The L2 user and the native speaker

This chapter brings together themes about the relationship between people who know more than one language and monolingual native speakers. Are L2 users and monolingual native speakers different types of people? If so, what should be the proper goals of students of second languages and how does this affect how they should be taught? These issues have been debated with great passion. The views here broadly come from within the multi-competence perspective outlined in Chapters 1 and 12. This chapter concentrates on the L2 user as an individual, Chapter 11 on L2 users as part of communities, though there are inevitable overlaps.

Box 10.1 Questions for L2 users

1. Do you use:
   - the two languages in different situations or in the same situation?
   - the two languages to different people or the same people?
   - the L1 at the same time as the L2 (e.g. by translating)?
   - codeswitching during the course of a conversation?
2. Do you feel using two languages has:
   - social advantages or disadvantages?
   - mental advantages or disadvantages?
3. Are you jealous of native speakers?
4. Do you feel you are losing your first language?

10.1 The L2 user versus the native speaker in language teaching

Focusing questions

- Should L2 learners aim to speak like native speakers?
- What kind of role do non-native speakers have in the coursebook you are most familiar with? Powerful successful people? Or ignorant tourists and near-beginner students?
A central issue in SLA research and language teaching is the concept of the native speaker. But what is a native speaker? One of the first uses of the term is by Leonard Bloomfield: ‘The first language a human being learns to speak is his native language; he is a native speaker of this language’ (Bloomfield, 1933: 43). Being a native speaker in this sense is a straightforward matter of an individual’s history; the first language you encounter as a baby is your native language. A typical modern definition is ‘a person who has spoken a certain language since early childhood’ (McArthur, 1992). You can no more change the historical fact of which language you spoke first than you can change the mother who brought you up. Any later-learnt language cannot be a native language by definition; your second language will never be your native language regardless of how long or how well you speak it.

A second way of defining native speakers is to list the components that make them up. David Stern (1983) lists characteristics such as a subconscious knowledge of rules and creativity of language use: native speakers know the language without being able to verbalize their knowledge; they can produce new sentences they have not heard before. L2 learners may be able to acquire some of these components of the native speaker state. L2 users also know many aspects of the second language subconsciously rather than consciously; L2 users are capable of saying new things in a second language, for example the ‘surrealistic aphorisms’ of French-speaking Marcel Duchamps such as ‘My niece is cold because my knees are cold’ (Sanquillet and Peterson, 1978: 111) – not to mention the writings of Nabokov or Conrad. The question is whether it is feasible or desirable for the L2 user to match these components of the native speaker.

A third approach to defining native speaker brings in language identity: your speech shows who you are. In English, a word or two notoriously gives away many aspects of our identity. According to George Bernard Shaw, ‘It is impossible for an Englishman to open his mouth without making some other Englishman hate or despise him.’ Our speech shows the groups that we belong to, as we see in Chapter 4, whether in terms of age (‘wireless’ rather than ‘radio’), gender (men prefer to pronounce ‘-ing’ endings such as ‘running’ as /iŋ/, women as /iŋ/) (Adamson and Regan, 1991), or religion (the pronunciation of the church service ‘mass’ as /mæs/ or /mæʃ/ is one giveaway of religious background in England, as is the abbreviation of ‘William’ to ‘Bill’ or ‘Liam’ in Northern Ireland). An English linguist once observed: ‘it is part of the meaning of an American to sound like one’ (Firth, 1951).

We may be proud or ashamed of belonging to a particular group; politicians in England try to shed signs of their origins by adopting RP as best they can; British pop and folk singers take on American-like vowels. Being a native speaker shows identification with a group of speakers, membership of a language community. In social terms, people have as much right to join the group of native speakers and to adopt a new identity as they have to change identity in any other way. But the native speaker group is only one of the groups that a speaker belongs to, and
not of overriding importance; how important is it to be a native speaker of a language compared to being a believer in a religion, a parent, or a supporter of Newcastle United?

The definitions of native speaker then are not helpful for language teachers. In the sense of first language in life, it is impossible for students to become native speakers of a second language. The components definition raises the issue of whether students should be trained to be like native speakers; it therefore limits their components to those that monolingual native speakers possess rather than the additional skills of L2 users, such as translation. In terms of identity, it raises the question of which group we wish the students to belong to – the community of native speakers of which they can never be full members or the communities of L2 users? According to Ben Rampton (1990), language loyalty can be a matter either of inheritance (language is something you inherit, you claim and you bequeath) or of affiliation (a language is something you belong to), both of them continually negotiated.

