L1 Use with University Students in Thailand: A Facilitating Tool or a Language Barrier in Learning English?

Napapat Thongwichit

School of Liberal Arts, TEFL Program, Walailak University, Thailand
Corresponding author: E-mail: t.napapat@gmail.com

Abstract

This research aims at investigating the university students' attitudes and purposes of L1 use in English classrooms to propose a guideline for teachers of English at the university level. The researcher uses a mixed-methods type research to integrate data from multiple sources: survey, semi-structured interview and field notes from a group of the second-year, the third-year and the fourth-year students at a government university in southern Thailand. The results demonstrated that the overall students hold a positive attitude towards L1 use as it plays significant roles in domains of affective filter, comprehensible input, language preferences and language proficiency. Meanwhile they realize drawbacks of L1 if overused in EFL context where English is limited to the classroom only. Furthermore, the data revealed that L1 is expected by the students to be used in translation, instruction, discussion, vocabulary, grammar and comprehension check. The findings ultimately suggested that teachers make a judicious use of L1 to facilitate the students' learning. With a carefully planned lesson, L1 should be regarded as a worthy source in the field of second language learning.

Key Words: **Attitude** Most researchers seem to agree that an attitude is a state of readiness, a tendency to respond in a certain manner when confronted with certain stimuli (Oppenheim, 2005). Attitude can also be considered the sum of beliefs. Here it means the students' response to L1 use in the language classrooms.

Belief Belief is a psychological state in which a person holds a proposition to be true. Thus, in the study, belief refers to what the students perceive or think about L1 use no matter right or wrong.

EFL (English as a Foreign Language) In Thailand, English is considered a foreign language because the country has Thai as an official language and it is not an English-speaking country. Thai people rarely use English in their daily communication. English is only taught to people who need to learn it for their studies or their career.

First language (L1) (also native language or mother tongue) First language (L1), in this study, refers to the Thai language which is the language a person has learned from birth.

Second language (L2) (also target language) Second language (L2) here means English. It is the language which a person is learning and is contrasted with their mother tongue.

Introduction

Learning English in EFL context

Learning any language has its own challenges, especially when it is the language that you were not born with, you need to try even more. Younger learners in an informal second language learning environment are allowed to be silent until they are ready to speak, while older learners are often forced to speak (Lightbown & Spada, 1993, p.22). Imagine what would happen if you study English in a limited context: nowhere in your country requires English communication except your luxuriously artificial classroom. English in this situation, at best, is just the decoration of your wisdom. Thus, one of challenges in this case is the surrounding context. Your cognitive process belongs to one language while in class you need to be exposed to another world: the world of a foreign language which is unfamiliar to your routines. What if in the limited context, in class, you are cordially encouraged to use only English? As students, this might be a nightmare. Why? First, they only live their life with their mother tongue: for traveling, studying other subjects, chatting with their friends and family, or even discussing with teachers at lunchtime. English automatically and completely disappears after the class.

To make things worse, the students might have only two or four hours a week to practice English in class. The language or the input that learners are exposed to is crucial to make their language learning occur (Ellis, 1997). Yet, the input is very limited here. Second, language learning is like growing flowers. It takes time to grow at a suitable pace. With great care and love, little young flowers will beautifully bloom. Learners are like flowers: beautiful but different. They have various backgrounds, expectations, beliefs and preferred learning styles. Although a language lesson provides a useful textbook, learners may not appreciate this if they do not see any links between the book and an examination they are working toward (Richards, 2001). Similarly, what language a teacher uses in an English classroom is as important as how the students feel towards it. Whether or not to use the mother tongue in the language classroom: the students' voices are meaningful.

A philosophical journey of L1

It can be traced back to the old days when the idea of completely avoiding L1 use in classrooms was unquestionably accepted according to the belief of the interference of the native language on the target language: the learners were likely to rely on their L1 once they were to produce the second language by writing or speaking (Bhela, 1999). L1 was considered negative inside a second language classroom. With this notion, L1 was intentionally avoided by most teachers of foreign languages. In addition, it is believed that extensive use of the target language in a classroom can aid students' communication skills (Crichton, 2009). This belief is then explicitly combined into a famous teaching approach called Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The approach supports the belief of maximizing the target language use in a classroom which undoubtedly promotes minimizing L1 use. CLT believes that "the target language should be used not only during communicative activities, but also for explaining the activities to the students or in assigning homework" (Freeman, 2000, p.132). This being widely accepted, the target language has been intensively promoted in its use in the classroom. L1 therefore, has been hopelessly forced to disappear.

More recently, this kind of belief stills plays its role worldwide among students. It is found that they sometimes hold a negative attitude and reject L1 use (NAZARY, 2008) (capitals in original). This is because in their perception, L1 is just a language learning barrier rather than a facilitating tool. One group of the students in this study did not believe in L1 advantages; therefore, L1 meant nothing to their language learning. Taking deeper consideration of the result, there is something more than just their belief that affects this phenomenon. It is explained that the resistance to L1 arrives from the advanced students. Thus, whether or not to successfully use students' native language also depends on students' language proficiency (Kavaliauskiene, 2009). In other words, if teachers make use of L1 in a class of high language proficiency students, they may surprisingly find the students unhappy and bored.

