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Examining students' perspectives on the use of first language in community-based English as second language classrooms

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Examining Students' Perspectives on the Use of First Language in Community-based
English as Second Language Classrooms

by

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Thesis

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Abstract

This survey-based research investigates the perspectives on first language (L1) use by adult students of English as a second language (ESL) in three ESL community-based programs in Michigan, United States. The study focuses on community-based programs because, even though it offers a variety of social, educational, and language backgrounds, this setting has been underrepresented in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) research on L1 inclusion in ESL classes. The key findings of this study demonstrate that students use their L1 regardless of their English proficiency and lack of encouragement by teachers. In addition, students believe specific L1 uses (e.g., translating vocabulary and taking notes) can help them learn English. Overall, the findings suggest that strategic use of L1 has the potential to benefit community-based learners across different proficiency levels by fostering their second language (L2) acquisition as well as affirming their identity as multilingual and multicultural individuals.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The use of students' first language (L1) in English as a second language (ESL) classrooms continues to be one of the controversial topics in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), and it has been the focus of recent research studies' (Celic & Seltzer, 2011; Cummins, 2011; Hall & Cook, 2012) aim to assess whether and how it can enhance the second language (L2) learning process. Even though an increasing number of TESOL professionals view L1 use as beneficial, many educators and administrators still believe that adopting an *English-only* approach is the most effective and efficient way forward in teaching English to ESL learners. This approach has been supported by many U.S. institutions and ESL educators since it was first implemented (Baron, 1990; Crawford, 1991; Daniels, 1990, as cited in Auerbach, 1993), even though teachers and students still feel the need to use the native language to explain/understand concepts and vocabulary as a last resort, or even socialize in class.

First language inclusion has been the focus of studies, which show why and how this practice can bring benefits to the language learning process (Auerbach, 2000, 2016; Cummins, 2007; García & Seltzer, 2016; Macaro, 2005; Meyer, 2008; Tan, 2015). For instance, Cummins (2007) mentioned studies that show the efficacy of the use of bilingual dictionaries in the classroom (Kerr 2014; Mandalios; 2012; Takahashi, 2012; Tan, 2015). García (2017) explored the inclusion of students' L1 in the classroom to “[enable] migrants to recognize their full language repertoire and [help] them incorporate new features into their own language system” (p. 17). However, more research needs to be done on this topic in order for us to understand the value of L1 use in the development of L2 and the extent to which students perceive it as beneficial.

Some of the few studies addressing students' perspectives show a tendency that English learners in lower proficiency levels have positive attitudes towards their L1 use in the classroom (Al Sharaeai, 2012; Lee, 2012; Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2008; Tan, 2015). While these studies focus on university students, there are few studies addressing adult learners' perspective in ESL community-based settings.

The ESL community-based setting offers a varied multicultural environment, which includes learners from various social and educational backgrounds, interested in communicating in the new community in which they are living. It is important that researchers and educators find the best strategies to help these learners succeed by taking into account students' perceptions of their own learning process, including their views of L1 use, because it can guide ESL teachers to help learners improve their comprehension and production in English (McMillan & Turnbull, 2009; Rivers, 2011a, 2011b). This research aims to contribute to the TESOL field by adding to the body of literature on ESL learners' beliefs related to the use of L1 in ESL community-based contexts.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

The View of First Language in English Language Teaching

Communicative language teaching and the “English-Only” approach. Among the most popular language teaching methods of the later part of the 20th century was communicative language teaching (CLT), and the influence of this methodology continues to be experienced in many English teaching contexts today. One of the key tenets of CLT is the need to focus on communication in meaningful contexts. What this means is that similar to first language (L1) acquisition, those studying English as a second or foreign language can learn to communicate using English as the target language, provided that sufficient engagement with the language accompanied with effective scaffolding, such as comprehensible input, visual aids, and collaborative tasks are offered. The implication of the CLT method is that the use of learners’ L1 is not seen as particularly valuable; in fact, it is seen as a potential hindrance to language learning (Cook, 2001; Cummins, 2005; Macaro, 2005)

In its original form, the main argument for this monolingual approach in CLT is Krashen’s theory of second language acquisition (1982), which claims that languages are better learned naturally—the more the process resembles first language acquisition, the more likely students are seen as able to succeed in learning the target language. In addition to the focus on providing learners with comprehensible input, most teachers subscribing to the CLT paradigm believe that learners have to interact with one another, and if such interaction breaks down, they need to implement strategies for negotiating meaning (Long & Porter, 1985). They believe meaning negotiation can be done without the support of L1.

While many of the CLT tenets had a positive influence on the English language teaching field, this approach also brought its own limitations, especially in English as foreign language

(EFL) contexts where teachers often do not have sufficient linguistic competence to carry out classes solely in English, based on interaction and meaningful communication (Li 1998; McKay, 2002). For this reason, most teachers have continued to tap into students' L1 backgrounds, especially in situations when it was difficult to convey the desired meaning in the target language (Cook, 2001), even though officially, L1 use may be discouraged in these teachers' contexts. Even in ESL contexts, where teachers often have a very high linguistic competence in the L2, the low level of students' proficiency often limits the amount of interaction and understanding in class, making comprehensible input insufficient in helping students advance in their language development and making communication, which is supposed to be authentic, artificial (Tan, 2015).

In many contexts, L1 use continues to be viewed as a major detriment to L2 learning. As Tan (2015) explained, "L1 use remains contentious and many continue to believe that it should be avoided at all cost" (p. 3). Similarly, Cook (2001) explained, "so pervasive is the exclusion of L1 use in many language teaching techniques that in some literature it is listed as an item on a list of problems when students use their own languages" (p. 404). Because of this belief, many institutions adopt the English-only concept, meaning the view that English is better learned through complete immersion in the English language without the "interference" of learners' mother tongues, as they attempt to facilitate their English learners' language development. Another argument for the English-only view is that ESL monolingual teachers are not able to include learners' L1 in class, since they do not know their native languages (Skilton-Sylvester, 2003; Walqui, 2006;).

Although many English-only supporters continue to advance the monolingual approach, other scholars have pointed to the problems surrounding this way of teaching an additional

language (Auerbach, 2016; Cummins, 2005; Kerr, 2016; Macaro, 2005). Auerbach (2016) claims that establishing an English only practice in class constitutes a form of macroaggression as it “devalues the linguistic resources and hence the identities of some language minority learners under the guise of ‘helping’ them to learn English” (p. 937). In addition, according to Nunan (1999) and Cummins (2007), the monolingual perspective ignores cognitive psychology that emphasizes the need to activate students’ prior knowledge in order to facilitate the L2 learning process, which means that when students are not encouraged or allowed to use their L1, opportunities to activate students’ schema by making strong connections with what they already know are missed.

Macaro (2005) and Bialystok (2011) also posit that cross-linguistic transfer is a very common phenomenon in bilinguals’ daily life, and it is an effective strategy to help them communicate. Therefore, since it is generally agreed that the classroom should prepare students for situations they will encounter in their daily communication, it appears reasonable that instruction include the cross-lingual transfer and strategies in the classroom as well (Cook, 2005; Li & García, 2016; Macaro, 2005).

Another important point that cannot be reconciled with the monolingual approach is the fact that monolinguals and multilinguals have different cognitive processes. In the words of Cook (2007), “L2 users are different kinds of people from monolingual native speakers, and need to be measured as people who speak two languages, not as inefficient natives” (p. 229). In addition, brain research has shown that bilinguals do not separate their L1 from their L2, and their executive control “is recruited into linguistic processing, a configuration not found for monolinguals” (Bialystok, 2011, p. 2). L2 users also have “different language abilities ... and different ways of thinking from monolingual native speakers” (Cook, 2002, para. 23). Therefore,

L2 learners should not be expected to perform as native speakers or learn the language as native speakers do.