**Should the native speaker be the target of language teaching?**

Most language teachers, and indeed most students, accept that their goal is to become as similar to the native speaker as possible. One problem is the question of which native speaker. A language comes in many varieties, according to country, region, class, sex, profession and other factors; this, then, is to do with the Lang2 abstract entity meaning of ‘language’. Some varieties are a matter of accent, some of social and regional dialect. The student’s target needs to relate to the roles that they will assume when using the second language. Some British students I knew in London were going for job experience in Switzerland; my colleagues accordingly taught them Swiss German. When they used this on the shop floor, their fellow workers found it highly entertaining: foreigners are expected to speak High German, not Swiss German. I was an L2 user of Swiss German as a child and can still comprehend it reasonably, provided the person speaking does not see me as a foreigner and switch to High German.

The problems of which variety to teach is more pressing for a language that is used globally, such as English. England itself contains a variety of class and regional accents, even if vocabulary varies little; the English-speaking countries from Australia to Canada, Scotland to South Africa, each have their own variety, with its own internal range; outside these countries there are well-established varieties of English spoken in countries such as Singapore and India. Which of these native speakers should the students adopt as a role model? The claimed advantages of RP were that, despite its small number of speakers based in a single country, it was comprehensible everywhere and had neutral connotations in terms of class and region. True as this may be, it does sound like the classic last-ditch defence of the powerful status form against the rest. A more realistic native accent nowadays might be Estuary English, encountered in Chapter 4.

Though much of this variation may be a matter of accent, reading an American novel soon shows the different conventions, whether in vocabulary (the piece of furniture called a ‘credenza’ is known as a ‘dresser’ in England), spelling (the same hesitation noise in speech is spelled ‘uh’ in American English and ‘er’ in British English, because of the ‘missing’ <r>s in RP) or grammar (‘I have got’ versus ‘I have
gotten’). So far as language teaching is concerned, there is no single ideal native speaker for all students to imitate; the choice of model has to take all sorts of variation into account.

However, if L2 users are not the same as monolinguals, as we have been arguing all along, whether in the languages they know or in the rest of their minds, it is inappropriate to base language teaching on the native speaker model, since it may, on the one hand, frustrate the students who soon appreciate that they will never be the same as native speakers, and on the other constrain them to the activities of monolinguals rather than the richness of multilingual use. If we want students to become efficient L2 users, not imitation native speakers, the situations modelled in coursebooks should include examples of successful L2 users on which the students can model themselves. The Japanese syllabus puts forward a goal of ‘Japanese with English Abilities’, not imitation native speaker (MEXT, 2003). Similarly, the Israeli curriculum ‘does not take on the goal of producing near-native speakers of English, but rather speakers of Hebrew, Arabic or other languages, who can function comfortably in English whenever it is appropriate’ (English – Curriculum for all Grades, 2002).

Successful L2 use is almost totally absent from textbooks. In some courses, students have to compare different cultures. In Move (Bowler et al., 2007), students discuss, ‘Do men or women usually do these jobs in your country?’; linked to cartoons of a chef, a ballet dancer, a soldier, and so on; in Hotline (Hutchinson, 1992) students give ‘useful expressions’ in their own languages. Most coursebooks use England as a backdrop, but they seldom present multilingual English people, even if multiculturalism is sometimes mentioned, as in the discussion of Asian marriages in The Beginners’ Choice (Mohamed and Acklam, 1992). By the end of a language course, students will never have heard L2 users talking to native speakers, let alone to other L2 users, important as this may be to their goals. When they have finished Changes (Richards, 1998), a course with the subtitle ‘English International Communication’, the only examples of L2 users, except for ‘student’ figures, the students will have met are brief first-person biographies of people in Taiwan, Madrid and Paris.

