though the Ministry of Education encourages the use of English for English classrooms (Littlewood and Yu 2011).

In recent years, CLT has been adopted in many Asian countries and teachers have been encouraged to use the target language throughout the class. Indeed, in South Korea, ‘Teaching English through English’ has been mandated by the national government starting from primary school at around the age of six (Choi 2015). In Japan, the Ministry of Education (MEXT) has introduced a new policy that will be enacted in 2020, which will require teachers to use English in junior and senior high school English classes (from the age of 13 to 18) as much as possible (Sekiya 2017). As an alternative to traditional English teaching approaches such as drill-based and audio-lingual methods, which have been long criticised, CLT does have its own advantages in improving students’ communication ability, though it also brings with it some challenges (see Butler 2011).

While CLIL has been extensively researched in European countries and regions, it is relatively under-researched in Asia (Yang 2015). Furthermore, within Asia, the development of CLIL practices is rather diverse due to the various sociocultural and education contexts among and within the countries (Lin 2015). Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand, for instance, differ in the speed and scale at which English language education is implemented in primary schools, and therefore Marsh and Hood (2008) argue that it is ‘neither possible, nor appropriate’ (p. 45) to generalise the classroom practice of these countries in CLIL research at the primary school level.

Notwithstanding these different methodological approaches to language teaching and the emphases they place (or not) on target language use, it is true to say that the majority of young learner teachers globally are not following a particular methodology but rather following the coursebook provided by the ministry of education or the school (Garton et al. 2011). Partly because of this, recent academic literature has been less concerned with whether the L1 should be used or not, but rather with how much should be used and when. A number of scholars have suggested that teachers should aim for ‘judicious’ language
In this perspective, the how, why and when aspects of using L1 are examined and debated, with the view to develop ‘guidelines’ for L1 use in the classroom (e.g., Macaro 2009; Turnbull and Dailey-O’Cain 2009). Macaro (2009) suggests that teachers’ judgement should determine how much of each language is used in class but based on a rationale. This viewpoint lines up with those of scholars such as Prabhu (1990) and Kumaravadivelu (2003; 2012), who believe teachers are in the best position to know how to teach their classes based on their knowledge of the children, the educational and sociopolitical contexts and what is both practical and possible under these constraints. While there are few studies which examine the important link between coursebook, context and classroom language use, Mahboob and Lin’s (2018) study shows how English language teachers in Hong Kong manage this nexus in their English classes, and how target language education can benefit from the use of local language.

Critical issues and topics

In this section, we will posit three critical issues that affect how languages are used in the classroom: the demand for communication skills; the value of using the first language to teach the second; and how the decrease in the age children are being taught English affects classroom languages.

The demand for communication skills in English

The first critical issue we wish to examine is the rise in demand in many countries for citizens who can use English to communicate orally and the consequences of this demand. As English has become a global lingua franca (see, e.g., Seidlhofer 2011) and is used extensively in business, academia and cultural exchange, governments around the world have examined the English language curricula in schools and found them to focus too much on knowledge about English (e.g., grammatical rules) and not enough on how to use English (e.g., to exchange meanings). While some might argue that this demand for English has been created by western governments who are keen to remain influential in international spheres (see Phillipson 2017, for an outline of this position), the fact that globally children are learning English at increasingly younger ages is testament to this demand (Copland et al. 2014; Johnstone 2009).

The first consequence of the demand for English oral competence has been a turn to communicative pedagogies which focus on listening and speaking skills. Communicative pedagogies generally require teachers to use the target language as the medium of instruction. This is obviously easier to achieve for an expert user, or at least a confident one. In some contexts, local English teachers are not offered the training required to reach this level and so their competence is limited (Garton et al. 2011). Often oral skills are a particular problem as their education in English has focused on the written word, and teaching through the target language for these teachers is not only difficult but impossible (see Garton et al. 2011).