Post-method English language teaching. The increased dissatisfaction with the monolingual approaches to teaching English and the widely accepted post-method view that context-specific factors must be allowed to shape English language teaching (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) have recently contributed to the articulation of language pedagogy that honors learners' L1. One example of this pedagogy is translanguaging, defined by Cen Williams (1994) as “the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system” (as cited in Canagarajah, 2011, p. 401). Indeed, translanguaging pedagogy has dominated several educational fields in recent years, including those of applied linguistics and English composition. Translanguaging posits that “the tendency to adopt binary and hierarchical orientations to language has distorted the integrated nature of multilingual competence and communication” (Canagarajah, 2011, p. 3). Therefore, translanguaging pedagogy distinguishes itself from the previous methods, which saw the bilingual speaker as two monolinguals in one. Instead, translanguaging pedagogy sees the bilingual speaker's repertoire as dynamic, instead of divided in L1 and L2 as if they were in different and hierarchical compartments.

In addition, translanguaging draws away from the idea of subtractive bilingualism, where the L2 dominates the L1, and additive bilingualism, where both languages co-exists in a balanced state and are stored separately, to see the language system as one that integrates “various lexical, morphological, and grammatical linguistic features in addition to social practices and features individuals embody” (Vogel & Garcia, 2017 p. 5). This way, translanguaging goes beyond the traditional idea of a named language (Garcia & Seltzer, 2016), recognizing and valuing the

interchange between both languages, which originates a new fluid language that should not be diminished by the arbitrary power of the social and academic standardized language.

Given the increased multilingual nature of the world we live in, especially with the recent mass migration of refugees and opportunities of relocation for professional and academic purposes, educational and business settings worldwide are becoming more and more multilingual. Therefore, educators cannot keep themselves out of the translanguaging discussion because it can bring valuable opportunities for learning about language and culture for both students and the community in which they live. For this reason, it is important to examine how our language classrooms can benefit from the inclusion of students' L1 in the classroom dynamic as well as language teachers' and students' opinions about this topic.

Teachers' and Students' Uses and Perceptions of L1

Given the shift toward a more positive view of L1 use in the classroom in the field of applied linguistics (Kumaravadivelu, 2003), it is important to consider how teachers and learners view the role of L1 and what shapes their perceptions and attitudes. There are many factors that may affect teachers' and students' perception of the use of L1 in class.

Teachers' perceptions may be affected by "their own experiences as L2 learners, teacher training, teaching experiences, official policies, and through exposure to the perspectives of colleagues and superiors" (McMillan & Rivers, 2011, p. 253). Similarly, students may be influenced by teachers' perceptions, previous teaching methods, their own experience using the language, or even their cultural background. Keeping that in mind, research examining teachers' and students' perceptions should consider these factors, avoiding generalizations across different settings.

Research studies have examined this topic, especially in foreign language (FL) contexts. One of the most important case studies on teachers' and students' beliefs was conducted by Levine (2003). The purpose of the study was to explore the relationship between TLU (target language use) and TLA (target language anxiety). This study included a large sample of 600 participating foreign language (FL) students and 163 FL instructors. Most student participants were native speakers of English, and the minority called themselves bilinguals. As for instructors, less than half were native speakers of the FL and the great majority (74.8%) reported adopting a CLT approach.

The first finding reported by the study was that teachers' and students' perceptions of the actual amount of TLU varies. For example, when interacting with students, instructors believed they used 80% to 100% of the TL 40% of the time, while students claimed that 80% to 100% of the TL was actually used 60% of the time. Regarding TLU in different contexts, instructors affirmed that there was an 80% to 100% of TLU 50% of the time when discussing themes and topics, while students said that it was used only 30% of the time. Differences in perceptions regarding contexts were also shown in activities that involved grammar and tests, with teachers claiming that the TL was used more often than the L1, when in fact it was the opposite. In sum, this study found that students used the TL more often to talk to their teachers than with other classmates and that TL was more frequent used to talk about theme-based topics, while a greater tendency to use L1 was identified for communicating about grammar or usage, and tests or assignments.

In another section of the study, teachers and students were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with specific statements about TLA. Interestingly, teachers perceived a much higher anxiety level in students using the target FL than students themselves reported experiencing.

However, both groups agreed that although communicating in the FL can be frustrating, it is also a worthwhile challenge. No correlation was found between TLU increasing TLA, unlike what other researchers have claimed (Cook, 2001). The study identified that “TL use tends to be higher, and anxiety lower, for, (a) students in the second year of instruction, (b) students with a bilingual background, and (c) students who expect a higher grade” (Levine, 2003, p. 352). These observations support studies that claim that the higher the proficiency level, the more willing and comfortable students feel to use the TL (Al Sharaeai, 2012).

While Levine’s (2003) focus was on differences between teachers’ and students’ perceptions on TL use, another important research study conducted by McMillan and Rivers (2011) investigated if teachers’ perceptions about L1 corresponded with the English-only policy adopted by their institution or if they would reflect recent turn in research literature in favor of L1 use. This study included 60 native speaker instructors teaching in a private Japanese university specializing in foreign languages. Twenty participants defended the judicious use of L1 in class by the teacher, and 19 participants defended L1 use by students in class. The arguments provided were based on research. For example, they claimed that “teacher and student L1 use can act as a conversational lubricant” (p. 258); L1 use can promote learner collaboration; and students can use it in preparation or rehearsal stages of a lesson, and benefit from comparing the TL and L1.

On the other hand, teachers who were opposed to L1 use provided arguments that cannot be substantiated in the literature. For instance, they claimed that when working collaboratively, “learners may not negotiate meaning in the TL as often or as wholeheartedly as the teacher may assume” (p. 258); students who use their L1 can be seen as lazy or defiant; and that L1 use may expand to the whole class, thus reducing TL production. Another interesting finding from this

study was that teachers who showed less proficiency in students' L1 tended to see L1 use as positive. It may suggest that teachers do not have to be a native speaker of their students' L1 to still be comfortable with them using it for useful purposes.

In his review of literature on code-switching, Macaro (2005) also provides insightful information on teachers' perceptions by stating that a great majority see the L1 as a necessary, but regrettable resource, which means that using it makes them feel guilty. This reflects the extent to which the monolingual principle has been internalized as common sense by policymakers and teachers despite the fact that classroom practice often falls short of this standard (Cummins, 2007; Lugoloobi-Nalunga, 2013). By analyzing other studies on the topic, Macaro (2005) concludes that although most teachers agree that TL should predominate in classroom interaction, L1 should not be excluded since it is still needed to provide understanding. However, teachers seem to use L1 mostly with low proficiency level learners to provide quick explanations, thus avoiding student frustration when they are not able to understand the explanation in English, which seems to suggest that most teachers still do not value L1 in terms of cognitive development and language acquisition, since it is mostly used for complex explanations and to save time (p.68).

While the study the review of literature by Macaro (2005) identified teachers feeling guilty when using the L1, the study by Tan (2015) identified a more positive attitude from teachers as well as students. Tan's (2015) study was conducted in a university setting in New Zealand with seven native teachers and 45 multilingual students in general English and university bridging courses. The purpose of the study was to examine teachers' beliefs and students' attitudes towards L1 use. Teacher participants reported that, even though they try to maximize TL use, L1 can be "beneficial to the learning experience," especially for low

proficiency level learners because it provides comprehensible input and helps learners to negotiate meaning (p. 119). Similarly, student participants also regarded L1 as “a resourceful tool in learning English” to understand the TL structure and vocabulary as well as work on content clarification and negotiation (p. 119). Especially for teachers of university bridging courses, L1 use was not seen as a problem, even when students translated their written work. In fact, this practice was seen by teacher participants as positive because it allowed students to “produce their work twice” and “consolidate [their] mastery and fluency of knowledge in the English language” (Tan, 2015, p. 121). When investigating the reasons behind the teachers’ beliefs, Tan (2015) identified an interesting pattern—teachers who had past experience as students in a FL classroom where L1 was not allowed tended to be more supportive of L1 use because they “wanted to avoid for their students the kind of helplessness and frustration they had experienced” (p. 125). Therefore, despite their ESOL training in CLT, they considered the L1 a valuable resource if used strategically to mediate learning.