Even the celebrities in coursebooks are invariably monolingual rather than bilingual. The characters that are supposedly L2 users fall into two main categories: tourists and visitors, who ignorantly ask the way, desperately buy things or try to fathom strange travel systems, and students who chat to each other about their lives and interests. Both groups use perfectly adequate English for their activities; nothing distinguishes them from the native speakers portrayed in the pages except that their names are Birgit, Klaus or Philippe (Changes). Neither group are effective role models of L2 users. New English File (Oxenden et al., 2004) features inter alia celebrities such as the novelist J.K. Rowling and the model Naomi Campbell, and gives short life histories of people who live in Japan and Rio: it is not thought worth mentioning whether any of them use second languages successfully.

Nor is it only English. Coursebooks for teaching other languages, such as French Libre Echange (Courtillon and de Salins, 1995) or Italian Ci Siamo (Guarnuccio and Guarnuccio, 1997), present L2 users similarly. L2 users have an unflatteringly powerless status, rather than the extra influence that successful L2 users can wield. The students never see an L2 user in action who knows what they are doing. While the roles of students or of visitors are useful and relevant, they are hardly an adequate reflection of what L2 use can provide. Looking at most EFL and modern language coursebooks, you get the distinct impression that all of them are written by monolinguals who have no idea of the lives lived by L2 users.
10.2 Codeswitching by second language users

Focusing questions

- When have you heard one person using two languages in the course of the same conversation or the same sentence?
- Is it polite to codeswitch?
- Should students ever switch languages in mid-sentence?

Keywords

codeswitching: going from one language to the other in mid-speech when both speakers know the same two languages

bilingual/monolingual modes: in bilingual mode, the L2 user uses two languages; in monolingual mode, a single language, whether their first or second

The danger of concentrating on the native speaker is that the specific characteristics of L2 users are ignored. L2 users can do things that monolingual native speakers cannot. We are limiting the students’ horizons if we only teach them what native speakers can do. An example is a process peculiar to using a second language, namely codeswitching from one language to another. To illustrate codeswitching, here are some sentences recorded by Zubaidah Hakim in a staffroom where Malaysian teachers of English were talking to each other:

- ‘Suami saya dulu slim and trim tapi sekarang plump like drum’ (Before my husband was slim and trim but now he is plump like a drum).
- ‘Jadi I tanya, how can you say that when... geram betul I’ (So I asked how can you say that when... I was so mad).
- ‘Hero you tak datang hari ni’ (Your hero did not come today).

One moment there is a phrase or word in English, the next a phrase or word in Bahasa Malaysia. Sometimes the switch between languages occurs between sentences rather than within them. It is often hard to say which is the main language of such a conversation, or indeed of an individual sentence.
Codeswitching is found wherever bilingual speakers talk to each other. According to François Grosjean (1989), bilinguals have two modes for using language. In bilingual mode they speak either one language or the other; in monolingual mode they use two languages simultaneously, by codeswitching from one to the other during the course of speech. Bilingual codeswitching is neither unusual nor abnormal; it is an ordinary fact of life in many multilingual societies. Codeswitching is a unique feat of using two languages at once, which no monolingual can ever achieve, except to the limited extent that people can switch between dialects of their first language.

Box 10.3 Examples of codeswitching between languages

- Spanish/English: ‘Todos los mexicanos were riled up.’ (All the Mexicans were riled up.)
- Dutch/English: ‘Ik heb een kop of tea, tea or something.’ (I had a cup of tea or something.)
- Tok Pisin/English: ‘Lapun man ia cam na tok, “oh yu poor pussiket”.’ (The old man came and said, ‘you poor pussycat’.)
- Japanese/English: ‘She wa took her a month to come home yo.’
- Greek/English: ‘Simera piga sto shopping centre gia na psakw ena birthday present gia thn Maria.’ (Today I went to the shopping centre because I wanted to buy a birthday present for Maria.)
- English/German/Italian: ‘Pinker is of the opinion that the man is singled out as, singled out as, was?, as ein Mann, der reden kann, singled out as una specie, as a species which can. . .’
- English/Italian/French:
  
  ‘London Bridge is falling down
  Poi s’ascose nel foco che gli affina
  O swallow swallow
  Le Prince d’Aquitaine á la tour aboli’

  (T.S. Eliot, The Waste Land, V)

Codeswitching is found wherever bilingual speakers talk to each other. According to François Grosjean (1989), bilinguals have two modes for using language. In bilingual mode they speak either one language or the other; in monolingual mode they use two languages simultaneously, by codeswitching from one to the other during the course of speech. Bilingual codeswitching is neither unusual nor abnormal; it is an ordinary fact of life in many multilingual societies. Codeswitching is a unique feat of using two languages at once, which no monolingual can ever achieve, except to the limited extent that people can switch between dialects of their first language. Box 10.3 gives some examples of codeswitching drawn from diverse sources, which also demonstrates its utter respectability by occurring in perhaps the most celebrated twentieth-century poem in English, The Waste Land.