However, there are several studies on second/ foreign language learning that attempt to consider L1 from a different perspective. A lot

of research studies prove that L1 use plays an important role in language teaching and learning for many aspects (Brooks, 2009; Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Simsek, 2010). It seems like L1 was given one more chance to shine its positive light into the language learning process. Findings from several studies reveal positive feedback from students towards L1 use. For example, it is said that university students in Lithuania mainly use their mother tongue in helping them learning English (Kavaliauskiene, 2009). Later on, it is found that most university students in Turkey also have positive attitudes towards the use of L1 (Turkish) in the classroom (Saricoban, 2010). These show the other side of students' perception towards L1 use in language classes.

Speaking of advantages of L1, language teachers cannot deny that the outstanding one is its benefits on learning grammar and vocabulary. Cook (2001) is one who supports this academic phenomenon as he states that students learn grammar and vocabulary better and faster through their first language. This strongly supports the idea that L1 should have its own place somewhere in language classes. In addition to grammar and vocabulary, some instructors use L1 for instructional purposes. It is found that experienced teachers most often use L1 for activity instructions and personal comments (Campa & Nassaji, 2009). L1 was also studied and proved that it is appropriate within teaching L2 among low proficiency ESL students in writing class (Stapa & Majid, 2006). Even teaching vocabulary to low English proficiency level students is more effective with the application of L1 (Bouangeune, 2009). Students with lower language proficiency need L1 to help them master the target language.

L1, in this case, is therefore pleasantly accepted because it is the language that they best understand. If the language used in the classroom is the only input for students it is crucial that the students understand it. Allwright (1994) stated that if the input is slightly more advanced than the learners' level this will assist their learning. We also should not forget that students usually rely on their existing language knowledge or their L1 to comprehend and learn logic and organization principles behind the target language (Gabrielatos, 2001). This is another strong belief supporting why L1 is beneficial. To conduct classes without the students' L1 may be possible;

however, L1 still plays its role inside the learners' cognitive process during their language learning (Kahraman, 2009).

L1 has now been continually studied as a potential resource in language learning. Besides learning achievement, L1 also has a significant role in reducing students' affective filters and giving them a more effective way to learn. Ford (2009) found in his interview that most university teachers in Japan agree to use English only policy, they occasionally use Japanese for creating a relaxed atmosphere, giving instructions and directing tasks. Even student teachers also come back to L1 from time to time as they need to deal with student confusion, discipline problems, lack of time and building rapport with students (Bateman, 2008). Students' feelings are one factor that teachers should not overlook. Their feelings about themselves and what they are studying unavoidably affect the quality of their learning (Arnold, 1999). If students feel happy and unworried, they are much more ready to learn. If not, sitting in classes for them just means being there but getting little or nothing from the lesson. Once this dismal condition arises, it is harmful to the students' motivation. In this case, L1 is an alternative for it is generally perceived as a tool to increase students' motivation (Cianflone, 2009). As learners will better achieve their learning goals if they have high motivation; teachers sometimes employ students' first language for this reason.

All the presented details above are like two lenses for us to look at L1. While the first lens denies the first language and intentionally promotes the target language in classes; the other lens provides the contrasting view. However, both aim to lead all language learners to their highest goal. Therefore, the exploration of the better or at least the friendlier lens to our learning context will certainly benefit language learning. The study is therefore to examine whether L1 use is accepted among university students in Thailand, a country with English as its foreign language. Though teachers may realize that the first language is examined and proved to facilitate students' learning, especially in most foreign language contexts where grammatical and lexical explanations are involved (Nunan, 1996); voices from students are important and should not be ignored. The findings finally will reflect another perception from the learners who study English in an EFL context from Thailand.

Materials and Methods

The research was designed to use a mixed method type**.** A mixed method type is a research design that uses both quantitative and qualitative data to answer a particular question or set of questions (Hesse-Biber, 2010, p.3). The data collection procedure, therefore, was twofold: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative part investigated university students' attitudes in general about L1 use in English classrooms and the qualitative tool explored in more detail their beliefs and opinions as to why they agreed or disagreed with L1 use. The quantitative measurement assisted in collecting the massive data from a large group of participants while the qualitative approach appropriately dealt with the data that could not be simply obtained from the questionnaires. The selected approach offered the tools to get information from inside and to explore in more detail each issue from the participants. Thus a mixed method type was the best possible way to answer all of the queries in this study.

The selected site of this study was a government university located in southern Thailand (here it was named under a pseudonym 'Public University'). On the campus where the study was conducted, English in daily communication was rarely found. The students' life outside the class was mainly based on their mother tongue only. All of the freshmen here were required to study and pass two English preliminary courses. In addition, the university provided several courses in foreign languages: English, Chinese, Japanese and German. All students were fully expected to be a splendid product of the university.

