

EFL Learners' Use of L1 in L2 Collaborative Reading Tasks and Their Attitudes towards It

Mehdi Nickkhah*, Hooshang Yazdani, Majid Amerian and Moussa Ahmadian

*Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Literature and Foreign Languages,
Arak University, Arak 3815688349, Iran*

ABSTRACT

There have been irrefragable arguments over the use of first language (L1) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. The debates have been oscillating and vacillating between those who advocate the use of L1 and those who take an oppositional stance against the use of L1. There has been abundant research excavating this phenomenon, especially on L1 use in second language skills. However, there has been a dearth of research on whether L1 can have a significant role in reading. This study focused on the use of L1 in second language reading, specifically on learners' attitudes towards L1 and second language (L2) use while they were engaged in second language collaborative reading tasks (CRT). To this end, 60 intermediate EFL learners were selected and assigned in two homogeneous groups. After administering a questionnaire to the L1 class, the researchers found that the majority of the participants did not feature disagreement with the use of L1 while interacting with their peers. It was also found that, based on the descriptive comparisons of scores obtained by L1 and L2 class in the post-test reading, the performance of L1 class was not significantly better than that of their peers who did not use L1 in their collaboration.

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E-mail addresses:

mnickkhah55@gmail.com (Mehdi Nickkhah)
h-yazdani@araku.ac.ir (Hooshang Yazdani)
m-amerian@araku.ac.ir (Majid Amerian)
m-ahmadian@araku.ac.ir (Moussa Ahmadian)

*Corresponding author

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INTRODUCTION

The debate over target language and first language use in teaching and learning second and foreign languages has affected

a broad-spectrum body of literature. Ahmadian et al. (2016) mentioned that the genesis of sociocultural theory gave rise to the all-around applications of its tenets in second language pedagogy; consequently, L1 was eulogized to play facilitative roles in second language learning. The history of language teaching is replete with arguments for and against the inclusion of learners' first language (L1) in second language (L2) teaching. Accordingly, the debate has tended to be polarized between these two sides. Scholars in either side of this ongoing debate look at the issue from their own perspectives, and posit their ideas putting forth various claims. Auerbach (1993) posited this debate on L1 use in EFL classes was enigmatic, with controversy arising and subsiding with wavering and varying intensity but never approaching resolution. The enigma, he continued, was that inclusion of L1 had been theoretically justified, verified by research, and pedagogically accepted, while its exclusion had been based on unexamined assumptions (Auerbach, 1993).

Research conducted within the sociocultural theory of learning has been generally the most supportive towards the inclusion of L1 in L2 pedagogy. Contrary to its predecessors such as the interactionist perspectives, Vygotskian sociocultural theory did not deem the presence of target language input as sufficient for learning. Learning, in this regard, is perceived as a social enterprise which is an outcome of collaborative dialogue, or as Cook (2001) put "trying to see the world from the viewpoint of others". Language is

also regarded as a semiotic tool through which human beings can think and convey/comprehend meaning. One such tool, according to Anton and DiCamilla (1999) is L1. It is in studies within the sociocultural tradition, they maintain, that L1 use "as an important semiotic tool is noted". L1 has been claimed to play a crucial role in providing learners with "scaffolded help", through which they might well be able to handle tasks that individually they are unable to complete.

Such a radical shift in views towards L1 use, has sparked a good number of studies, and scholars have recently tried to demonstrate the potential benefits of using L1 in L2 teaching and learning. Studies in this regard can be categorized into three general groups. The first group of studies (de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Kraemer, 2006; Macaro, 2001) have investigated the teachers' use of the first language. The results of these studies imply that L1 has undeniable functions in class, a good number of which may play crucial facilitative roles.

The second group, on the other hand, has been dealing with the learners' and teachers' attitudes about first language use (Brooks-Lewis, 2009; Duff & Polio, 1990; Levine, 2003; Macaro, 2001). The majority of these latter studies also suggest that both learners and teachers hold positive attitudes about judicious use of the first language. And more importantly, within a sociocultural perspective, some scholars, to be discussed in the review of the related literature, have focused on learners' use of

the first language in collaborative productive tasks, i.e., writing and speaking skills. These studies, as will be discussed later on in the review of the literature, have investigated the role of L1 use in helping foreign language learners become more efficient L2 speakers and writers. However, there seems to have been few attempts to see how L1 use can help learners improve their L2 reading skills.