The interesting questions about codeswitching are why and when it happens. A common reason for switching is to report what someone has said, as when a girl who is telling a story switches from Tok Pisin (spoken in Papua New Guinea) to English to report what the man said: ‘Lapun man ia cam na tok, “oh yu poor pussiket”’ (The old man came and said, ‘you poor pussycat’). In one sense, whenever a book cites sentences in other languages, or whenever T.S. Eliot uses quotations from other languages, it is codeswitching.

A second reason for switching is to use markers from one language to highlight something in another. The Japanese/English ‘She wa took her a month to come home yo’ uses ‘wa’ to indicate what is being talked about, its function in Japanese.

Another reason is the feeling that some topics are more appropriate to one language than another. Mexican Americans, for example, prefer to talk about money in English rather than in Spanish – ‘La consulta era (the visit cost) eight dollars.’ One of my Malaysian students told me that she could express romantic feelings in English but not in Bahasa Malaysia, supported by Indians I have met who prefer
English for such emotions – English as the language of romance is a bit surprising to an Englishman!

Sometimes the reason for codeswitching is that the choice of language shows the speaker’s social role. A Kenyan man who was serving his own sister in a shop started in their Luiyia dialect and then switched to Swahili for the rest of the conversation, to signal that he was treating her as an ordinary customer. Often bilinguals use fillers and tags from one language in another, as in the Spanish/English exchange, ‘Well I’m glad to meet you’, ‘Andale pues and do come again’ (OK swell...).

The common factor underlying these examples is that the speaker assumes that the listener is fluent in the two languages. Otherwise such sentences would not be a bilingual codeswitching mode of language use but would be either interlanguage communication strategies or attempts at one-upmanship, similar to the use by some English speakers of Latin expressions such as ‘ab initio learners of Spanish’ (Spanish beginners). Monolinguals think that the reason is primarily ignorance; you switch when you do not know the word, that is, it is a communication strategy of the type mentioned in Chapter 6; yet this motivation seems rare in the descriptions of codeswitching. Box 10.4 lists some reasons people codeswitch, including most of those mentioned here.

When does codeswitching occur in terms of language structure? According to one set of calculations, about 84 per cent of switches within the sentence are isolated words, say the English/Malaysian ‘Ana free hari ini’ (Ana is free today), where English is switched to only for the item ‘free’. About 10 per cent are phrases, as in the Russian/French ‘Imela une femme de chambre’ (She had a chambermaid). The remaining 6 per cent are switches for whole clauses, as in the German/English ‘Papa, wenn du das Licht ausmachst, then I’ll be so lonely’ (Daddy, if you put out the light, I’ll be so lonely). But this still does not show when switches are possible from one language to another; switching is very far from random in linguistic terms.

The theory of codeswitching developed by Shona Poplack (1980) claims that there are two main restrictions on where switching can occur:

- **The ‘free morpheme constraint’**: the speaker may not switch language between a word and its endings unless the word is pronounced as if it were in the language of the ending. Thus an English/Spanish switch ‘runeando’ is impossible because ‘run’ is distinctively English in sound. But ‘flipeando’ is possible because ‘flip’ is potentially a word in Spanish.
The ‘equivalence constraint’: the switch can come at a point in the sentence where it does not violate the grammar of either language. So there are unlikely to be any French/English switches such as ‘a car americaine’ or ‘une American voiture’, as they would be wrong in both languages. It is possible, however, to have the French/English switch ‘J’ai acheté an American car’ (I bought an American car), because both English and French share the structure in which the object follows the verb.