Participants numbered 323 university students: 259 were female and 64 were male studying at their second, third and fourth year in the 2012 academic year. Freshmen were intentionally excluded as they had just begun their studies at university level and so had not gained much experience in studying English at this level. Moreover, the researcher selected the participants to be interviewed based on their English grade from a previous course; again, the freshmen did not meet this requirement of the study.

The questionnaires were distributed to 323 students (164 language students and 159 non-language students: Industrial Management, Information

Technology Business and Business Economics) who were enrolled in English courses in their first semester academic year 2012 at Public University. The total 323 participants were divided into 150 second year, 95 third year and 78 fourth year students.

From the information provided by the students, there were eight students who got GPAX at 1.50 – 1.99, seventy-two got 2.00 – 2.49, a hundred and seventeen got 2.50 - 2.99, seventy students got 3.00 – 3.49 and thirty four got 3.50 – 4.00. In the group of all participants, there were 84 students who had been abroad and 238 students said no for this experience. Getting into more detail about their experience abroad, the questionnaires showed that 18.3% went abroad for traveling and 22% for educational purposes. The remainder did not state a reason. The most visited country by the students was Malaysia with most visits being short in duration.

Another language experience that was asked in the questionnaire was about English proficiency tests. There were 11.1% who had taken English tests while 80.8% did not have this experience. In the number of 11.1%, one student had taken the TOEFL test, two students had taken IELTS tests, twenty-nine had taken TOEIC tests and the rest mentioned they had experience with other kinds of English tests. In addition, the participants were asked about their grade from their recent English class and the result showed that there were 47 students achieving A, 61 achieving B+, 78 B, 69 C+, 30 C, 24 D+, and 6 achieving D.

There were three sources of data used in the study: a questionnaire measuring students' attitudes, a semi-structured interview gathering further information on the students' opinions and classroom observations supporting any other findings. These three methods facilitated the collection of rich and in-depth data from the participants.

Questionnaire

The purpose of employing questionnaires was to survey the students' beliefs and attitudes towards L1 use in the language classroom from a large number of respondents. The questionnaire was divided into two parts. In the first part, the participants were required to fill in their information on gender, major of their study, GPAX and their language learning experience.

In the second part, there were 34 statements written in a Likert scale type with the scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The value 4 was assigned "strongly agree", 3 "agree", 2 "disagree" and 1 for "strongly disagree". The questions in the questionnaires were formed based on the inquiries of the study which were firstly, what are students' beliefs and attitudes towards L1 use in the language classroom and secondly, for what purposes is L1 expected from the students.

The data from the questionnaires was analyzed and measured by basic statistics: frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation to find out the students' attitudes about L1 use in the language classroom. A Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 17.0) software was used at this stage.

Semi - structured interview

This type of interview was selected to collect the data because it allowed the novice researcher to prepare structured questions beforehand while making it possible to ask other relevant questions to the objectives of the research if necessary. In other words, it ensured some basic information according to the structured questions and provided scope for collecting additional relevant information (Pawar, 2004).

In this step, the data were drawn from twelve participants. The interviewees were purposely selected based on their major and their grade from a previous English course. The goal was to explore their initial beliefs and attitudes towards L1 use. Then the original data which was in Thai was transcribed and coded into categories. Later, they were translated and restated in English.

The qualitative data: words, phrases and sentences obtained from the interviews were transcribed and organized into meaningful categories. Predominant themes related to the research questions were identified. The interview scripts were sent back to the participants to let them read and approve.

Classroom observation

Three classes of English were observed for a total nine hours. Classroom observation was selected to be one of the research instruments

because it gave the researcher opportunities to observe the language use and interaction as it occurred through the lesson. The researcher used an observation task to help observe the target lessons. The observation task was a focused activity to work on while observing a lesson in progress (Wajnryb, 1992, p.7). This helped prevent the observer from paying attention to unrelated information. The observation task focused on the language used by the teacher and students during class time. The students' verbal responses and facial expressions were fully noted down. All of the teachers' real names were private to the researcher only; therefore the three names of the teachers mentioned in this study are pseudonyms.

The data from classroom observation was coded for instances of L1 use and the students' responses were to be supplementary to the findings of the study. The researcher finally examined all of the results together and out of these the interpretation of the findings was drawn.

Results

1. Students' beliefs and attitudes towards L1 use in English classroom

1.1 Affective filter

The survey

Based on the survey, the findings revealed that most of the participants (62.5%) agreed that using Thai could make them feel relaxed when talking to the teacher and most of them (54.5%) also agreed on this attribute when taking the exam. In addition, the participants (65.9%) were mainly pleased if their classmates also wanted the teacher to use some Thai in class. 61.6% of the participants agreed that using Thai provided a positive feeling about learning English and 53.3% said it motivated them to learn. When the classroom needed to deal with a boring topic, the participants (56.3%) also believed that Thai was helpful.