However, Tan (2015) also found that teachers’ positive attitude contrasted with a dichotomy in students’ beliefs documented in the self-reports. Although over half of the student participants believed L1 use can hinder the L1 learning process, a great majority commonly used a bilingual dictionary to learn English vocabulary and grammar. In addition, despite students’ belief that using their L1 to discuss class tasks was not a good strategy to learn English, the researcher observed that L1 use was a common occurrence in the classroom. Regarding the reason for their L1 use, participants reported using the L1 for learning purposes, to help each other, and to translate words.

Similar conflicting opinions and practices were found in Al Sharaeai’s (2012) study on students’ reasons to use the L1, frequency of use, and attitudes towards it, at a large university in

the Midwest of the United States. The participants were 51 university students from different linguistic background, including Chinese, Arabic, Spanish, and Korean as the largest groups, and at different English proficiency levels (the great majority were above low intermediate English proficiency) and majors. Participants were currently or had previously taken ESL classes. Unlike studies that showed EFL students' preference for instructors who could understand their L1 (Nazary, 2008; Sharma, 2006;) and sitting next to a classmate who shared the same language, participants in this study showed a tendency to prefer teachers who could not speak their native language, and sitting next to classmates from different language backgrounds. Participants reported sometimes using L1 "to explain and ask about the new ideas and concepts presented in English classes, to feel connected to their cultures, and when they felt they could not find the correct word in English" (p. 83).

The findings from Al Sharaeai's (2012) study suggested that participants supported the English only approach to instruction in class, preferring to be exposed to the L2 as much as possible, and reducing L1 use, although they acknowledged reasons to use it. Similar to Levine's (2003) study, Al Sharaeai's (2012) findings show that as students' proficiency level increases, they start feeling more comfortable using the L2, thus reducing L1 use. Furthermore, it seems to be the case that students do not experience a high level of TLA when using the TL, which also corroborates Levine's findings.

A more positive student attitude towards L1 use was found in Lugoloobi-Nalunga's (2013) survey and observation-based study of 40 immigrant students from 16 to 20 years of age, living in Sweden. These participants were required to attend English lessons and also acquire the school's language of instruction, Swedish. A total of 15 mother tongues were identified, 12 shared by at least two or more students, and only three spoken by only one student each. The

purpose of the study was to find out how and when students switched between the TL and L1 in class. The survey results indicated that students used their L1 to ask a classmate for help and that they were not negatively affected by other students speaking in their mother tongues. Even though they were aware that teachers did not allow L1 use, they still used it. In fact, 70% of the participants reported preferring switching from L1 and L2, especially to help each other in class. It was observed that switching between L1 and L2 occurred to clarify instructions, but both students and teachers reported dissatisfaction when it happened for long periods of time. Some students switched between L1 and L2 to compensate for their limited vocabulary and keep the conversation flow, and also to exclude others from the conversation when they were helping each other and did not want to share with the other students what they had found out in the exercise. Class observations also showed that this language switch promoted L2 development through meaningful content as “experiences gained through L1, and not only English, were used in L2 learning in a multilingual classroom” (p. 27), serving a scaffolding function as students guided each other.

Lugolobi-Nalunga (2013) concluded that translanguaging, meaning dynamically using both the L1 and TL, is “a form of collaboration in a heterogeneous L2 classroom, which allows students to own their learning processes through the language they master” (p. 29). The author also points out that using L1 to help learners understand instructions is an important strategy in L2 acquisition as it promotes active participation, interaction, and additive bilingualism, even though additive bilingualism is not necessarily associated with translanguaging. In addition, L1 use also provides opportunities for peer scaffolding as learners receive assisted performance. Finally, a cultural benefit is added since students develop their intercultural competence by respecting other people’s languages.

The studies presented above have greatly contributed to our understanding of L1 use and teachers' and students' perspectives on it. It is possible to find similar findings among them. For instance, Levine' (2003) and Al Sharaeai's (2012) study found that increased TLU does not always results in TLA. Tan (2015) and Al Sharaeai (2012) identified several conflicts between what students believe about L1 use and what they actually do with it; while many students believe L1 should be reduced because it can have negative effects on the learning process, they also use the L1 to translate, talk about grammar and vocabulary, and discuss tasks. Lugolobi-Nalunga's (2013) study seems to be the one that identified more positive attitudes toward L1, as it promoted opportunities for scaffolding, meaningful interaction, and active participation.

Purpose of This Project

The purpose of this study was to examine students' beliefs and uses of L1 in their ESL community-based classes. This project will contribute to the body of research on this topic in two ways. First, as has been demonstrated in the literature review, there is extensive information about teachers' perceptions of L1 use in the classroom, but there is relatively little information about students' perceptions and beliefs. Second, the existing research investigating learners' perceptions focuses mostly on university settings, leaving community-based contexts largely unexplored (Auerbach, 2016). By focusing on adult learners in community-based education programs, this project will help identify, understand, and address the assets and the needs of students in this complex and highly diverse setting, rich in language, cultural, and social backgrounds. By identifying learners' beliefs about the value of L1 in this particular setting, this investigation aims to help teachers and institutions reflect on the role of learners' L1 in ESL classes in order to make informed pedagogical decisions and use effective instructional strategies. The following research questions were at the core of this investigation:

1. What are adult English learners' experiences with and reasons for the use of L1 in the English classroom?
2. What are adult English learners' beliefs about the use of L1 in the English classroom?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Design

This study employed convenience sample cross-sectional survey methodology. Participants anonymously completed a paper-based survey, which yielded quantitative data (responses to Likert scale questions) and limited descriptive data (from a small number of open-ended questions). The survey was an appropriate instrument because it enabled the researcher to target specific research questions and minimize the possibility of collecting data irrelevant to the study. In order to make the study as accurate as possible, the survey was translated by volunteers into Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Spanish, and Arabic, since these were the largest language groups attending community-based ESL classes in the participating institutions. The purpose of the translation was to ensure that students with a beginning level English proficiency would be able to understand each question, instead of leaving questions unanswered or answering them in a manner that that would not correspond with their actual beliefs. The researcher conducted the survey in person, visiting each location to provide opportunities for clarification and observe the survey completion process in order to answer any questions about the survey instructions and the study. By providing students with opportunities to take the survey in L1, personally distributing hard copies of the survey, and observing students completing the survey, the researcher increased the validity of the collected data.

Instruments

The initial survey (see Appendix A) was piloted in a beginner and intermediate level class with a small group of adult learners. Modifications were made based on students' feedback and researcher's observations, resulting in a shorter and more linguistically accessible survey.

The survey was accompanied by a letter of consent giving permission for the participants' responses to be used for this thesis project (see Appendix B). The consent form also informed participants that their responses would remain anonymous and all data would be stored on the researcher's password-protected computer. The survey contained 18 questions, a combination of multiple-choice, Likert scale, and open response questions. The last page included 10 questions to collect demographic information about learners' profile, including native language, age, gender, proficiency level, years in the U.S., etc. After validation with experienced TESOL researchers at Eastern Michigan University and piloting of the survey, the instrument was administered face-to-face by the researcher to a total of 77 adult ESL students.

Procedure

Following the institutional review board approval of the research proposal (see Appendix C), site selection was finalized based on proximity and reputation. The three sites were ultimately selected due to their populations of adult learners among immigrants, refugees, and expatriates across all English learning proficiency levels. The mode of contact was through email (see Appendix D), to which each organization responded promptly and positively.

The researcher visited ESL community-based classes, collecting data over the period of three months. Beginner level participants who did not have the survey translated in their native languages were not required to participate and, when they did, their answers were not included in the database. This inclusion criterion for the study was put in place to ensure that beginner level students would understand the questions. Almost half of the intermediate students ($n = 20$) also completed the translated survey, even though it was not a requirement to complete the survey solely in their first language. A total of three student responses were removed because the

respondents were beginners who completed the survey in English. Apart from that, all learner responses to the survey met the inclusion criteria for the study.

Participants and Context

From a total of 23 beginners, 42 intermediate, and seven advanced participants, 74 of learners' responses met the criteria for the study. This research involved 74 respondents from various language backgrounds, including Japanese (37.3%, $n = 25$), Chinese (17.65%, $n = 12$), Spanish (14.7%, $n = 10$), and Korean (13.2%, $n = 9$) as the largest groups of learners attending community-based classes in Washtenaw County, Ypsilanti, and Ann Arbor in Michigan in the United States. The median age group was 36–45.