Review of the Related Literature

The present study has at its core claim the sociocultural-bound investigation of L1 use in reading tasks; as a result, the review of the related literature is compartmentalized into sociocultural theory, L1 use, reading, and L1 use in reading respectively.

Sociocultural Theory

Cook (2008) posited that “one of the most influential models since the early 1990s has been sociocultural theory (SCT).” In a similar vein, Ellis (2008) stated that “the major theoretical development in SLA since 1994 has been the emergence of ‘sociocultural SLA.’” The embryonic stage for this theory was shaped from the work of Lev Vygotsky, a prominent figure in early Soviet Psychology. Brown (2014) asserted that in the 1990s, momentum built around the social turn in SLA research. He went on to state that sociocultural viewpoints were different from maturational and cognitivist perspectives in that in SCT the focus was on interaction rather than individual learner. SCT also takes language as the quintessential tool for “engaging

in *collaborative* activity in a community of language users” (Brown, 2014). In essence, SCT builds its infrastructure on the psychological theory of human consciousness which was proposed by Vygotsky (Lantolf, 2011). SCT, drawing heavily from the earlier work of Vygotsky (1978) and the shedding of light on it by Lantolf (2000) and later by Lantolf and Thorne (2006) became a “hot topic” (Brown, 2014) in second language acquisition.

The key theme in SCT revolves around the fact that language learning is social mediation between the learner and another person during which socially acquired knowledge internalizes. Another essential theme is that language learning occurs through scaffolding by an expert or a fellow learner (Cook, 2008). In teaching, SCT accentuates the use of what Swain (2000) called “collaborative dialogue” – “dialogue in which speakers are engaged in problem solving and knowledge building”. This takes place in the classroom through structured cooperative tasks. Consequently, it is not the dialogue in the realm of interaction hypothesis in which people are involved in exchanging information i.e., communication, but an educational dialogue in which people create new knowledge i.e., learning. The social context of second language learning is basic to Vygotskian SCT; the theory is predicated upon understanding the significance of interaction between people to form mental activities (Vygotsky, 1978). Two fundamental tenets of Vygotskian SCT are activity theory (Wertsch, 1979, in Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), which reflects

the basic idea that motives for learning in a particular milieu are intertwined with socially and institutionally established beliefs; and mediation, which suggests that human mental activity is mediated by tools and signs, the principal one being language. Regarding activity theory, Lantolf and Thorne (2006) were of the opinion that the “epistemological apparatus of activity theory provides methodologically as well as ethically vigorous tools for use in SLA research and practice and as regards mediation, Lantolf (2000) asserted that, from Vygotsky’s point of view, the mission for psychology was to find out how human social and mental endeavor is shaped via “culturally constructed artifacts and social relationships.”

Pivotal to SCT and mediation is the concept of scaffolding which is social mediation embodying two people. This is carried out by a person who is an expert. Some have expanded the concept of scaffolding to encompass help from people at the same level as the student i.e., fellow students or peers (Ahmadian et al., 2015, 2016; Brown, 2014; Cook, 2008; Khodamoradi, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2013; Wells, 1999).

The most important concept at the heart of SCT is Zone of Proximal Development (henceforth ZPD) which brought about the bulk of research in SCT SLA (Lantolf, 2000, 2007, 2011, 2012; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Thorne & Tasker, 2011). ZPD was delineated by Vygotsky (1978) as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving

and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in *collaboration* with more capable peers.” What can be meant by this, according to Gass (2013), is that learning is the result of interpersonal activity, and it is this interpersonal activity which shapes the infrastructure for individual functioning. This lucidly represents the social nature of learning and accents the significance of “collaborative learning” as it shapes what is learned. Whereas Vygotsky’s original formulation of ZPD was predominantly concerned with interaction between a dilettante and expert, current SCT researchers include pair and group work among peers. Wells (1999), for the purpose of this study-to-be, is worth quoting verbatim: “To learn in the ZPD does not require that there be a designated teacher; *whenever* people *collaborate* in an activity, *each* can assist the others, and *each* can learn from the contribution of others.”