The interview

In this aspect, the data from the interview yielded two sides of opinions: supporting and standing against Thai use. Seven from twelve interviewees expressed rather negative attitudes about Thai use in English

class. They claimed that it could lead to feelings of being unmotivated, disappointed and bored. On the one hand, Thai may cause a stressful situation to students as earlier stated, but on the other hand, it may also be considered in a positive way. Responses from the other five students indicated that Thai use was useful for reducing anxiety in the classroom.

1.2 Comprehensible input

The survey

Learning a foreign language is believed to be apparently involved with acquisition and language acquisition happens when learners understand language that contains structure a little beyond where they are (Krashen, 1982). This means learners could best acquire the target language when the input is meaningful to them. In one way, Thai use may be considered to be an alternative for some students. The findings from the survey revealed that L1 was perceived as a tool to make the lesson more understandable and accessible. Most of the participants (61.9%) agreed that the lesson was more understandable when the teacher used Thai. The participants (59.8%) also agreed that they learned new vocabulary better through a bilingual dictionary (English-Thai). When dealing with difficult exercises, most of the participants (53.6%) also agreed that the teacher should use Thai. If the teacher did not use Thai at all, it was possible that the participants (51.1%) could not follow the lesson.

The interview

The data from the interview also yielded results proving that eleven informants (91.6%) believed that Thai could help simplify the lesson, making it more comprehensible and accessible. The interviewees also expected that the teacher should facilitate the students by using Thai to make the lesson more comprehensible. It was added that Thai promoted the students' comprehension in the difficult lessons.

1.3 Language preferences

The survey

The investigation demonstrated that 63.8% of the participants preferred Thai when asking a question in the classroom while 46.1% of the participants believed that Thai was not a barrier in language learning.

Similarly, the participants (51.7%) agreed that seats in a course in which the teacher used Thai were quickly reserved; however, if they found that the teacher used only English in class, 46.1% of the participants' would not drop the course. Simultaneously, the participants (54.8%) expected the teacher to use Thai only when it was necessary.

The interview

In this case, the data yielded that ten from twelve informants clearly stated that their language preference was English. Although they did not mean to use English for the whole lesson, they expected it to be used for most of the time. In contrast, one female informant mentioned that English only seemed to be impossible in Thai context. She claimed that "In my view, it couldn't be English only because the teacher and students still use Thai and when some students don't understand, the teacher also speaks Thai. I myself also prefer Thai because Thai is my language and I understand it better than English". Similarly, one male informant asserted that, "I expect the teacher to speak English but also some Thai because if English is used for the whole lesson, I may get nothing".

1.4 Language proficiency

The survey

It was believed among most of the participants (58.5%) that if the teacher used some Thai in explanation, it would help increase their score on the test. Also, if the teacher used Thai in teaching, 46.1% of the participants believed that it was a tool to better the students' English ability. Thus, Thai was positively identified as a facilitator to enhance the language proficiency.

The interview

According to the data from the interview, there were two big groups of informants: one that believed in a benefit of Thai in developing English proficiency while the other was against this idea. However, Thai was believed to be the language the students needed in a tough situation.

2. Purposes of L1 use in English classroom

Purposes of L1 use that were mentioned by the participants are presented below. See table 6 for more information on statistical results.

2.1 Translation

The participants (66.9%) agreed that they should be allowed to use Thai to translate vocabulary from English to Thai to prove that they understood. Similarly, 67.2% of the participants agreed that they should be allowed to use Thai to translate articles from English to Thai to prove that they understood.

2.2 Instruction

Most of the participants (60.4%) agreed that the teacher should use Thai to give instruction.

2.3 Discussion

The participants (67.2%) agreed that they should be able to use Thai when working in pairs or groups. In addition, they (67.2%) agreed that they should be allowed to ask questions related to the lesson in Thai if they did not understand. The participants (71.2%) agreed that the teacher and students should be allowed to use Thai in discussion.

2.4 Vocabulary

Most of the participants (66.9%) agreed that the teacher should use Thai to explain new vocabulary. 64.1% of the participants also agreed that the teacher should use Thai for explaining the difference between the usage of Thai and English. In addition, 63.2% believed that they should be allowed to use Thai to ask how to say "....." in English.

2.5 Grammar

67.5% of the participants agreed that the teacher should use Thai to explain grammar while 71.8% agreed that the teacher should use Thai to explain the difference between Thai grammar and English grammar.

2.6 Comprehension check

Most of the participants agreed that both teacher and students should be allowed to use Thai to check listening comprehension (65.9%) and reading comprehension (68.4%).

Discussion

1. The students' beliefs and attitudes towards L1 use

To provide an answer for research question one (What are university students' beliefs and attitudes towards L1 use in the English classroom? If the students' attitudes are negative, for what reasons do they reject L1 usage?), the results from the current study showed a consistency with many research studies (e.g. AL-NOFAIE, 2010; Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Carson & Kashihara, 2012; Khassawneh, 2011; Machaal, 2012; Macias & Kephart, 2009) in that L1 was perceived as a facilitating tool rather than a barrier in learning English. In the current study, the positive attitudes clearly dominated the negative voices regarding L1 use in English class among the informants.