The approach to codeswitching that has been most influential recently is the matrix language frame (MLF) model developed by Carol Myers-Scotton (2005). She claims that in codeswitching the matrix language provides the frame, and the embedded language provides material to fill out the frame, rather like putting the flesh onto the skeleton. So in ‘Simera piga sto shopping centre gia na psaksw ena birthday present gia thn Maria’, the matrix language is Greek, which provides the grammatical structure, and the embedded language is English, which provides two noun phrases. The role for the matrix language is to provide the grammatical structures and the ‘system’ morphemes, that is, grammatical morphemes that form the basis of the sentence. The role of the embedded language is to provide content morphemes to fit into the framework already supplied. For example, the Russian/English sentence ‘On dolgo laia-l na dog-ov’ (He barked at dogs for a long time) shows matrix Russian grammatical morphemes and structure, but an embedded English content word ‘dog’ (Schmid et al., 2004).

The later version of this model (Myers-Scotton and Jake, 2000) is known as the 4M model as it divides all morphemes into four types:

- **content morphemes** which have thematic roles, typically nouns such as ‘book’ and verbs such as ‘read’;
- **early system morphemes** which have some content meaning, such as articles ‘the/a’, ‘(chew) up’;
- **late bridge system morphemes** which make necessary connections between grammatical parts but contribute no meaning, say ‘the Wife of Bath’, or possessive ‘s’ ‘John’s friend’;
- **late outsider system morphemes** which have connections extending beyond the basic lexical unit, such as agreement ‘s’; ‘Tomorrow never comes’.

(Note: ‘early’ and ‘late’ apply to the processes of language production, not to the stages of language acquisition.)

According to the 4M model, content and, to a large extent, early system morphemes go with the embedded language in depending on meaning. The late bridge and outsider system morphemes go with the matrix language as they provide the grammatical framework within which the content and early system morphemes can be placed.

**Codeswitching and language teaching**

What does codeswitching have to do with language teaching? The profile of the proficient L2 user includes the codeswitching mode of language. It is not something that is peculiar or unusual. If the bilingual knows that the listener shares the same two
languages, codeswitching is likely to take place for all the reasons given above. For many students, the ability to go from one language to another is highly desirable; there is little advantage in being multi-competent if you are restricted by the demands of a single language in monolingual mode.

A simple point to make to students is that codeswitching between two people who both know the same two languages is normal. There is a half-feeling that people who switch are doing something wrong, either demonstrating their poor knowledge of the L2 or deliberate rudeness to other people present who may not be able to join in, as we see in Figure 10.1. This seems particularly true of children in England. This feeling is not helped by the pressure against codeswitching in many classrooms, as we see in the next section. Occasionally codeswitching may indeed be used for concealment from a third party. However, this may be to preserve the niceties of polite conversation: Philip, a 7-year-old French/English speaker, switches to French to his mother in front of an English guest to request to go to the loo: ‘Maman, j’ai envie de faire pipi’ (Mummy, I need to have a wee). Too long has codeswitching been seen as something reprehensible (young children who use switching are doing something terrible – they cannot keep their languages separate!), rather than something completely natural and indeed highly skilled, as Fred Genesee (2002) points out. Codeswitching is a normal ability of L2 users in everyday situations and can be utilised even by children as young as 2.

![Figure 10.1 Percentage of people who consider codeswitching rude](image)

The Institute of Linguists’ examinations in Languages for International Communication (discontinued in 2004) (Institute of Linguists, 2008) assessed whether candidates can mediate between two languages. At beginners’ level this may be reading an L2 travel brochure or listening to L2 answerphone messages to get information that can be used in the first language. At advanced stages it might be researching a topic through reading and conducting interviews in order to write a report. To take an Italian example, students are told they are working for an English charity that needs a report on immigration. They are given a dossier in advance of newspaper articles on the topic in Italian. On the day of the test they are given a task-brief, listing points that they should cover; they then have to interview someone in Italian for 15 minutes to establish the information; finally they have two hours to write up a professional report in English based on the dossiers and the interview. In this international use of a second language, the L2 learner is not becoming an imitation native speaker, but is someone who can stand between the two languages, using both when appropriate. While this is not in itself codeswitching, it involves the same element of
having two languages readily available rather than functioning exclusively in one or the other.