However, teaching through the target language is considered easy for another group of teachers – native English speaker teachers (NESTs) – and a second consequence of the demand for communication skills in English language therefore has been their employment. Currently, particularly in southeast Asia, many NESTs work on government schemes, such as JET (Japanese English Teachers) and NET (Native English Teachers in Hong Kong) where they spend time in state schools and support local English teachers (LETs) (see Copland et al. (2016) for a full discussion). Many others work autonomously in private language
schools, which are numerous, ubiquitous and often unregulated. However, many NESTs are inexperienced and unqualified in English language teaching (see Copland et al. 2016). Others struggle with local educational norms which are often very different from those in the countries in which they were educated (ibid.). In terms of using the target language as the medium of instruction, there are also issues, but as Krashen has suggested, teachers need to be able to moderate their English so that students can understand them. This skill may not come easily to NESTs who may be ignorant of the fact that their language use will often contain complex constructions and be highly idiomatic. Ironically, they therefore struggle with the skill for which they are employed.

Valuing L1 in the language classroom

A second critical issue relates to the usefulness of using the L1 to teach the L2, which has been explored in recent literature (see, e.g., Hall and Cook 2012). This position goes beyond the judicious use approach described above and makes the case for choosing to use L1 to support development of L2. For example, Copland and Yonetsugi (2016) explain how a bilingual teacher drew on L1 explicitly to contrast sounds between the L1 and L2 and to provide children with personalised learning experiences. The learners’ L1 can also be used effectively to contribute to positive classroom ‘affect’, that is, the emotional side of learning (Mitchell et al. 2013). In this regard, Auerbach (1993) claims that using L1 ‘reduces anxiety, enhances the affective environment for learning, takes into account sociocultural factors, facilitates incorporation of learners’ life experiences, and allows for learner centred curriculum development’ (p. 20). Copland and Neokleous (2011) and Brooks-Lewis (2009) both suggest that teachers can use the L1 to engage and motivate students, and Littlewood and Yu (2011) explain that using the L1 can reduce learner anxiety; in a study from South Korea, for example, young learners were less comfortable in an L2 only classroom than were adult learners (Macaro and Lee 2013). From these pedagogical perspectives, therefore, rather than L1 use being considered a mistake, it is considered a tool. Nonetheless, there remains an L2 hegemony in English language teaching, summed up by Ellis and Shintani (2013), who argue that teachers should:

maximise the use of L2 inside the classroom. Ideally this means that the L2 needs to become the medium as well as the object of instruction, especially in a foreign language setting.

(p. 24)

The age drop

A third critical issue is the continuing reduction in age at which children are taught English. In many countries, children in the first years of primary school are now learning English (e.g., Mexico, Germany, China) and in many others, children may be enroled in (private) kindergartens which promise an English language environment (e.g., in South Korea and France). This decrease in age has implications for classroom language use. In some cases, schools promise an immersion experience with all interaction carried out in English. In others, English is the language of instruction and children are encouraged to use it as much as possible. However, as researchers note, it is challenging with very young children to insist on using the L2 only particularly when the children (and the teachers) all share another language and where the emphasis is on learning through play rather than on formal learning.
(see, e.g., Mourão (2014) on Portugal, and McPake et al. (2017) on Gaelic medium kindergartens in Scotland).

Mourão (2014) suggests that changing pedagogical practices can support children in using the L2 in a natural and playful way. She describes how an ‘English Corner’ was introduced into a kindergarten in Portugal. Materials, such as flashcards and picture books, that the teacher used during a circle time storytelling activity were placed into the English Corner at the end of the storytelling section of class. Children were free to visit the Corner or not and to play with the materials. Mourão (2014) found that children spontaneously used the English they had heard in the storytelling activity in their play, helping each other to remember and pronounce the English words as they took on the role of teacher and learner. This contrasts with the somewhat stilted and artificial insistence on Gaelic which McPake et al. (2017) found in their kindergarten study, where there was no reason for children to use the L2 except to respond to teacherly questions on what they were doing in the activities.

Current contributions and research

This section examines current contributions to the field of classroom language and will focus on two areas: first, we will explore recent research into classroom language in young learner classrooms, and, second, we will examine how research in bilingualism can support our understanding of classroom languages in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language.