L1 was positively accepted for playing an important role in the affective filter domain. It makes the students feel more relaxed, motivated, and positive towards learning English. This result confirmed Ocak, Kuru and Ozcalisan (2010) that using L1 in the language classroom could be useful for it helped lower affective filters that might block the students' learning. L1. As Schweers (1999) mentioned that using the students' native language leads to positive attitudes towards the process of learning English and encourages students to learn more English. Thus, particular attention must be paid to how students feel as Lopez (2011, p.44) mentioned that when students have to deal with a difficult problem, but are relaxed while studying it, they are likely to have a positive outlook towards it and are willing to try more in the future.

Additionally, L1 played a role in comprehensible input domain. Based on the previously presented findings, the majority of the participants agreed that Thai could make the lesson more understandable. These findings were in agreement with Horst, White, and Bell (2010) that L1 could be helpful as a link between the new knowledge and the existing knowledge the learners already have. More importantly, as Qian, Tian, and Wang (2009) suggested, the teacher should be aware that learners' cognitive levels are far beyond their foreign language level. Thus, employing Thai at a suitable time could be a knowledge bridge for the students who studied English as a second or a foreign language.

Furthermore, language preferences were mentioned in relation to the participants' perceptions about L1 use in the English classroom. Based on the survey, the majority preferred Thai when asking a question in the classroom. This finding was supported by the other survey result that indicated that using mainly Thai was not perceived as a language barrier in learning English. Simultaneously, the survey result revealed that it was difficult to find available seats in an English class in which the teacher used Thai. This could be implied that this group of participants realized that teachers who are Thai share the same mother tongue as them, so they were certainly expected to use some Thai in the classroom. This is in line with a study in China that L1 appears to be inevitably and actively employed as a facilitating tool in L2 class, even when students have no difficulty in understanding (Song, 2009). Moreover, when the teacher and students share L1 in EFL context, at times interactions in L2 between them exhibited the interpersonal distance and a sense of artificiality (Nikula, 2005).

However, they found that if the teacher used only English in teaching, they would not drop a course. This finding indirectly showed that although the majority held a positive attitude towards L1, they recognized the significance of English in their context. The majority from the survey also agreed that the teacher should use Thai only when necessary. Hence, teachers of English should be aware of the learners' need regarding language input in classes to best benefit them. As Nation (2003) stated that even though L1 use had its positive side for students, it was more helpful to encourage students to use L2 in class if they had a few opportunities to use the target language in real life.

The next domain of L1 use regarding the informants' voices was language proficiency. It was revealed that Thai was believed to help improve test scores and better English ability. This result was in agreement with Nation (2003) that to work with fluency development tasks, it needed language items that were familiar to the learners. Moreover, having the students use their own language means accepting who they are and developing their academic success (Sumaryono & Otiz, 2004).

Even though the data mainly leads to a positive side of L1 use, it should be noted that there were some negative perceptions found from the interview section. This could be explained that in EFL context where learners have minimal chances to be exposed to English, they recognize the need of English as the input for their learning. Consequently, L1 should be taken into English class with the teacher's careful consideration. As Weschler (1997) stated that L1 is just like any tool; it could be useful or misused depending on the goal and the procedures in the classroom.

2. Purposes of L1 use

To provide answers to research question two (What are the purposes of L1 use in English class expected from the students?), the findings revealed six purposes based on the students' voices. The first purpose was that L1 should be used in translation. Six interviewees also supported the notion that Thai was mainly used in class for translation; instances were also found in the field notes from class A and class C. This confirmed AL-NOFAIE (2010) that students used L1 for translating. In addition, it was in line with Raeiszadeh, Alibakhshi, Veisi, and Gorjian (2012) that students believed that the use of translation by employing L1 could help them improving their language skills.

Next, most of the participants (60.4%) voiced through the survey that the teacher should use L1 for giving instruction. This result was supportively revealed by four informants from the interview who affirmed that Thai was purposely used in their class to instruct them what to do. The field notes were also evident that the teachers from class A and class B employed Thai in this purpose. This was in line with Campa and Nassaji (2009) that one of the most frequent purposes was related to giving activity instructions. Unlike Nazary (2008), who stated that there were only a few students who perceived L1 useful in giving instruction, the current study was evident that the participants in similar context hold different perspectives, for they agreed that L1 could be utilized in this purpose.

Using L1 for discussion in class was another purpose approved by most of the participants. L1 was agreed to be used in discussion when working in pairs or groups, asking questions and talking about the teaching methods the teacher would apply in his or her teaching. These results generated a picture

of L1 as a communicating tool for the teacher and students to interact with one another in varied situations. The interview also yielded the examples from two informants that their teacher used Thai for discussing strong and weak points after presentation and any issues irrelevant to the lesson. The evidence was also found through the observations in all three classes. Cook (2001) supportively stated that L1 might be used when all were more comfortable to discuss some topics. This result was also consistent with Ocak et al. (2010) that students were likely to use L1 in classroom interaction and the possible reasons were fear of making mistakes, avoiding criticism and effortlessness of speaking L2 as they were required to speak the target language while sharing the same language in the artificial environment.