Also important under the aegis of Vygotsky’s (1978) notion of ZPD is his distinction between actual and proximal types of development. According to him while the former deals with the functions that have already blossomed, the latter is concerned with those functions that have not yet matured but, are in the process of maturation, that is, the functions that will mature later, but are currently in their infancy. The gap between actual and proximal types of development, Vygotsky propounded, can be bridged by the presence of scaffolded help. Vygotsky (1986) also interpreted human mental activities as being

first external (inter-psychological) and then becoming internal intra-psychological). In other words, according to him, new knowledge is acquired if it is first dealt with externally either through collaboration with others or self-talk. He also deemed inner speech to be the sign of knowledge appropriation (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). This clear emphasis on collaborative interaction between learners and/or learners and teachers, in turn, has served as a fresh impetus for many studies to be conducted; and it is interesting that all such studies, to be specifically mentioned in the next section under L1 use, have attributed a crucial role for the learners' L1 in the processes of other collaboration or self-talk.

Under the rubric of SCT and its embedded concepts, ZPD and peer interaction, good many studies have been carried out (Gass, 2013; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Mitchell et al., 2013; Swain et al., 2002; Swain et al., 2011). Since the purpose of this study is L1 use, some of the studies concerned with L1 use particularly will be briefly reviewed in the following section.

L1 Use

There has been an ongoing debate on the role of the learners' first language (L1) in second language learning. There have always been contradicting views about whether to use learners' L1 in EFL classes. The monolingual approach suggests that the target language (L2) ought to be used solely as the medium of communication, implying that the prohibition of L1 would

maximize the effectiveness of learning L2. Authors of some introductory books on EFL teaching do not address this issue or give a cold shoulder to it (Harmer, 1997; Haycraft, 1978; Hubbard et al., 1983).

Although, as mentioned above, there are contradicting views towards the issue of L1 use, more recent publications opting for a sociocultural theoretical lens have friendlier attitudes towards giving L1 a role. In other words, the majority of such studies advocate the use of L1 in language teaching and learning (Ahmadian et al., 2015, 2016; Scott & De la Fuente, 2008; Storch & Aldosari, 2010). They all have a thing in common and that is being influenced by sharing Vygotskian sociocultural framework.

Focusing on the use of L1 in the collaborative interaction of adult learners of Spanish engaged in writing three informative paragraphs, Anton and DiCamilla (1999) found that L1 served "a critical function" when students work in a joint endeavor to work out miscellaneous elements of their task. This was done, they claimed, to keep track of intersubjectivity, which, in turn, helped them to provide each other with scaffolded help, bringing along the externalization of their inner speech. They concluded that the utterances in L1 gave rise to a semantic analysis and related lexical search. This is a communicative and cognitive strategy that propels learners to mutually access those L2 forms that are sufficient in their vicinity. The highlight of their finding is the fact that L1 use as a mediating tool can help the construction of collective scaffolding through which "two

novices”, by means of interaction, can provide scaffolded help to each other (Anton & DiCamilla, 1999).

Observing the collaborative interactions of L2 writers and comparing L1 and L2 collaborations, Ahmadian et al. (2015) expounded that L1 use in collaborative writings, by a large amount, boosted L2 writers’ awareness of task management, task clarification and grammar. L1 use, however, as they found, does not have an effect on attention to vocabulary selection and content. The highlight of this study is the fact that, contrary to the good many studies in the literature determined to excavate the why of switching to L1 while writing in L2, this study ventured its trajectory for two groups, L1 and L2 respectively to see how each group approaches the task of writing; as a result, they observed that cognitive overload of writing in L2 was reduced and learners had this serendipitous opportunity to probe other areas of language besides content.

In another study, focusing on the outcome of the writing process and being designed to examine whether giving L1 a role in L2 writing process enhances the quality of written output, Ahmadian et al. (2016) found that the use of L1 could, to a great extent, make L2 writing better in the aspects of “*organization/unity, development, cohesion/coherence, structure and mechanics.*”

As discussed above the role of L1 use in the two language skills of speaking and writing has been well investigated. Reading, on the other hand, has not received due

attention. In other words, few studies have focused on the potential roles L1 can play in reading skill. The following section will be dedicated to studies concerned with L1 use in reading.