Research into classroom language use in the young learner classroom

In terms of the young learner classroom, language use is little researched. Carless (2002) found that pupils in Hong Kong used L1 (Cantonese) more frequently in complicated language tasks (maybe because it is difficult and time-consuming for them to tackle the tasks through communication in English) or when they had lower English proficiency (which makes it hard for them to talk with each other in English). In terms of teachers’ perspectives, an English teacher in Inbar-Lourie’s (2010) research in Israel held the opinion that her aims were to provide exposure and inspire interest for low-grade students rather than to teach the language, and therefore she used more L1 with younger learners, and decreased the amount as the students improved. Enever (2011), drawing on a large-scale study of early language learning in Europe (ELLiE), suggests that target-language-only classrooms were not common in the seven European countries in the study. This may be because, as Weschler (1997) argues:

There comes a point beyond which abstract concepts simply cannot be conveyed through obvious gestures, pictures and commands.

Fisher (2005) points out, pre-literate learners have little recourse to means of expressing themselves other than their L1; they cannot look up a word in a dictionary, their narrow range of vocabulary makes it difficult for them to give an example sentence to clarify their meaning and even their ability to use gestures is immature. To expect these young learners, therefore, to function effectively in a learning and teaching context in the L2 is naïve.

Copland and Yonetsugi (2016) investigated how teachers and young learners use English and Japanese in a classroom in a private primary school in Japan. They compared the language use in classrooms taught by two different teachers: one bilingual and the other...
who only spoke the L2, English. In order to ensure a level of comparability, the teachers taught the same lesson which they had planned together to two different classes of six- to seven-year-olds. The classes were observed, recorded and transcribed, and the teachers were interviewed about the classes.

In their data, Copland and Yonetsugi (2016) show how the bilingual teacher modelled pronunciation drawing on the learners’ L1 and that she provided more opportunities for learning by translating the learners’ meanings into English sentences, practices not available to the monolingual teacher. An example of the latter practice can be seen in the following extract. At the time the data were recorded, students were looking in their picture dictionaries at a page of insects in order to select an example to practise the language point of the lesson, which was responding to the question ‘What animal do you like?’ with the response ‘I like/don’t like (animal + s)’. During this activity, over 18 separate interactions with the bilingual teacher were initiated by the students (indented lines indicate the words spoken: left aligned lines are translations into English).

Extract 1

| S1:  | 先生、毛虫嫌い |
| Teacher: | Teacher, I don’t like hairy caterpillars. |
| Teacher: | 本当！何で？可愛いじゃない？ |
| S1:  | いや！年中のとき刺された、痛かった |
| Teacher: | No way! I was bitten by a hairy caterpillar when I was in kindergarten. It was sore |
| S1:  | I can understand that. In that case I don’t like caterpillars. |
| S1:  | I don’t like caterpillars. |

Altogether, students produced nine full English sentences providing a personalised response to the question. In contrast, in the monolingual teacher’s class, children spoke only to each other, and in total produced only four utterances using ‘I like/don’t like (animal + s)’. From this and other data, the authors claim that the bilingual teacher in this context is better able to support the children’s English language development than the monolingual teacher and suggest that, where possible, bilingual teachers should be recruited to teach languages to young children.

What we can learn from the bilingualism research

In terms of the classroom, bilingualism research has consistently and effectively made the case that separating languages is neither natural nor desirable as it does not mirror what happens either in the brain (see Birdsong 2006) or in the outside world, where most people are bilingual and draw on two or more languages as a matter of course (Canagarajah 2013). García and Wei (2014) highlight ‘the complex language practices that enable the education of students with plurilingual abilities’ (p. 3), and this has led to a new approach to classroom languages called ‘translanguaging’ (Creese and Blackledge 2010), a flexible approach to using both the first and target languages. In a translanguaging classroom, learners and teachers draw on all their linguistic resources: all languages are valued and are regarded as making different but equal contributions to language learning and meaning making (see, e.g., Palmer et al. 2014).
Scholars differentiate translanguaging from codeswitching in a number of ways. First, codeswitching implies that speakers have two separate systems which they move between; translanguaging supports the case for speakers having one linguistic system (Birdsong 2006) which is often called the linguistic repertoire (e.g., Busch 2014). A second difference is in how codeswitching and translanguaging are regarded. Codeswitching has often been used to highlight deficiencies in a person’s language skills: users ‘switch’ when they are unable to produce the word or phrase for something in the target language; in the language classroom, teachers codeswitch to the L1 when they cannot explain something in the L2 (see, e.g., Copland and Neokleous 2011). Third, codeswitching implies that monolinguals’ language practices are the norm, not those of bilinguals (García and Wei 2014), which makes it fail to fit in the modern world where at least half of the population is bilingual (Conteh 2007; Grosjean 2010).