The next purpose was using L1 for vocabulary. The findings demonstrated that the teacher should explain new vocabulary and the difference about ways that words were used in each language in Thai while the students should be also allowed to use Thai when asking how to say "....." in English. Three informants were more specific that Thai was used in class particularly for difficult words and technical terms. Two instances of using Thai regarding vocabulary were also found in the field notes from class A and C. This was evident that Thai was purposely used in English class for vocabulary. The findings confirmed Nation (2003) that in learning new words in a second language, there were several ways of conveying the meaning of an unknown word and using L1 was one of many possible ways. This was also in agreement with the other two studies (AL-NOFAIE, 2010; Saricoban, 2010) that teachers mainly used L1 when dealing with new vocabulary.

Learning about grammar also required L1 to simplify its complexity. Most of the participants (67.5%) demonstrated that the teacher should use L1 to explain grammar and even more (71.8%) agreed that Thai should be used to explain the difference between Thai grammar and English grammar. In line with this result, three informants from the interview also mentioned grammar as one of the other purposes that their L1 was used for in the classroom. The field note from class A was evident that the teacher really used L1 to explain grammatical knowledge in class. The findings from the current study supported AL-NOFAIE (2010) that grammar was one of

several areas that teachers mainly used L1 to explain. The result was also in agreement with Saricoban (2010) that some students affirmed their reasons for relying on their first language when dealing with difficult concepts. As grammar was considered difficult, so L1 was selected as a facilitator here. Moreover, students were likely to be more interested in learning when teachers used L1 in highlighting the differences and similarities between the students' mother tongue and English as they could see some linguistic and cultural aspects in common with their native language (Jabak, 2012).

The last purpose of L1 use that emerged in the current study was comprehension checking. The survey result showed high percentages of agreement (65.9% and 68.4%) regarding reading and listening comprehension checking respectively. Two interviewees also affirmed that L1 should be used in English class for this purpose. The evidence of this purpose of L1 use was found in class C where the teacher paused to ask her students in Thai whether they all were at the same pace. The findings confirmed Saricoban (2010) that students required L1 to recheck their comprehension towards what their teacher said. The study was also in agreement with Macias and Kephart (2009) that in language classrooms, if a teachers' goal was to check students' comprehension and assist students when they are struggling, L1 use could be helpful.

3. The students' reaction towards L1 use

Based on data analysis, there were found to be two phases of reaction from the students when L1 was employed in their language classroom. See diagram 1.

Phase I: Being relaxed and motivated

Based on the observations in three English classes, the students' reaction to the lesson with L1 use was primarily positive.

Phase II: Being passive and dependent

The students' reaction was remarkably changed at the later stage. Initially, most of the students were active and attentive to the lesson with L1 use but later, more students appeared to lose their attention and became dependent on being spoon-fed by the teachers.

Conclusion

The findings from the current study demonstrated a picture of positive attitudes among the majority of the participants towards L1 use in English classroom in the context of southern Thailand. It was widely confirmed that they saw positively important roles of L1 use in working against affective filter, making input more comprehensible and developing their English proficiency. Simultaneously, English is recognized for its importance in their context where they have few opportunities to be exposed to it outside the class. Hence, English class was the only place for them to practice and use English. Therefore, it is suggested that L1 should be carefully and pedagogically used to make the best of it. As El-dali (2012) supported, the overuse of the mother tongue could be a hindrance to language learning and the students' fluency in the target language. Based on the current study, L1 was expected to be used in class for translation, instruction, discussion, vocabulary, grammar and comprehension checking. The teacher must use L1 with a careful plan and stay on purpose to avoid negative feelings from students. Although the students perceived L1 as a facilitator, they were conscious of its drawbacks if overused in EFL context.

Table 1 Purposes of L1 use

Statements	Frequency and percent					Mean	Std. deviation
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree			
Translation							
Students should be allowed to use Thai to translate vocabulary from English to Thai to prove that we understand.	56 (18.3%)	216 (66.9%)	44 (13.6%)	4 (1.2%)		3.02	.608
Students should be allowed to use Thai to translate articles from English to Thai to prove that we understand.	65 (20.1%)	217 (67.2%)	37 (11.5%)	4 (1.2%)		3.06	.602
Giving instruction							
The teacher should use Thai to give instruction.	35 (10.8%)	195 (60.4%)	86 (26.6%)	7 (2.2%)		2.80	.650
Discussion							
Students should be allowed to use Thai in discussion when working in pairs or groups.	47 (14.6%)	217 (67.2%)	50 (15.5%)	9 (2.8%)		2.93	.639
Students should be allowed to ask questions related to the lesson in Thai if we do not understand.	69 (21.4%)	217 (67.2%)	34 (10.5%)	3 (0.9%)		3.09	.591

Table 1 Purposes of L1 use (Continued)