Respondents were asked to indicate their proficiency level; there was no placement test to determine participants' English proficiency. The majority of respondents self-identified as having intermediate proficiency (58.3%, $n = 42$), followed by beginners (31.9%, $n = 23$), and advanced (9.7%, $n = 7$). Most respondents had been studying English for less than 12 months (32.3%, $n = 23$), and the other groups for 1–2 years (22.5%, $n = 16$), 6–10 years (22.5%, $n = 16$), and 11 years or more (12.7%, $n = 9$).

The group living in the U.S. for less than 1 year made up 41.3%, of the data ($n = 28$), followed by 1–2 years (30.9%, $n = 21$), 3–5 years (11.8%, $n = 8$), and 11 years or more (10.3%, $n = 7$). Given this statistics and general knowledge of the community programs in Washtenaw County, most of the respondents are in the US on visitor visas, followed by longer-term immigrants. It is highly unlikely that a significant number of refugees and international students have been included in this study, based on the information I received from the institutions.

Three institutions were selected to participate in this research. The first one was Washtenaw Literacy with 51 responses collected. Washtenaw Literacy is a non-profit

organization that offers literacy support services for domestic citizens, as well as immigrant and international participants. Typically, they offer individual and group tutoring sessions for local citizens focused on reading improvement, although the ESL-focused sessions tend to emphasize speaking skills. The institution adopts an immersion policy where English is to be used in class at all times, meaning that students' native language is not used or explicitly encouraged. Most tutors are about 50 years old, and 4% of them have a degree in a language field. The second participating institution was the Jewish Family Services (JFS), and it had 21 responses collected. JFS is a non-profit immigrant and refugee resettlement organization for newly arrived people. JFS' classes emphasize the communicative approach to language learning while building life skills, focusing on developing speaking skills through self-expression and communication. The institution does not adopt an English-only policy, leaving it to the teacher to decide if they want to encourage students' L1 use or not. JFS' volunteer tutors are a mixed group of retired and semi-retired professors, members of the community, and volunteers who come to fulfill community service or education credits for classes. The permanent group of volunteer tutors are mainly over 50 and not all are bilingual or have ESL background, but most of them have an undergraduate degree. The final program was one run by the Ann Arbor Public Schools. Only two responses were collected on this site because the beginners' class visited had native languages not included in the translated survey.

Data Analysis

The survey questions were designed based on surveys already conducted by other researchers in the TESOL field to examine students' perspectives on L1 use (Al Sharaeai, 2012; Tan, 2005; Levine, 2003). Adapting surveys from peer-reviewed studies allowed me to build on already established information in the field.

Quantitative data. I assigned a numerical code to each of the multiple choice and Likert scale survey questions (agree, not sure, and disagree). Some participants utilized the “other” option for multiple-choice questions, which required an open-response answer. Descriptive data analysis was used to describe the basic features of the data in this study. The chi-square test of homogeneity was used to find differences across levels to evaluate if there were differences among language proficiency groups in their responses to how they use their native language in the class environment. The assumption tests were sufficient to allow the use of the statistics. The chi-square test of homogeneity looks at proportions and compares them to each group. The proportion remains the same, regardless of group size.

Qualitative. The open-response answers were analyzed qualitatively in order to identify patterns. Learners were not required to answer every question to complete the survey, and therefore, the sample number of responses slightly varies from question to question. Answering every question was not a requirement because I wanted to respect students’ choice to only complete questions they wanted to answer. The finalized data sets provided the number and percentages of participants who selected each response and the average rating for the Likert scale questions.

Chapter 4: Results

Research Questions

What are adult English learners' experiences with and reasons for the use of L1 in the English classroom? Items 1 and 2 (see Table 1) identified the reasons why students spoke in their L1 with another classmate and when they used it in class for other purposes, respectively. By using descriptive statistics, I found that L1 is spoken by students mostly to help each other (about 79%, $n = 59$ participants) and socialize (32.4%, $n = 24$), and also used to translate (59.5%, $n = 44$) and take notes (54%, $n = 40$). There was no significant difference found among the uses. Out of the four open responses to Item 1, two participants mentioned that they speak their L1 in class when they do not know how to say a specific word in English.

Still, a number of students reported never speaking their native language in class (28.4%, $n = 21$) and never using it for other purposes (13.5%, $n = 10$). It is important to mention that 14.9% ($n = 11$) of participants reported not having any classmate who could speak their L1, which may suggest that the reason why 11 out of 21 participants reported never speaking their L1 in class might be because there are no other classmates who shared the same language.

Respondents reported using their native language mostly to translate using dictionaries and the internet (59.5%, $n = 44$). Taking notes and writing down vocabulary (54.05%, $n = 40$) was the second most preferred reason among participants for using their L1. When they cannot think of an English word/phrase, 41.9% of participants ($n = 31$) reported that they used their L1. Finally, 14.9% of respondents ($n = 11$) used their L1 to do their activities more efficiently. No significant difference was found among these items. Just a small percentage of participants reported never using their native language in class (13.5%, $n = 10$), three beginners, six intermediate, and one advanced.

Table 1
Language Use in the Classroom

Survey Items	Options	Number of participants
1. I speak my native language with another classmate to	socialize	32.4% (24)
	get help to do class activities	39.2% (29)
	help my classmate with class activities	40.5% (30)
	I never use my native language in class	28.4% (21)
	Other	5.4% (4)
2. I use my native language in class when I	cannot think of an English word/phrase	41.9% (31)
	want to do my activities more efficiently	14.9% (11)
	want to take notes and write down vocabulary	54.0% (40)
	use dictionaries or the internet to translate	59.5% (44)
	I never use my native language in class	13.5% (10)
	Other	4.0% (3)

By using the chi-square test of homogeneity, no significant differences in L1 use were found between the answers from beginner and more advanced students, except for the use of L1 for note taking and writing down vocabulary, and using the internet or dictionary to translate. The note-taking use was selected by 11 beginner, 25 intermediate, and three advanced participants while using dictionaries or the internet to translate was selected by 10 beginner, 26 intermediate, and six advanced participants. Considering that each group had a total of 23 (beginner), 42 (intermediate), and seven (advanced) respondents, we can see that the more advanced groups had a high proportion of report saying that they use this strategies.

What are adult English learners’ beliefs about the use of L1 in the English classroom? Item 3 (see Table 2) examined students’ opinions about teachers who encourage L1 use. Students seem to be divided over whether teachers who encourage L1 use support their students’ learning or make English learning more difficult. While 41.65% ($n = 30$) of participants reported believing that these teachers support their students’ English learning, 25% ($n = 18$) believed that these teachers make English learning more difficult, and 5.4% ($n = 4$) participants

chose both items. When teachers encourage L1 use, 33.3% ($n = 24$) of respondents felt that teachers show appreciation of students' culture. Out of the seven open responses for this item, four of them mentioned that the teacher did not allow L1 use in class.

Table 2
Opinions About Teachers Who Encourage L1 Use

Survey Question	Options	Number of participants
3. In your opinion, a teacher who encourages students to use their native language during ESL lessons	shows that they appreciate their students' cultures	33.33% (24)
	promotes friendships between students	23.61% (17)
	supports their students' English learning	41.67% (30)
	makes English learning more difficult	25.% (18)
	makes some of their students feel isolated in the lesson	9.72% (7)
	Other	13.89% (10)

Of the 72 adult English language students who answered the items in Table 2, 41.3% ($n = 19$) beginning and intermediate students indicate that they believe that the teacher who encourages L1 use shows that they appreciate their students' cultures, compared to 71.4% ($n = 5$) advanced students (19 out of 65 beginner and intermediate students compared to 5 out of 7 advanced students). A statistically significant difference in the group proportions was found using an exact chi-square test of homogeneity, $X^2(1) = 5.064$, $p = .037$, with a post hoc procedure, Cramer's $V = .265$. This seems to indicate that advanced students, compared to beginner and intermediate students, felt that teachers who encourage L1 during ESL lessons show that they appreciate their students culture more so than students at the lower proficiency levels.