L1 Use in Reading

Since the purpose of this study is, generally, the use of L1 in reading, and, particularly, the use of L1 in collaborative reading, the related literature will be briefly reviewed. Cohen (1995), as an instance, surveyed bilingual and multilingual learners on the strategies they used while trying to make meaning of a text and found that shifting to L1 either in the form of explicit translation or inner speech had facilitative functions. Based on verbal report interviews of L2 learners, Kern (1994) had also come up with similar findings. Upton and Lee-Thompson (2001) avered that L1 played a crucial role which was “far beyond merely serving as a linguistic decoder-ring [code-switcher].” Applying think-aloud protocols and retrospective interviews with 20 native speakers of Chinese and Japanese at three levels of language proficiency, they reported that “L2 readers attempted to construct, on an intra-psychological or cognitive plane, a scaffold using their own expertise in their L1 as a means of pushing their L2 competence beyond its current level” (Upton & Lee-Thompson, 2001). Also significant in their findings is that “the overall use and success of calling on the L1 to aid in L2 reading comprehension is clearly determined by the readers’ overall L2 proficiency”. Seng and Hashim (2006), studying L1 use in

reading and considering analyses based on think-aloud protocols, found that L1 was used by all the students in the study. As a matter of fact, they specifically came up with the finding that more than thirty percent of the total instance of the strategy use involved L1. The problem with this group of studies is that they all rely on the learners' self-reports and are based on data from think-aloud protocols. However, data collection procedures as such are not free from problems. Therefore, further studies with innovative designs are needed to shed more light on the effects of L1 use in an L2 reading comprehension task.

The present study, therefore, is an attempt to bridge the gap in the literature regarding the absence of studies investigating the attitudes of learners towards L1 use in collaborative reading tasks (CRT). The edge of this research is in fact its focus on the collaborative aspect of the skill since reading has been generally regarded as an individualistic endeavor so far. The study is equally an attempt to investigate the effects of using L1 on learner's reading performance and their attitudes towards CRT while using L1. The following two questions were hence posed for this research:

1. What is the attitude of the learners towards using L1 in CRT?
2. Is there any significant difference between reading scores of readers allowed to use L1 and those allowed to use L2 in a CRT?

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Participants

The study was conducted in a private language institute in Varamin, Iran. To conduct the study, initially, 120 participants were asked to take a placement test. Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was used to determine the general English proficiency level of the participants in the first place and the scores obtained were used to determine group compositions. The paper version of OPT, as can be seen in Table 1, groups test takers based on their proficiency level on a score range of 0-60.

As Table 1 indicates, OPT results can categorize test takers according to their proficiency in English in six groups ranging from beginners to very advanced learners. In order to control the English proficiency variable only learners who scored in the range of 30 to 47 were selected (equivalent to B1 and B2 levels on CEFR). In other words, first, 60 intermediate EFL learners were selected based on the results of the OPT and were randomly put in two groups: L1 group that used the first language to collaborate while doing a reading text and L2 group that used only English as the medium of interactions. The result of the placement test conducted in this phase was therefore only used for participant recruitment and grouping purposes and was not included in the main phase of the study.

Data Collection

After administering a proficiency test to the original sample and assigning them

Table 1

Placement test and its score interpretation

OPT* score range	Level range	CEFR** range
0-17	Beginner	A1
18-29	Elementary	A2
30-39	Lower Intermediate	B1
40-47	Upper Intermediate	B2
48-54	Advanced	C1
54-60	Very Advanced	C2

*Oxford Placement Test

**Common European Framework

to two homogeneous groups (L1 and L2 groups) as was explained above, regarding the first question, all members of the group who used L1 during their collaborative dialogue took a questionnaire. The fact that the questionnaire sought to explore the views of learners regarding the use of L1 in collaborative dialogue obviated the need for learners in L2 groups to respond to it simply because they did not experience using L1 in their collaborations.

As for the second research question, after an orientation session, learners were accommodated in two separate classes. Learners in both classes took the reading section of a TOEFL iBT as the pretest. Since all the recruited participants based on the results of the preliminary placement test were in the intermediate English proficiency range, the TOEFL iBT reading section was considered appropriate for their level. Next, in one of the classes, hereafter referred to as the L1 class, learners used only L1 in collaborative reading tasks for seven sessions, whereas in the second class, referred to as L2 class, the normal course of

the action went on, i.e. learners used L2 as the medium of interaction while engaged in CRT. In the ninth session, all learners took a post-test which was taken from the reading section of a TOEFL iBT. Then, independent samples t-test was used in order to compare the scores obtained from the post-tests.