Statements	Frequency and percent				Mean	Std. deviation
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
The teacher and students can use Thai to discuss a teaching method used in the classroom.	53 (16.4%)	230 (71.2%)	34 (10.5%)	6 (1.9%)	3.02	.587
Vocabulary The teacher should use Thai to explain new vocabulary.	46 (14.2%)	216 (66.9%)	57 (17.6%)	4 (1.2%)	2.94	.605
The teacher should use Thai to explain the difference between the usage of Thai and English.	63 (19.5%)	207 (64.1%)	50 (15.5%)	3 (0.9%)	3.02	.623
Students should be allowed to use Thai when asking how to say " ......" in English.	60 (18.6%)	204 (63.2%)	55 (17%)	4 (1.2%)	2.99	.638
Grammar The teacher should use Thai to explain grammar.	56 (17.3%)	218 (67.5%)	47 (14.6%)	2 (0.6%)	3.02	.587
The teacher should use Thai to explain the difference between Thai grammar and English grammar.	57 (17.6%)	232 (71.8%)	34 (10.5%)	-	3.07	.527

Table 1 Purposes of L1 use (Continued)

Statements	Frequency and percent				Mean	Std. deviation
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree		
Comprehension check						
The teacher and students can use Thai to check listening comprehension.	64 (19.8%)	213 (65.9%)	44 (13.6%)	2 (0.6%)	3.05	.598
The teacher and students can use Thai to check reading comprehension.	57 (17.6%)	221 (68.4%)	43 (13.3%)	2 (0.6%)	3.03	.578

| **The lesson** | **The students' reaction** |

| **Phase I** | The lesson is partly in Thai. | → | Pleased and satisfied

Safe and relaxed |

| **Phase II** | The lesson is mostly in Thai. | → | Passive and dependent |
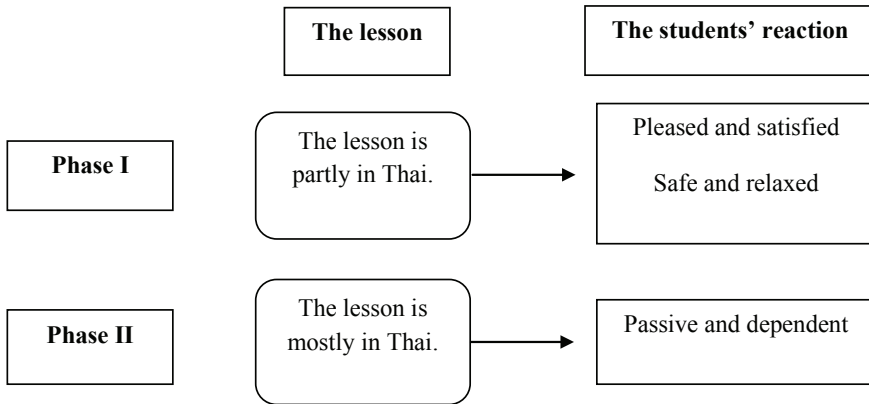
Diagram 1 Two phases of students' reaction toward L1 use

References

Allwright, D. (1994) *Focus on the Language Classroom.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

AL-NOFAIE, H. (2010) The attitudes of teachers and students towards using Arabic in EFL classrooms in Saudi public schools - a case study. *Novitas-Royal,* 4(1): 64-95.

Arnold, J. (1999) *Affect in Language Learning.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Auerbach, E. (1993) Reexamining English Only in the ESL Classroom. *TESOL QUARTERLY,* 27(1): 1-18.

Bateman, B. (2008) Student Teachers' Attitudes and Beliefs about Using the Target Language in the Classroom. *Foreign Language Annals,* 41(1): 11-28.

Bhela, B. (1999) Native language interference in learning a second language: Exploratory case studies of native language interference with target language usage. *International Education Journal,* 1(1): 22-31.

Brooks, K. (2009) Adult Learners' Perceptions of the Incorporation of their L1 in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning. *Applied Linguistics,* 30(2): 216-235.

Bouangeune, S. (2009) Using L1 in Teaching Vocabulary to Low English Proficiency Level Students: A Case Study at the National University of Laos. *English Language Teaching,* 2(3): 186-193.

Campa C. J. and Nassaji, H. (2009) The Amount, Purpose, and Reasons for Using L1 in L2 Classrooms. *Foreign Language Annals,* 42(4): 742-759.

Carson, E. and Kashihara, H. (2012) Using the L1 in the L2 Classroom: The Students Speak. *The Language Teacher,* 36(4): 41-48.

Cianflone, E. (2009) L1 Use in English Courses at University Level, a survey of literature on students and teachers' perspectives. *ESP World,* 8(22): 1-5.

Cook, V. (2001) Using the First Language in the Classroom. *Canadian Modern Language Review,* 57(3): 402-423.

Crichton, H. (2009) 'Valued added' modern languages teaching in the classroom: an investigation into how teachers' use of classroom target language can aid pupils' communication skills. *Language Learning Journal,* 37(1): 19-34.

Ellis, R. (1997) *Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

El-dali, H. (2012) L1 and Second Language Learning: A Non-Stop Debate. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development,* 1(2): 8-32.