Translanguaging can be seen in the following extract (taken from Conteh et al. 2014), where the teacher, Meena, is bilingual in English and Punjabi and she is teaching in a state primary school in England where English is the medium of instruction. The children (25 altogether) were aged eight to nine years old. About 15 spoke Punjabi as a first language; one or two spoke Polish as a first language and the remaining six or seven children spoke English. Meena was teaching a lesson from the National Geography Curriculum (2011, p. 2). In this extract, the teacher is drawing on her knowledge (and that of some of her students) of bartering in the Swat Valley of Pakistan. As can be seen, Meena draws on both English and Punjabi to explain the practice (the same transcription conventions are used as in extract 1).

**Extract 2**

001 Meena: When you . . . I know that . . . jilaythusa rai amithayabba
002 jilaynadukarnay par paysayarvacthdanay.. dukarn
002 jilaynadukarnay par paysayarvacthdanay.. dukarn
003 daray.. koi.. jraaykhusa nay kol
When your mum and dad go to the ‘corner shops’ and they pay the shop-keepers, do they pay the shopkeeper there and then. . . I mean the shops that are near you

Meena: When you . . . I know that . . . jilaythusa rai amithayabba
002 jilaynadukarnay par paysayarvacthdanay . . . dukarn
002 jilaynadukarnay par paysayarvacthdanay . . . dukarn
003 aray . . koi . . jraaykhusa nay kol
When your mum and dad go to the ‘corner shops’ and they pay the shop-keepers, do they pay the shopkeeper there and then . . . I mean the shops that are near you

004 Child 1: No, they can give . . .
005 Meena: Kay karnai?
What do they give?
006 Child 2: Paysaydaynayna
They give money
007 Meena: Paysaysarai day nay?
Do they give all the money?
008 Child 3: No . . . (unintelligible)
009 Meena: Who said ‘no’? What does your mum do when she goes to the shop? Paysaydaynay . . . kai kithabay par liknaysaakithab
Do they pay (upfront) or do they write it in a book, i.e. ‘all your goods’
Child 2: Paysaydaynay nah
They pay

Child 3: Liknaythaypaysaydaynay
They write it and pay

Meena: I know . . . I know . . .

De Oliveira and Ma (2018) provide further evidence of a teacher translanguaging in English and Spanish in a state primary school in the USA to ensure all the children in her class are developing literacy skills, not only the English monolingual children. In South Africa, translanguaging is a common pedagogy in state education (Probyn 2015) although not formally condoned. Makoe and McKinney (2014) argue that in a country where languages are inevitably linked to political ideologies, and where children have a little exposure to English outside school, recognising translanguaging as a legitimate resource in formal education settings is one important step towards creating and providing ‘equal learning opportunities and access to all’ (p. 372).

While EFL researchers have been slow to recognise the theoretical purchase that translanguaging might offer as a way of explaining how teachers use languages concurrently in class to support language learning, some scholars have started to explore its potential. Phyak (2018) adopts the term in his discussion of a Nepalese teacher’s practice, and argues that translanguaging allows the teacher to engage children in a deeper understanding of subject matter and to ensure that children keep on task and can negotiate meanings successfully, while Copland and Yonetsugi (2016) suggest that translanguaging provides the bilingual teacher in their study with the resources to support her pupils’ meaning making (see extract 1).