The idea for having a collaborative approach towards doing the reading tasks originated from research on sociocultural theory. Collaboration is a central concept in this theory and it is believed that learning originates from collaboration on an inter-psychological phase. It is only after this phase that learning can be internalized and find its way into the intra-psychological phase. As reviewed in the literature, however, little attention seems to have been paid to collaboration in reading. This study has taken Swain's (2000) definition of collaborative dialogue as the basis for treating reading as a collaborative task. She argued that collaborative dialogue was any "dialogue in which speakers are engaged in problem solving and knowledge building." CRT was therefore operationalized in this

study in the form of a reading task done by a group of language learners who verbalized their thoughts while doing the task. They were encouraged to talk to each other about different aspects of the reading task, both the text itself and the questions that came after it, and share their background knowledge and lived experiences to solve their comprehension problems collaboratively. The only difference between the two groups of learners in this study was that while the L1 groups were allowed to use their first language in their collaborations and were encouraged to do so by the researchers during the reading tasks, the L2 groups were only allowed to use English in their collaborations.

The majority of research on the thinking processes involved while reading in a second language has used think-aloud protocols as data collection instrument (Seng & Hashim, 2006). In this protocol, learners are asked to verbalize what they think so that researchers can monitor their thinking process. This is not free from criticism, however. Learners may provide a partial account of their thinking process. What is more, talking about what one thinks imposes a heavy cognitive burden thereby limiting one's cognitive abilities. Collaborations, on the other hand, are more natural than thinking aloud. That is why collaborative reading tasks were used in this study to monitor the use of L1 by the learners. The argument is that L1 may be used by learners doing a reading task by themselves. Yet, since access to what they think at the time of doing the task is partial, collaborative dialogue can

serve as a better tool for making learners' thoughts hearable. In the experimental sessions, therefore, L1 group learners were encouraged to discuss the text in whatever language they felt more comfortable with to maximize their collaborations. The researchers monitored them and their interactions were recorded as well. The L2 groups, as mentioned above, were limited to the use of English, however.

RESULTS

The First Research Question

The first research question dealt with the attitudes of the learners in the L1 class who used their first language while engaged in CRT. The questionnaire comprised 15 Likert scale items. However, since all the 15 items measured one dimension, they were first computed by IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, version 19.00. The following table summarizes the results of the descriptive analyses of the questionnaire data.

As Table 2 shows, a third of the participants held favorable attitudes towards using L1 in CRT. 63% of the learners, nonetheless, took a neutral posture regarding the questions. The remaining three percent (one of the learners), however, took issue with the use of L1 in CRT. Overall, the data seem to imply that the majority of the participants in the L1 class did not feature disagreement with the use of their mother tongue while interacting with their peers to comprehend a passage in English.

Table 2

Descriptive analysis of the attitudes of learners in the L1 class

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	10	33.3	33.3	33.3
Neutral	19	63.3	63.3	96.7
Disagree	1	3.3	3.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

The Second Research Question

The second question entailed a comparison between the scores obtained from the post-tests by the two groups of learners. However, before running independent samples t-test for the purpose of a comparison as such, Levene's test of homogeneity of variances was necessary. In fact, as a prerequisite for running t-tests, the variances of the scores of the two groups need to be similar. The following table shows the result of this test for the post-test data collected from the participants in this study.

As stated above in Table 3, variances of the scores of the two groups should be homogeneous and not significantly different. In other words, there should be a negligible difference between the variances for the data from two groups to be comparable. What the test in Table 3 shows is that the f value is above the cutoff point of 0.05 (0.125). This, in turn, means that although the variances are different, the difference between them is negligible. That is to say, the variances are homogeneous. The following ANOVA test examines the same issue for the observed difference between the mean scores of the two groups.

As Table 4 indicates, the ANOVA f value is suggesting that there is no significant

mean difference between the two groups because the p value is above 0.05 (0.063) and is hence not significant.

Now that the condition for running a t-test is met, it can be used to see whether the observed difference between the scores obtained by the learners in the two classes were significant. The following tables summarize the scores obtained by the participants in the two groups and after that the results of the t-test comparing their mean scores.

Table 5 testifies the fact that the mean score obtained by the learners in the L1 group was slightly more than the one obtained by their peers in the L2 group. In other words, the learners in the L1 group scored 19.46 out of 30 on average, while in the other group the learners scored 18.43. In order to decide whether this observed difference has been significant, an independent samples t-test was run, the results of which can be seen in Table 6.