But codeswitching proper can also be exploited as part of actual teaching methodology. For example, the New Crown English course in Japan uses some codeswitching in dialogues (Morizumi, 2002). When the teacher knows the language of the students, whether or not the teacher is a native speaker, the classroom itself often becomes a codeswitching situation. The lesson starts in the first language, or the control of the class takes place through the first language, or it slips in in other ways. In a sense, codeswitching is natural in the classroom if the teacher and students share the same languages: the classroom is an L2 user situation with two or more languages always present, and it is a pretense that it is a monolingual L2 situation; at best, one of the two languages is invisible. Use of the L1 in the classroom is developed in the next section.

Rodolpho Jacobson has developed the new concurrent approach (Jacobson and Faltis, 1990), which gets teachers to balance the use of the two languages within a single lesson. The teacher is allowed to switch languages at certain key points. In a class where English is being taught to Spanish-speaking children, the teacher can switch to Spanish when concepts are important, when the students are getting distracted, or when a student should be praised or told off. The teacher may also switch to English when revising a lesson that has already been given in Spanish. The codeswitching is highly controlled in this method.

### Box 10.5 Codeswitching exercise

Look at the list of reasons for codeswitching in Box 10.4 (page 176) and then say which applies to each of the following examples of codeswitching, taken from a variety of sources.

1. English-Swedish: *Peak* var inte bra på *spotmarknad*. (The peak was not good on the spot market.)
2. English-Spanish: But I wanted to fight her *con los puños*, you know. (But I wanted to fight her with my fists, you know.)
3. French-English: *Tu dévisses le bouchon... comme ça... et tu squirt*. (You unscrew the cap... like this... and you squirt.)
4. English-Spanish: No van a *bring it up in the meeting*. (They’re not going to bring it up in the meeting.)
5. French/Swedish: Mother: *Tu reprendras un peu de ça?* (Would you like some more?) Emily to her mother in Swedish: ‘*Jag tror inte att hon tycker om det.*’ (I don’t think she likes it.)
6. Russian-French: *Imela une femme de chambre*. (She had a chambermaid.)
7. Greek/English: “*Ωντος βιβλιοθήκης και ήθελα να πάρω copycard και λέω “five pound phonecard please’.*’ (I was at the library and I wanted to buy a copycard and I say ‘five pound phonecard please’.)
8. Hindi-English: ‘Maine bahut bardas kiya hai *but now it’s getting too much*.’ (I have withstood a lot but now it’s getting too much.)
9. English-Spanish: So you *todavía* haven’t decided *lo que vas a hacer* next week. (So you still haven’t decided what you’re going to do next week.)
Box 10.6 L2 learning and codeswitching

1 Codeswitching is the use of two languages within the same conversation, often when the speaker is:
   ● reporting what someone has said;
   ● highlighting something;
   ● discussing certain topics;
   ● emphasizing a particular social role.

2 Codeswitching consists of 84 per cent single word switches, 10 per cent phrases, 6 per cent clauses.

10.3 Using the first language in the classroom

Focusing questions

● When did you last use/encounter the L1 in the L2 classroom?
● Do you think it was a good idea or a bad one?
● When do you think the first language could be used profitably in the classroom? How?

Keywords

compound and coordinate bilinguals: compound bilinguals are those who link the two languages in their minds, coordinate bilinguals are those who keep them apart
reciprocal language teaching: a teaching method in which pairs of students alternately teach each other their languages
bilingual method: a teaching method that uses the student’s first language to establish the meanings of the second language

Though the teaching methods popular in the twentieth century differed in many ways, they nearly all tried to avoid relying on the students’ first language in the classroom. The only exceptions were the grammar-translation academic style of teaching, discussed in Chapter 13, which still survives despite the bad press it has always received, and the short-lived reading method in USA in the 1930s. But everything else, from the direct method to the audio-lingual method, to task-based learning, has insisted that the less the first language is used in the classroom, the better the teaching.

In the early days, the first language was explicitly rejected, a legacy of the language teaching revolutions of the late nineteenth century. Later the first language was seldom mentioned as a tool for the classroom, apart from occasional advice about how to avoid it, for example in task-based learning for beginners: ‘Don’t ban mother-tongue use but encourage attempts to use the target language’ (Willis,
In the 1990s, the UK National Curriculum emphasized this in such dicta as: ‘The natural use of the target language for virtually all communication is a sure sign of a good modern language course’ (DES, 1990: 58). According to Franklin (1990), 90 per cent of teachers think it is important to teach in the target language.