The following questions identified how often teachers encourage and guide students to use their L1 in the classroom. Most participants report minimal encouragement and guidance of L1 use by the teacher in class. A total of 68.06% ($n = 49$) said that the teacher never encouraged them to use their native language, only 11.11% ($n = 8$) reported that encouragement was given

“several times.” While 55.07% ($n = 38$) reported that teachers never encouraged students who speak the same language to help each other in their native language, 29% ($n = 20$) said that encouragement was given “once or twice” and 16% ($n = 11$) said “several times.” When asked how often their teacher talked about why it is a good idea to use their native language, 82.6% ($n = 57$) reported that this type of encouragement was never given. Furthermore, 72.5% ($n = 50$) reported that teachers never recommended bilingual books and translators, and 70.15% ($n = 47$) informed that their teacher never provided opportunities to use their native language creatively in their learning (e.g., translate a poem). However, 46.3% of the participants ($n = 31$) reported that their teacher showed interest in their native language “once or twice,” while 31.3% ($n = 21$) said that interest was “never” shown and 22.4% (15) that interest was shown “several times.”

Figure 1 compares the percentage of students who reported never receiving encouragement and guidance to students receiving some encouragement and guidance. The category that was perceived by the participants as the most frequent way in which teachers encourage L1 use was by showing interest in their native language. The lowest frequent type of encouragement was teachers explaining why using L1 can be a good idea.

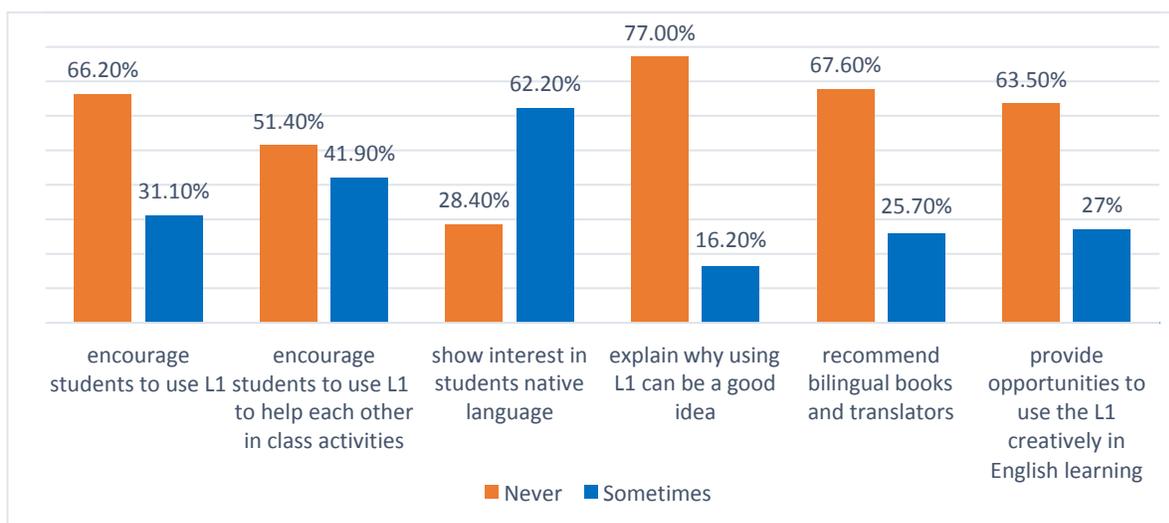


Figure 1. Teachers' encouragement of L1 use.

The differences between proficiency groups were not significant, but similar. Generally, the encouragement was low across levels. In addition, it appears that teachers stop providing integration or learning opportunities in the native language in the advanced group. The more frequent category in all levels was teachers showing interest in students' L1.

The last section of the survey examined students' opinions and beliefs about native language use (see Table 3). The results did not show a significant difference in whether students support or disapprove of L1 use. A total of 32% ($n = 23$) of the participants agreed that using a native language in class can help students learn English, while 36.11% ($n = 26$) disagreed and 32% ($n = 23$) felt uncertain. When asked if discussing tasks in their native language with their classmates could help them learn English, 36.5% ($n = 27$) of respondents agreed, while 41.9% ($n = 31$) disagreed and 21.6% ($n = 16$) felt uncertain. Finally, another question that seemed to show that students felt divided on their views of L1 value was the one asking whether they preferred to have a teacher who could speak their native language. While 25% ($n = 18$) agreed with that, 36.11% ($n = 26$) disagreed and 38.9% ($n = 28$) felt uncertain.

While students did not show high agreement on the items above, they had a surprisingly high agreement level when asked about the value of translation. A total of 76.7% ($n = 56$) of the participants reported that translating new words into their native language helped them learn English, while only 8.2% ($n = 6$) disagreed. When asked whether writing notes in their native language helps them learn English, 72.2% ($n = 52$) of respondents agreed, while 18.06% ($n = 13$) disagreed. These answers were in accordance with the answers in Questions 1 and 2, where translation and note-taking were the two most preferred use of L1 reported by students. Translation was perceived by students as a helpful strategy, regardless of their level of proficiency or teacher encouragement.

A negative view towards L1 use was found in items related to speaking L1 in class.

When asked whether they believed students can benefit more from their ESL class if they can sit next to a classmate who speaks their native language, 47.95% ($n = 35$) of the respondents disagreed, while 19.2% ($n = 14$) agreed and 32.9% ($n = 24$) felt uncertain. Somewhat surprisingly, 76.4% ($n = 55$) disagreed with the statement that only using English in class made them nervous and 12.50% ($n = 9$) felt uncertain. Only 11.11% ($n = 8$) of participants, five of them beginners, seemed to associate nervousness with having to only speak English. In the open responses for this section, beginner level participants expressed negative views towards L1 use saying that they “don’t agree with that” and that “they should never speak in their native language.” Interestingly, intermediate and advanced participants reported positive views, such as acknowledging that translation “helps understand the new language” and “understand English explanation.”

Table 3
Students’ Beliefs about the Benefits of L1 in ESL Classroom

Statements	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
11. Using a native language in class can help students learn English.	31.94% (23)	31.94% (23)	36.11% (26)
12. It is best to have a teacher/tutor who can understand my native language.	25% (18)	38.89% (28)	36.11% (26)
13. I benefit more from my ESL class if I can sit next to a classmate who speaks my native language.	19.18% (14)	32.88% (24)	47.95% (35)
14. Only using English in class makes me nervous.	11.11% (8)	12.50% (9)	76.39% (55)
15. Translating new words into my native language helps me learn English.	76.71% (56)	15.07% (11)	8.22% (6)
16. Discussing tasks in my native language with my classmates helps me learn English.	36.49% (27)	21.62% (16)	41.89% (31)
17. Writing notes in my native language helps me learn English.	72.22% (52)	9.72% (7)	18.06% (13)

When we compare the L1 uses reported by students in the first section and their beliefs about L1 use, we can find some apparent differences between their beliefs and practices. For instance, 76.7% ($n = 56$) participants believed that translating new words into their native language helped them learn English, while only 59.5% ($n = 44$) reported doing it in class. In addition, 72.2% ($n = 52$) students believed that writing notes in their native language helped them learn English, but only 54.05% ($n = 40$) reported using this strategy in class. There seems to be a trend across levels, with beginner level students having higher dissonance between what they believe and what they actually do. Out of the 19 beginners who believe translating new words can help them learn, only 43.5% ($n = 10$) actually use this strategy. Similarly, out of the 18 beginners that believe that writing notes in their native language helps them learn English, 47.8% ($n = 11$) actually do it.

Chapter 5: Discussion

L1 Use

As the findings discussed in the section above show, translation and note-taking are the two most used and valued L1 strategies among adult ESL learners attending community-based ESL classes. Students' open responses to the survey also reflect this finding. The responses are transcribed exactly the way they were written, including grammatical and spelling errors:

Comment 1: "Sometimes, the translation helps understand the new language."

Comment 2: "It's only useful when you translate an English word in your native language to understand better what it mean."

Comment 3: [I use the internet to translate] "some words that I can't understand."