As the results of the independent samples t-test in Table 6 show, since the p value (0.063) is above 0.05, the observed difference between the scores of the two groups in the post-test cannot be regarded as significant. In other words, this means that although the L1 class scored slightly

Table 3

Levene's test of homogeneity

Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
2.417	1	58	0.125

Table 4

ANOVA test for determining the significance of Levene's statistic

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	16.017	1	16.017	3.589	0.063
Within Groups	258.833	58	4.463		
Total	274.850	59			

Table 5

Descriptive comparison of the scores obtained by L1 and L2 groups

	Language	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Score	L1	30	19.4667	1.83328	0.33471
	L2	30	18.4333	2.35889	0.43067

Table 6

Independent samples t-test for comparing the results of the two groups

		T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference			
						Lower	Upper			
Score	Equal variances assumed	1.894	58	0.063	1.03333	0.54544	-.05849	2.12516		
	Equal variances not assumed	1.894	54.668	0.063	1.03333	0.54544	-.05991	2.12658		

higher than the L2 class on average, their performance was not significantly better than that of their peers who did not use L1 in their collaborations.

DISCUSSION

The present study was intent on investigating the attitudes of EFL learners towards the use of their L1 while engaged in CRT and the potential effects of using the L1 on

their reading in the second language. For long, the debate has tended to be polarized between those who have been in favor of using L1 and those who have been against it. With the advent of sociocultural theory this chasm has not widened any further not the least due to the scaffolding feature attributed to L1 use. Sociocultural theory constitutes evidence in favor of mediation as a contributing element in collaborative tasks. This having said, there have been a number of studies, as mentioned in the review of literature, which supported the idea of mediation in respect of sociocultural theory arguing that L1 use can both facilitate mediation and act as a salient factor in the ZPD of EFL learners. Nevertheless, there has been no unanimous consensus in the fact that L1 use has a facilitating role in the betterment of language skills, especially in the reading skill. Now, looking at the results of the present study in retrospect, one could argue that there are two areas where the results feature both similarities and differences with what the existing literature on L1 use in L2 reading has to offer: facilitation in L2 acquisition through L1 use and learners' attitudes towards giving their L1 a role in the process of L2 learning.

As far as the former of the two aspects is concerned, although this study implies that L1 use may have a positive impact on L2 acquisition, it does so with caution since the observed difference between the performance of the learners who were allowed to use L1 and that of the learners who used L2 exclusively in their collaborations was not statistically significant. This stands

opposite to what the proponents of L1 use in the acquisition of L2 reading skill have to say. For example, Kern (1994) and Cohen (1995) argued that using L1 in the forms of explicit translation or inner speech had a facilitative role in learning a second language. Although this bears resemblance to the findings of the present study in that holding a positive attitude towards L1 use can contribute to the enhancement of the reading skill, the authors of the present study do not share with these researchers their complete support for L1 use. As another example, Upton and Lee-Thompson (2001) put forward the idea that L2 readers made endeavors to build a scaffold intrapsychologically or cognitively using their expertise in L1 which allowed them to perform tasks that would be above their potentiality otherwise. Seng and Hashim (2006) also used data collected via think-aloud protocol and self-reports to investigate the use of L1 based strategies by their participants and found that thirty percent of the strategies employed by learners in reading was allocated to L1 use. Once again, despite the findings of the abovementioned studies, the current research plods cautiously along the proposition that L1 has a definite facilitative role in CRT. As it is patently manifest in Table 6, the observed difference between the mean scores of the two groups in this study was not statistically significant. The result can corroborate the fact that L1 use has an effect but not to the extent that it can be deemed significant.