Ford, K. (2009) Principles and Practices of L1/ L2 Use in the Japanese University EFL Classroom. *JALT Journal,* 31(1): 63-80.

Freeman, L. (2000) *Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gabrielatos, C. (2001) L1 Use in ELT: Not a Skeleton, but a Bone of Contention: A Response to Prodromou. *TESOL Greece Newsletter,* 70: 6-9.

Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2010) *Mixed Methods Research: Merging Theory with Practice.* New York: The Guildford Press.

Horst, M., White, J., and Bell, P. (2010) First and second language knowledge in the language classroom. *International Journal of Bilingualism,* 14(3): 331 - 349.

Jabak, O. (2012) How to Make the Most of the Mother Tongue in an English Language Class? *Journal of Advanced Social Research,* 2(4): 191-201.

Kachru, B. (1998) English as an Asian Language. *Links and Letters,* 5: 89-108.

Kahraman, A. (2009) The Role of the Mother Tongue in Fostering Affective Factors in ELT Classrooms. *English as an International Language Journal,* 5: 107-128.

Kavaliauskiene, G. (2009) Role of Mother Tongue in Learning English for Specific Purposes. *ESP World,* 8(22): 1-12.

Khassawneh, S. (2011) The Attitudes of Students towards using Arabic in EFL Classrooms at Yarmouk University in Jordan. *European Journal of Social Sciences,* 21(4): 592-602.

Krashen, S. D. (1982) *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition.* Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Lightbown, P. and Spada, N. (1993) *How Languages are Learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lopez, M. (2011) The motivational properties of emotions in Foreign Language Learning. *Colomb. Appl. Linguist J.,* 13(2): 43-59.

Machaal, B. (2012) The Use of Arabic in English Classes: A teaching support or a learning hindrance? *Arab World English Journal,* 3(2): 194-232.

Macias, A. and Kephart, K. (2009) Reflections of Native Language Use in Adult ESL Classrooms. *Adult Basic Education and Literacy Journal,* 3(2): 87-96.

Montazer, M. (2009) The Practical Use of L1 in L2 Acquisition: a Tendency toward Changing the Iranian University Students' Attitudes. *Journal of Linguistic Studies,* 2(1): 9-22.

Nation, P. (2003) The role of the first language in foreign language learning. *Asian EFL Journal, 5* (2): 1-8.

NAZARY, M. (2008) The Role of L1 in L2 Acquisition: Attitudes of Iranian University Students. *Novitas-ROYAL,* 2(2): 138-153.

Nikula, T. (2005) English as an object and tool of study in classrooms: Interactional effects and pragmatic implications. *Linguistics and Education,* 16: 27-58.

Nunan, D. (1996) *The Self-Directed Teacher: Managing the Learning Process.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ocak, G., Kuru, N., and Ozcalisan, H. (2010) As a classroom language, students' attitudes towards speaking Turkish in English prep classes. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 2: 661-665.

Pawar, M. (2004) *Data Collecting Methods and Experiences: A Guide for Social Researchers.* New Delhi: New Dawn Press Group.

Qian, X., Tian, G., and Wang, Q. (2009) Codeswitching in the primary EFL classroom in China - Two case studies. *System,* 37: 719-730.

Raeiszadeh, A., Alibakhshi, G., Veisi, E., and Gorjian, B. (2012) Iranian EFL learners' Perception of the Use of L1 to L2 Translation Task in General English Classes. *Advances in Asian Social Science,* 2(2): 436 - 440.

Richards, J. (2001) *Curriculum Development in Language Teaching.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Sarıçoban, A. (2010) Should native language be allowed in foreign language classes? *Egitim Arastirmalari-Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 38: 164-178.

Schweers, W. (1999) Using L1 in the L2 Classroom. *English Teaching Forum,* April - June*,* 1-13.

Simsek R. M. (2010) The Effects of L1 Use in the Teaching of L2 Grammar Concepts on the Students' Achievement. *Journal of Theory and Practice in Education,* 6(2): 142-169.

Song, Y. (2009) An investigation into L2 teacher beliefs about L1 in China. *Prospect Journal,* 24(1): 30-39.

Stapa, S. and Majid, A. (2006) The Use of First Language in Limited English Proficiency Classes: Good, Bad or Ugly?. *Jurnal e-Bangi,* 1(1): 1-12.

Sumaryono, K. and Otiz, F. (2004) Preserving the Cultural Identity of the English Language Learner. *Voices from the Middle,* 11(4): 16-19.

Vanichakorn, N. (2009) Re-examine the use of the students' first language in the English as a foreign language classrooms: a cross-case analysis from undergraduate engineering students in Bangkok, Thailand. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning,* 6(5): 1-16.

Wajnryb, R. (1992) *Classroom Observation Tasks.* Great Britain: Cambridge University Press.

Weschler, R. (1997) Uses of Japanese (L1) in the English Classroom: Introducing the Functional Translation Method. *The Internet TESL Journal,* 3(11). [Online URL: www.iteslj.org/Articles/Weschler-UsingL1.html] accessed on August 12, 2012.