This preference for translation may result from previous learning experiences where students used translation in foreign language settings and/or because they were not introduced to other L1 uses in their current ESL classes. The percentage of students using L1 during note-taking, especially in the intermediate and advanced levels, was surprising since L1 is usually associated with low proficiency level learners. In addition, note-taking can be seen as an attempt to process information through translanguaging to facilitate the assimilation and understanding of the L2. The small percentage of respondents that use their L1 to do their activities more efficiently may indicate that students' L1 is not presented in a strategic way, other than mere translation, to aid their understanding. This fact is supported by Macaro's (2005) study, which concludes that L1 is still not seen as a tool for L2 development and language acquisition, since it is mostly used for complex explanations and to save time.

The fact that a majority of the participants reported frequently using their L1 for translation and note-taking, but at the same time disagreed or were uncertain about the benefits

of using their L1 to learn English or of sitting next to a classmate who speaks their L1, may indicate students' preference for using their L1 for their own purposes, instead of having it as a tool included in the class dynamic and methodology. However, a question that remains unanswered: May this preference be a result of feeling guilty for using their L1s because the message communicated to them often suggests that English-only approaches to teaching ESL are superior? Future research can examine this issue in more depth.

As for speaking, the situations in which students most speak in the native language in class are to get help to do class activities and help their classmates do class activities. The same L1 social functions were identified by Lugoloobi-Nalunga's (2013) study, where participating students expressed their willingness to help each other through collaboration. This finding highlights the importance for teachers to take social interaction into consideration, especially in the community-based context, where students come from various social and educational backgrounds, facing the challenges of living in a foreign country (Lugoloobi-Nalunga, 2013), and hoping to feel more integrated/adapted in the new community.

L1 Use and Anxiety

In Tan's (2015) study, teachers reported that L1 use among learners helped to reduce anxiety in the classroom. My initial hypothesis was that the participants in this research would also report a high level of anxiety when having to speak English only. Contrary to this hypothesis, a large number of participants did not report feeling nervous when speaking only English in class. One possible explanation for this finding is that these students are in much more stressful "real life" situations during the day, since they live in an immersed English environment, having to use English daily as they shop, use public transportation, navigate their children's educational system, talk to neighbors, etc. In addition, classes in the participant

institutions are usually small, consisting of 10 or fewer students, which may contribute to learners' experiencing less anxiety.

Another contradiction to my initial beliefs was the fact that students prefer not to sit next to a classmate who can speak their L1. These findings seem to suggest that students do not feel the need, as some studies suggest, to speak their L1 to reduce their anxiety level since they do not feel nervous having to speak in English only. In addition, the fact that most participants have been studying English for less than 12 months and 41.3% have been living in the U.S. for less than one year and, still, do not feel nervous to speak only English in the classroom, also might indicate that target language anxiety may not be an issue in multilingual community-based settings.

Identity

As has been demonstrated, a significant number of students believe that teachers who encourage L1 use do so to show appreciation for students' culture. This may suggest that when students' L1 is acknowledged, their identities are affirmed. Therefore, this appreciation can be used to foster a friendly and welcoming classroom environment. The fact that out of the three proficiency groups, the advanced learners were the ones who most agreed that teachers who encourage L1 use show appreciation for students' culture may indicate that, for this group, L1 use is not seen as a functional tool for learning L2, as it is for beginners. In other words, advanced students do not need L1 inclusion to function in an ESL class, but to feel like their identity as a multilingual person is valued.

Indeed, several scholars have written about the connections between identity affirmation and L2 literacy development. According to Cummins (2007), identity affirmation can have a positive impact on students' academic achievement. In addition, "bilingual instructional

strategies can also promote identity investment among both majority and minority students in bilingual/immersion programs by encouraging them to express themselves through both of their languages ...” (p. 238). In the teaching implications session, the construct of identity texts will be addressed to guide teachers in designing materials based on this genre that utilize students’ L1 and affirm their identity.

Not Using L1

A significant number of students reported never using their native language in class when speaking. There are several likely explanations behind this lack of L1 use. The first one is that students may not have other classmates who speak their L1 (14.9% [$n = 11$] participants in the present study). The second is that not using their L1 may be a personal choice based on beliefs that it will hinder their L2 development. This belief might come from previous learning experiences students had with teachers or institutions that adopted an English-only policy, which is a belief not always supported by facts. The third possible explanation is the lack of encouragement by teachers, or even the fact that teachers may not allow L1 use. All these reasons were found in participants’ comments, with some of them saying that the teacher usually asks them to speak only English in class:

Comment 4: “Every time students are talking in their native language, the teacher says “English, please.”

Comment 5: “My teacher always remind me ‘don’t speak Spanish in class.’ I think it’s good because sometimes I speak Spanish without noticing.”

Comment 6: “My teachers don’t agree with students speaking their L1 in class.”

Comment 7: “Nobody else speaks Spanish in my class.”

Comment 8: [the teacher] “prohibits my native language (Russian) in class.”

It is generally believed by teachers that beginner students are the most in favor of L1 use. Surprisingly, only beginning level students wrote disapproving comments about L1 use in class, while intermediate and advanced respondents wrote neutral and/or positive comments. This may indicate that beginner students may be conditioned to seeing L1 as a hindrance, but as they progress in the language, they start to find ways to use their L1 as an ally. The participants' comments below seem to support this hypothesis:

Comment 9: "I think that it [using first language] is the better for to learning English."

Comment 10: "For the beginner, they can use native language to further his study of English. For the advanced learners, they shouldn't use native language."

Comment 11: "If the person is a beginner, the teacher who can speak the language could help them."

Comment 12: "It's only useful when you translate an English word in your native language to understand better what it mean."

Teachers willing to reflect on these findings may want to consider if students would benefit from using L1 strategically in their L2 development. If so, teachers can promote awareness of L1 use so that students can feel comfortable using it, instead of guilty. A significant body of research has been conducted to examine the benefits of using L1 in class to expand vocabulary (Bouangeune, 2009), increase amount of TL in class (Kerr, 2014), and reduce cognitive overload (Bruen & Kelly, 2014), among other benefits. Therefore, instead of relying on beliefs not substantiated by research, it is the teachers' role to keep exploring ways in which students can progress in their language development. Ideas for doing so will be provided in the Teaching Implications section of this thesis.

Teachers' Lack of Encouragement

Responses showed that most community-based ESL teachers rarely encourage or guide their learners to use their L1. Some hypotheses can explain teachers' attitudes towards L1 use. The first one is that teachers do not see value in it or that they are just following the policy of the institution they are working for. Another possibility is that teachers do not know how to guide students to use their L1. Finally, teachers' teaching and learning experience in the language field can also play a big role (Hall, & Cook, 2012). This last hypothesis is supported by the research study conducted by Lugolobi-Nalunga (2013), who identified a conflict between teachers having negative attitudes towards code-switching based on educational background and at the same time witnessing positive effects of code-switching. It is important to point out the fact that not knowing how to use students' L1 as a tool can be a barrier, which may lead to the belief that it cannot be done and that translation is the only way, or that not knowing students' L1 makes it impossible. These beliefs reflect the lack of understanding on both students' and teachers' side regarding L1 use.

On the other hand, a significant number of participants reported that their teachers have shown interest in the native language on limited occasions ("once or twice"). This inconsistency between believing L1 is a hindrance and at the same time showing interest in students' L1 may indicate that the interest shown by the teachers may not be related to the teaching/learning process itself but more like a curiosity or a personal desire to connect with the students instead of an attempt of using it as a potentially useful scaffolding strategy for cognitive development. Because this research study did not assess teachers' perceptions on this topic, we cannot know for sure the reasons why these teachers show interest in their students' L1 more frequently.

Similar to Al Sharaeai's (2012) findings, the present study did not find a significant difference in the number of students who agree, feel uncertain, or disagree about preferring to have a teacher who can speak their native language. On the other hand, it differs from the results presented in Sharma (2006) and Nazary (2008), who found EFL students showed preference for having a teacher who can speak their native language. By comparing the results of the present study and the previous ones mentioned, there seems to be a tendency from ESL students to feel neutral about having a teacher who can speak their native language or not.