As far as the attitudes of the participants in this study towards L1 use in CRT are

concerned, one has to approach the results and draw conclusions with more caution. As mentioned earlier on in the results section of this paper, participants in the L1 groups did not have a negative attitude towards L1 use. Yet, while around 33% of them said that they had a positive attitude towards L1 use, more than 63% reported a neutral feeling. In other words, the majority of the participants in this study felt neither good nor bad about the use of L1. Moreover, to the best of the authors' knowledge very little has been published on the use of L1 in reading tasks, which makes comparisons between the results of this research and those of other similar studies difficult. Yet, the mixed results of this study, i.e. positive and neutral views towards L1 use, bear resemblance to what we already know. There seem to be contradictory results as far as attitudes of learners and teachers towards L1 use in EFL are concerned (Nazary, 2008). Obviously, issues such as the context of study and proficiency level of learners might influence research results. Prodromou (2002) for instance, argued that learners with lower proficiency levels benefited more from L1 use and therefore had positive attitudes towards it. Indeed, such variables play important roles. But as it has been often stated in the literature, the use of L1 in EFL can be politically and socially sensitive (Phillipson, 2009). This implies that whether or not learners and teachers develop and maintain positive attitudes towards L1 use can be dependent on the sociopolitical environment of the classroom as well as the influence of media and popular culture. Yaqubi and

Pouromid (2013), as a case in point, having researched attitudes towards L1 use in an Iranian context, concluded that an intricate web of variables including the views of stakeholders of language teaching other than learners and teachers influenced the beliefs and attitudes towards L1 use as well as the amount teachers and learners may actually use it in the classroom. Investigating such sociopolitical issues around L1 use has been beyond the scope of the present study, but it is for sure an important issue and future research is hoped to shine more light on it. However, the mixed attitudes of learners towards L1 use in this study can be interpreted through such a sociopolitical lens as well. That is to say, the present study takes side with the authors mentioned in this section who believe that attitude is not necessary a personal construct and can instead be formed and shaped based on the context in which individuals are residing.

Another issue worth mentioning is the type of task used in the experimental sessions in this study as CRT. What the authors of the present study suggest is more about an approach towards reading tasks and less about the specifics of the task itself. During the experimental sessions and in the pre- and post-tests, learners were encouraged to interact and tell each other what they thought about the different aspects of the task. The theoretical logic behind this was to evaluate the extent to which sharing background information and lived experiences would influence learner attitudes and achievement. What is largely neglected here is the potential

influence of the task type. In other words, while in this study traditional reading tasks were used, the use of tasks and activities specifically designed for collaborative work might change the results. A reading task, for instance, that assigns different roles and responsibilities, such as summarizing, paraphrasing, taking notes about main ideas, to each member in a group might be more suitable for collaborative endeavors. However, a glance through published materials on reading activities reveals that most tasks, if not all, are designed for individual learners. Future research can also teach us more about the effects of using L1 during specifically designed collaborative tasks on the perceptions and achievement of learners.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study takes issue with the unsupported logic that monolingual policy proponents put forward. It seems that L1 has the potential to push the learners beyond their L2 performance. In light of the findings of this research, there is no gainsaying the fact that L1 can be used to enhance the effectiveness of developing language skills, especially the reading skill. However, one cannot be adamant in the belief that the rampant use of L1 can play a concrete facilitative role in CRT as the current research shows thanks to the findings patently obvious in the results section. This could be noteworthy for policy makers in the higher echelon of power not to disregard L1 use completely, at the same time not accentuating the fact that L1 use

can have the final say in CRT. As such, syllabus designers and teacher trainers cannot put all the eggs in L1 use basket. It is high time they considered the moderate use of L1 in EFL settings as L2 can still be pleasantly regarded as a facilitating factor vis a vis L1 use. This could eliminate the bias harbored in both poles. One can hope that by expunging these extreme poles, EFL can see a rosy future down the road.

Considering the fact that the use of L1 in collaborative reading tasks has largely remained unstudied so far, a number of suggestions for further research can be proposed. First of all, as mentioned above, the effect of task type and task variation can be studied in CRTs where learners are allowed to use their L1. Not all task types can be expected to elicit the same response in learners. While L1 use may suit certain tasks, it may fail to do so for other ones. Second, learners' attitudes need to be studied with regards to the context of the study as well as their interrelationship with the attitudes of other stakeholders in language teaching such as teachers. Furthermore, it is also worth examining whether different stakeholders exert any influence on each other's attitudes towards L1 use. Finally, the correlation between attitude and performance can also offer good insights. The idea is in fact whether or not having a positive attitude towards L1 use ends up in better performance in CRT by L2 learners. The results of research as such can hopefully inform L2 acquisition research on a theoretical level. More importantly, it can provide syllabus designers and

materials developers by providing them with insights into the process of L2 reading comprehension that can be used to put up syllabi that yield more accountable results than before. Carpe diem!

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