In tandem with a growing interest in general, translanguaging has been of increasing interest in immersion language classrooms. As the name suggests, the prevailing pedagogy in terms of language use in these classrooms is monolingualism, in that the target language is used exclusively to teach all classroom subjects. In some settings, dual-immersion is growing in popularity. In this model, children are taught the curriculum through one language in the morning and another in the afternoon, or on alternate days. In the USA, the languages are usually English and Spanish (see García et al. 2011), but in Canada the languages can also be Mandarin and English (e.g., Sun 2016). Meier (2010) reports on a similar approach in Germany, where children in Hamburg are taught through Portuguese and German, which reflects the languages spoken by the local population.

As current discussions in the literature show, proponents of immersion and dual-immersion can be fiercely opposed to language mixing or to translanguaging in class (McPake et al. 2017) as it can lead to the minority or less prestigious language being under-valued (Gomez et al. 2005). Many immersion teachers believe that children are best served by being surrounded by the language they are learning and that language, therefore, should be separated in the classroom (Stephen et al. 2016). McPake et al. (2017) take issue with this stance, however, and suggest that at least in the young learner Scots Gaelic immersion setting with which they are familiar, translanguaging offers a useful approach to scaffold children to learn the new language, while simultaneously providing a safe space for children to make their own meanings. Furthermore, Palmer et al. (2014) suggest that teachers in dual-immersion programmes in Texas can themselves struggle to separate languages, as doing so conflicts with goal of modelling dynamic bilingualism (see ‘definitions’ above).

In the ELT world, the notions that languages exist in one system and that bilingualism is the everyday reality for most people globally (Canagarajah 2013) have been less explored than
in the bilingualism literature, perhaps because a good deal of the research in teaching English as a foreign language focuses on countries where the dominant language is either considered to be more common or more necessary (Lao 2004), for example, in Japan, China and South Korea. It may also be because the ELT industry is for the most part predicated on a communicative language teaching model, where a target-language-only classroom is believed to be the ideal environment for language learning. Nevertheless, it is also fair to say that throughout language teaching history, teachers have used classroom languages based on context and students’ needs, and have not necessarily stuck to the tenets of a particular methodology, even when doing so has resulted in feelings of guilt (see, e.g., Copland and Neokleous 2011). We hope that Hall and Cook (2012) are right that ‘entrenched monolingualism’ (p. 297) is now a thing of the past, but question if teachers who had the choice of which language to use ever let dogma override appropriate pedagogy (see Butzkamm 2003 for a discussion of this point).

As with most issues in TESOL, there is no one-size-fits-all response to which languages children and teachers should use in class. Indeed, the choice of languages might be dictated at a different level from the classroom. Ministries of education sometimes expound on the issue (e.g., see Heo 2017 on South Korea), and sometimes head teachers will make a ruling (see Yanase 2016). In addition, as we have shown, different language teaching methodologies support different approaches to L1 and L2 use, from the ban on L1 in total immersion to the tolerance of teachers and students drawing on their linguistic repertoires in translanguaging approaches. In CLT, there has generally been a relaxing of the preference for target language use, although researchers continue to advocate its use in order to provide ultimate conditions to learn the language (e.g., Ellis and Shintani 2013). Researchers who advocate appropriate pedagogies (e.g., Holliday 1994; Kumaravadivelu 1994, 2001) would expect the teacher to make decisions about classroom languages based on their local context. These different approaches and ideologies make it difficult to advise on practice, but in this section we will provide some general suggestions.

First, it is important to meet the needs of the student, and this is especially true for younger students. Teachers of English to young learners should recognise their responsibility to educate the whole child and not only to teach him/her English. As research in education shows, a child must be nurtured, made to feel valued and allowed to develop his/her identity in order for him/her to become a confident young person (Cameron 2001; Chi et al. 2016; Johnstone 2009). Language learning can contribute to successful development but only if it is carefully done. Classroom language use is especially important in this regard because children need to feel understood and able to make their own meanings.