Chapter 6: Teaching Implications

As the discussion of findings shows, both students and teachers may be unsure about how to best utilize students' L1 while developing competence in English. In this section, I highlight several broad principles for effective utilization of students' L1 as well as several concrete practices, strategies, activities, and resources that can be used in multicultural community-based classes to include students' L1 as an important linguistic resource for learning English (Levine, 2009; Vogel & Garcia, 2017). I will conclude this section by describing my own experimentation with machine translation as a way of utilizing L1 in the process of developing students' TL.

Bollinger, Tomaš, and Metler (2017) state that the use of L1 and L2 in the adult ESL classroom is a careful “balancing act.” Indeed, an ESL classroom where different languages are used excessively without a clear focus on improving students' English could leave many learners dissatisfied with the curriculum, and ultimately looking for other alternatives for developing their English language proficiency. Bollinger et al. (2017) and Levine (2003) claim that an important condition for effective TL learning is destigmatizing L1 use, which consists of showing students how their L1 can help them develop their L2. Destigmatizing L1 use includes giving visibility to other languages, for instance, by using classroom videos where speakers use multiple languages.

Teachers can raise visibility to other languages systematically through practice activities built on *cross-linguistic awareness*. Techniques that build students cross-linguistic awareness engage students in activating their schemas by drawing connections between the known (L1) and the unknown (L2). A simple example may be asking students, “How do you talk about the past in your native language?” As students provide information on how their native language works, the teacher can get better equipped to understand why students make certain mistakes and students can become more aware of these same mistakes as well. In addition, anchoring L1 to L2

can contribute to reducing anxiety and negative feelings usually associated with learning grammar, such as believing that grammar is too complicated and that they are not able to understand it. Bilingual dictionaries can also be used to develop students' cross-linguistic awareness (Tan, 2015).

Discussing destigmatization of L1 use and raising visibility of multiple languages through effective cross-linguistic awareness tools and activities should be reinforced by the physical space in which English instruction takes place. Classroom environments should build students' awareness of the languages their classmates speak and help them feel valued in their own identities. It is important to invite students to participate in this process, especially because building a *multilingual ecology* can give students an opportunity to place them in a more active position since they are the experts in their own cultures and can bring ideas to make the classroom reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity its students have. Educators subscribing to translanguaging pedagogy describe what multilingual ecology could look like. Simple ideas entail posters on the walls with pictures that represent other cultures and/or maps where students can show where they are from.

The CUNY-NYSIEB translanguaging guide for educators (Celic & Seltzer, 2011) suggests additional ideas that contribute to the creation of multilingual ecologies and promote not only the use of TL but also students' L1. These ideas include creating *language passports*, which “includes different types of rubrics and charts for students to record and describe their competencies in different languages: what they know and can do in each language” (p. 23). Another interesting idea is the creation of *language biographies*, which “is a place for students to describe their experiences in different languages and with different cultures” and where they can also “record their language learning goals as well as their current language abilities” (p. 23). The

way to implement these ideas may vary and teachers should take into consideration what students want to do, in other words, what is relevant and meaningful for them.

Although the CUNY-NYSIEB translanguaging guide has been primarily designed for educators serving K-12 learners, this is particularly important for adult ESL learners because many ideas from this excellent resource can be adapted to meet their needs. *Community study* is another concept from this guide that encourages multi language use while extending learning beyond the classroom, thus making the learning process more meaningful by connecting students to their communities. By proposing a community study activity, the teacher can encourage students to explore multicultural aspects of the community they live in through collecting artifacts in “languages other than English,” such as pictures of signs, and newspapers, and also by “listening for people speaking in languages other than English; [and] seeing how languages other than English are used in community institutions, such as libraries or schools” (Celic & Seltzer, 2011, p. 40). Community studies can generate interesting discussions about how visible other cultures are and how they are seen. Comparisons between students’ home cultures and the local culture in which they live can also provide cultural exchange and awareness among students.

Drawing upon some of the same ideas from the translanguaging pedagogy, Cummins (2005) describes the value of using students’ L1s alongside of their new L2 in the process of producing *identity texts*. Identity texts can involve elements that are “written, spoken, signed, visual, musical, dramatic, or combinations in multimodal form,” which allow students to reflect upon their identities as multilingual people (Cummins & Early, 2011, p. 3). When learners share their identity texts with an audience, they receive positive feedback, which affirms their identity

as multilingual-cultural individuals, acknowledges what they have to share, and increases their production in the L2.

While identity texts have been shown to be powerful in developing learners' L2 literacy (Cummins, 2005), teachers in adult ESL contexts often find them hard to implement, especially with beginning level learners, given their limited vocabulary. In my own work with adult ESL learners, I addressed this limitation with the support of machine translation to scaffold the production of identity texts.

Even though many teachers discourage students to use *machine translation*, it is a fact that students use it in their daily lives, and it helps them to communicate in situations in which they otherwise would not have the sufficient linguistic resources. And given that these students are mature individuals with adult responsibilities, they cannot afford to not be able to communicate until they have a high enough proficiency. Therefore, machine translation ought not to be dismissed by adult ESL teachers.

The benefits of machine translation for learning English have been shown in the literature. For example, Cummins (2005) demonstrated how the inclusion of this tool in the classroom can maximize writing production and enhance its quality. To illustrate, teachers can have students write a paragraph in their L1, then use Google Translate to translate their paragraph, and finally revise/modify the paragraph provided by Google Translate. This activity will provide a deeper thinking about language, increase the value of writing, and raise awareness of some weaknesses in machine translation, such as literal translation of idioms and sentence structures common in the L1. The final version of the paragraphs produced by students can be included in the lesson plan and the teacher can create activities utilizing them. In addition to enhancing the use of this tool, the teacher will be inviting students to participate in the

construction of the lesson plan. Therefore, students will feel valued in their identities and skills as they will realize that, although they are in the beginner level, they can actively contribute to the class. More research needs to be done to evaluate the benefits of using this tool in class and how we can maximize such benefits to favor language acquisition.

Limitations of the Research Study

It is important to emphasize that these research findings are based on respondents' beliefs and not on observations of actual classroom interaction. For this reason, teachers and institutions should be careful when making curricular decisions based on this study. The uneven numbers across levels and the relatively small number of participants overall were additional limitations of this study. Having a more equivalent number in each level would have provided a better identification of common beliefs and attitudes towards L1 use and a more valid and reliable comparison across levels. Another limitation was a lack of proficiency level measure. As mentioned in the previous sections, participants marked the level that they believed corresponded to their own, which prevented the researchers from making a valid and reliable comparison across levels. In addition, only one of the institutions selected had an advanced level class. Therefore, it was not possible to expect a large number of advanced students. Future research can consider adding an independent language assessment measure to complement self-report data. In addition, having a classroom where all students had at least one classmate sharing the same first language would be ideal. Otherwise, the researcher cannot be sure if the student does not speak their L1 in class because they do not want to or because they do not have a classmate who have the same native language.

Another issue encountered in the items was that some of the students attend classes in different locations and with different teachers throughout the week. This may have made some of

the survey completers confused about which class and teacher they should refer to when answering questions.

Future Research

This study was an important step in identifying and understanding students' beliefs and uses of L1 in community-based ESL contexts and it raised other questions on the topic. Future research would benefit from including interviews, class observations, and other course artifacts (e.g., student work) along with surveys. Talking to students will yield more specific data to understand the reasons behind their beliefs and the exact strategies they use to maximize the value of L1 in learning English. In class observations, the researcher can observe students' notetaking process and their interaction with classmates who share the same L1. Examining students' notes can give interesting insights on how students process information. This way, the researcher can observe if students are merely translating or actually taking notes about teachers' explanations or their own thoughts throughout the class.

The present research focused primarily on students' beliefs and uses of L1. However, the results about teachers' practice revealed a gap between what instructors do and what students' believe. In other words, students see value in using their L1, even though encouragement and guidance by teachers seem to be minimal. From the studies included in my review of literature, none of them mentioned encouragement of L1 use being given by the teacher, even though they allowed students to use it sometimes or teachers themselves used it as a last resort. This disparity in the data merits further research in order to understand the reasons why teachers would not encourage something valued by the learners.

Future research could benefit from devising ways to support students in using their L1 as scaffolding for their L2 process. Hopefully, by receiving more guidance, learners will be able to

transfer L1 strategies they already have and create new strategies other than mere translation. In addition, teachers will become more resourceful by adding L1 use to their “tool box.” Although automatic translation tools, such as Google Translator, are often seen as to-be-avoided-tools by teachers, their use should also be examined to identify ways in which students can benefit from it and use it more efficiently. These are tools that will not disappear any time soon and students do use them. Therefore, instead of seeing it as the enemy, why not to take a closer look at it to see how it can be helpful and how to avoid its pitfalls?

Throughout the research process, the lack of L1 research in ESL community-based settings became apparent. This teaching/learning context is unique and rich in diversity in many aspects, from nationality, professional and academic background, to age and interests. In addition, it also poses a number of psychological and social nuances as each individual comes to the U.S. due to different reasons, from moving to take a job opportunity to moving to escape persecution or war. This sensitive context deserves our attention so that, as educators, we can find ways to welcome these individuals, make them feel cared for, help them see the great resources they already have, invite them to contribute to their new community, and communicate with people.

Conclusion

Most adult ESL learners in community-based ESL course settings appear to use their L1 for translation and note-taking, and perceive it as a valuable resource to be used for their own purposes, despite the minimal encouragement and guidance from teachers. Even though they use it, they seem to be uncertain or opposed to speaking their L1 with classmates or having it included in the classroom dynamics to support the L2 learning process. Finally, an increase in use of L1 was identified in the intermediate level, which seems to suggest that L1 perceived

value increases as students' progress. However, advanced students seem to value L1 as a way to show appreciation for students' culture and identity, but not to help them with class activity or to learn the L2. Since all levels demonstrated L1 use and attributed value to it to some degree, more teacher training should be provided so that teachers can identify strategies to use L1 in ways that will effectively suit the needs of each proficiency level.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Survey

Students' perspectives on the use of native language in English classrooms

SECTION A

Think of ESL classes or tutoring sessions you attend to answer the questions below. You can choose more than one option by writing a check (✓).

1. I speak my native language with another classmate to _____.
 - socialize
 - get help to do class activities
 - help my classmate with class activities (
 -) I never use my native language in class ()
 - Other. Please, explain:

2. I use my native language in class when I _____.
 - cannot think of an English word/phrase
 - want to do my activities more efficiently
 - want to take notes and write down vocabulary
 - use dictionaries or the internet to translate
 - never use my native language in class
 - Other. Please explain:

3. In your opinion, a teacher/tutor who encourages students to use their native language during ESL lessons _____.
 - shows that they appreciate their students' cultures
 - promotes friendships between students
 - supports their students' English learning
 - makes English learning more difficult
 - makes some of their students feel isolated/not included in the lesson
 - Other. Please, explain:

Think of ESL classes or tutoring sessions you attend to answer the questions below by writing a check (✓) in the right column. How often does your **teacher/tutor**:

	never	once or twice	several times
4. encourage you to use your native language?			
5. encourage students who speak the same language to help each other in their native languages?			
6. show interest in your native language?			
7. talk to you about why it's a good idea to use your native language when learning English?			
8. recommend bilingual books, translators, etc.?			
9. provide you with opportunities to use your native language creatively in your learning (e.g., translate a poem, etc.)?			
10. OPTIONAL: Are there any other ways in which your teacher/tutor encourages you to use your native language? If so, please explain:			

SECTION B:

Please, indicate your opinion by writing a check (✓) in the right column.

Opinion	Agree	Not sure	Disagree
11. Using a native language in class can help students learn English.			
12. It is best to have a teacher/tutor who can understand my native language.			
13. I benefit more from my ESL class if I can sit next to a classmate who speaks my native language.			
14. Only using English in class makes me nervous.			
15. Translating new words into my native language helps me learn English.			

16. Discussing tasks in my native language with my classmates helps me learn English.			
17. Writing notes in my native language helps me learn English.			
18. OPTIONAL: What additional opinions do you have about using native language during ESL lessons or for English language learning in general?			

Home country: _____

Native Language: _____

Other Languages: _____

Please check appropriate responses below:

Age:

18-25

26-35

36-45

46-60

60+

Gender:

Female

Male

Other: _____

English Language Proficiency:

Beginner

Intermediate

Advanced

I have been studying English for:

less than 12 months

1-2 years

3-5 years

6-10 years,

11 years or more

Number of years in the US

- less than 1 year
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years,
- 11 years or more

Does your teacher speak your native language?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

How many of your classmates speak your native language?

- None
- One
- More than one
- I don't know

Appendix B: Survey Informed Consent

RESEARCH @ EMU

Informed Consent

My name is Fernanda Carvalho and I am a researcher conducting a research study. I appreciate your contribution to the English as a Second Language field by participating in this study.

Project Title: Exploring Students' Perceptions of Native Language Use in the English as a Second Language Classroom.

Purpose of the study: Identify students' perspective on native language use in the English as a Second Language classroom.

Procedure: You will take a 10-15 minute paper-based survey in your English as a Second Language classroom.

Confidentiality: These surveys are completely anonymous. You will not be asked to give any personal information. All answers will be kept in the researcher's office and deleted after the study is published, no more than five years after the study is finished.

Expected Risks: There are no anticipated risks to you as a participant. No one will be able to find out who you are based on your answers. You can take as many breaks as you need during the survey.

Expected Benefits: You will not directly benefit from the research, however, benefits to society may include improvements to the English as a Second Language field by empowering language learners to communicate with people around them. This way, students can have a more active participation in the country they are living and increase their professional and academic opportunities.

Voluntary Participation: You can choose whether or not you want to take the survey. If you choose not to, you will not get in trouble.

Study Contact Information: If you have any questions about the research, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Fernanda Carvalho, at fdasilva@emich.edu. You can also contact Fernanda's advisor, Dr. Zuzana Tomas at ztomas@emich.edu.

For questions about your rights as a research subject, contact the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

Statement of Consent

By signing this Statement of Consent, I am saying that I have read this form. I have had the chance to ask questions and understand the answers I got. I give my consent to participate in this research study.

Participant's signature

Appendix C: EMU USHRC Exempt Letter

Oct 5, 2017 1:24 PM EDT

Fernanda Carvalho

World Languages, Users loaded with unmatched Organization affiliation.

Re: Exempt - Initial - UHSRC-FY17-18-30 Exploring Students' Perceptions of Native Language Use in the English as a Second Language Classroom Dear

Dr. Fernanda Carvalho:

The Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee has rendered the decision below for Exploring Students' Perceptions of Native Language Use in the English as a Second Language Classroom. You may begin your research.

Decision: Exempt

Selected Category: Category 2. Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Renewals: Exempt studies do not need to be renewed. When the project is completed, please contact human.subjects@emich.edu.

Modifications: Any plan to alter the study design or any study documents must be reviewed to determine if the Exempt decision changes. You must submit a modification request application in Cayuse IRB and await a decision prior to implementation.

Problems: Any deviations from the study protocol, unanticipated problems, adverse events, subject complaints, or other problems that may affect the risk to human subjects must be reported to the UHSRC. Complete an incident report in Cayuse IRB.

Follow-up: Please contact the UHSRC when your project is complete.

Please contact human.subjects@emich.edu with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee

Appendix D: Community Organization Recruitment e-mail

Dear *community-based organization name*,

Your organization has been selected to participate in a voluntary study because of the valuable insight your students can provide to this research. The study is focused on students' perspectives about native language use in the English as a Second Language classroom. The first step involves students filling out a paper-based survey that should take about 10 minutes. The survey is completely voluntary and anonymous. No personal information will be requested as a part of this survey process. I would like to request your permission to conduct the survey in person in your English as a Second Language classes. Any questions can be directed to the researcher, Fernanda Carvalho, via email, fdasilva@emich.edu. Thank you in advance for taking the time to contribute to this valuable area of research.

Best,

Fernanda Carvalho