A related but slightly different point concerns the purpose of teaching young learners English (or any language). As Singleton and Pfenninger (this volume) explain, an early start does not result in gains over students with a later start in terms of language proficiency. Given this finding, the most compelling reason for an early start is to engender in children an interest in languages through providing enjoyable experiences (Johnstone, this volume). Being flexible in terms of classroom language use is more likely to produce a low-anxiety environment conducive to learning (see Brooks-Lewis 2009; Copland and Neokleous 2011), which we believe should be the primary concern of teachers of English to young learners.

A further recommendation concerns the hiring of NESTs by government agencies and schools to teach young learners. Often recruited because they can teach English using English, inexperienced and unqualified NESTs may not have the knowledge and understanding of children’s development to teach young learners successfully. Furthermore, if they are newly arrived in country, they are unlikely to know the children’s L1, which can hamper their efforts to engage and motivate young learners (Copland and Yonetsugi 2016).
left in charge of classes despite their inexperience (see Copland et al. 2016 for a detailed description of the roles of NESTs in primary and secondary schools), NESTs can flounder (see for example, Ng 2014). On the other hand, experienced/qualified, bilingual NESTs can make excellent teachers of the young (see, e.g., Copland and Yonetsugi 2016; Yanase 2016) and can support the local teacher to provide quality education in learning English. We would suggest that those responsible for hiring NESTs should think carefully about the skills they require in a NEST and consider providing training in child development and in the local language to ensure NESTs are prepared for the young learner classroom.

**Future directions**

A clear route forward for research into young learners is to examine appropriate pedagogy. Currently, the tendency is for pedagogies designed to teach adults, such as CLT and TBL, to be introduced to the young learner classroom, where they may not be suitable. As described above, Mourão (2014) explores how English play corners can provide safe spaces for children to rehearse the English they have learnt through self-directed play. While a play corner might not be suitable for older children, the principle of pedagogies being fit for purpose depending on age and level pertains. We need more research of this kind with different young learner age groups so we can provide learning that is engaging and motivating.

A second direction is to find out more about children’s views on classroom language use. As stated above, Macaro and Lee (2013) found that children were less tolerant of a target-language-only classroom than their adult counterparts. In a recent study conducted at the University of Stirling, UK, Imray (2016) found that Thai students preferred to be taught by teachers who could use both English and Thai.

However, students’ preferences are only one part of the picture: more research is needed on how different kinds of interactions lead to learning. Copland and Neokleous (2011), Conteh et al. (2014), Copland and Yonetsugi (2016), Mahboob and Lin (2016) and Yanase (2017) are amongst a small number of researchers now exploring this and other L1/L2 issues through analyzing classroom data. More studies of this type could provide useful insights on the link between language use and language learning.

Finally, while translanguaging seems to offer a different ideological and pedagogical approach to language use in the classroom, there are currently too few studies to support a useful discussion of the approach in the young learner classroom in traditional EFL settings.

**Concluding comments**

Studies show that whether to use L1 in the young learner classroom is not a decision merely about the best way to teach language but ‘can underpin learners’ sense of who they are and who they want to be in a complex, multilingual world’ (Hall and Cook 2012, p. 279). Young learners are especially vulnerable when it comes to developing their sense of worth and identities, and developing confidence in language learning can be positive in these regards.

**Recommended reading**


This state-of-the-art article provides a detailed overview of historical perspectives on using L1 and L2 in class and describes arguments used by both sides. It is a little light on young learner perspectives, but this is because there are few research papers on the subject.

This paper examines the interactions between students and teachers in two classrooms in a primary school in Japan. One teacher is monolingual and the other bilingual. The authors present a number of data extracts from the class and make the case for using L1 and L2 with young learners based on their findings.


In this paper, the authors describe how teachers in a dual-immersion programme, where languages are supposed to be strictly separated, draw on a number of translanguaging pedagogies to support their pupils’ language development and positive identities as dynamic bilinguals. It is an excellent introduction to translanguaging and provides a strong discussion of bilingualism.

Related topics

Difficult circumstances, critical pedagogy, policies, CLIL

References


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Fiona Copland and Ming Ni