**Arguments for avoiding the first language**

While avoidance of the first language is taken for granted by almost all teachers, and is implicit in most books for teachers, the reasons are rarely stated. One is that the teacher’s language can be the prime model for true communicative use of the second language. Coming into a classroom of non-English-speaking students and saying ‘Good morning’ seems like a real use of language for communicative purposes. Explaining grammar in English – ‘When you want to talk about something that is still relevant to the present moment use the present perfect’ – provides genuine information for the student through the second language. Telling the students, ‘Turn your chairs round so that you are in groups of four’ gives them real instructions to carry out. Hearing this through the first language would deprive the students of genuine experience of interaction through the second language. The use of the second language for everyday classroom communication sets a tone for the class that influences much that happens.

Yet using the second language throughout the lesson may make the class seem less real. Instead of the actual situation of a group of people trying to get to grips with a second language, there is a pretend monolingual situation. The first language has become an invisible and scorned element in the classroom. The students are acting like imitation native speakers of the second language, rather than true L2 users.

The practical justification for avoiding the first language in many English language teaching situations is that the students speak several first languages and it would be impossible for the teacher to take account of all of them. Hence hardly any British-produced EFL coursebooks use the first language at all. EFL materials produced in particular countries, such as Japan or Greece, where most students speak a common first language, are not restricted in this way. In the EFL context, many expatriate language teachers often do not speak the first language of the students, so the L2 is unavoidable. But this is more an argument about desirable qualities for teachers than about the type of teaching students should receive; an L2 teacher who cannot use a second language may not be the best role model for the students.

The practical reasons for avoiding the first language in a multilingual class do not justify its avoidance in classes with a single first language. It is hard to find explicit reasons being given for avoiding the first language in these circumstances. The implicit reasons seem to be twofold:

- *It does not happen in first language acquisition.* Children acquiring their first language do not have another language to fall back on, by definition, except in the case of early simultaneous bilingualism. So L2 learners would ideally acquire the second language in the same way as children, without reference to another language.

- *The two languages should be kept separate in the mind.* To develop a second language properly means learning to use it independently of the first language and eventually to ‘think’ in it. Anything which keeps the two languages apart is therefore beneficial to L2 learning.
Neither of these arguments has any particular justification from SLA research. There are indeed many parallels between first and second language acquisition, since both learning processes take place in the same human mind. Yet the many obvious differences in terms of age and situation can affect these processes. The presence of another language in the mind of the L2 learner is an unalterable difference from first language acquisition: there is no way in which the two processes can be equated. If the first language is to be avoided in teaching, this ban must be based on other reasons than the way in which children learn their first language.

The argument assumes that the first and the second languages are in different parts of the mind. An early distinction in SLA research made by Uriel Weinreich (1953) contrasted compound bilinguals, who link the two languages in their minds, with coordinate bilinguals, who keep them apart. Thus the policy of avoiding the first language assumes that the only valid form of L2 learning is coordinate bilingualism. But mostly the distinction between compound and coordinate bilinguals has been watered down because of evidence that the two languages are very far from separate. However distinct the two languages are in theory, in practice they are interwoven in terms of phonology, vocabulary, syntax and sentence processing, as seen in several chapters of this book.

Ernesto Macaro (1997) observed a number of modern language teachers at work in classrooms in England to see when they used the first language. He found five factors that most commonly led to L1 use:

1. **Using the first language for giving instructions about activities.** As mentioned above, the teacher has to balance the gains and losses of using the first or the second language. Some teachers resort to the first language after they have tried in vain to get the activity going in the second language.

2. **Translating and checking comprehension.** Teachers felt the L1 ‘speeded things up’.

3. **Individual comments to students,** made while the teacher is going round the class, say, during pair work.

4. **Giving feedback to pupils.** Students are often told whether they are right or wrong in their own language. Presumably the teacher feels that this makes it more ‘real’.

5. **Using the first language to maintain discipline.** Saying ‘Shut up or you will get a detention’ in the first language shows that it is a serious threat, rather than practising imperative and conditional constructions. One class reported that their teacher slipped into the first language ‘if it’s something really bad!’

In terms of frequency, Carole Franklin (1990) found that over 80 per cent of teachers used the first language for explaining grammar and for discussing objectives; over 50 per cent for tests, correcting written work and teaching background; under 16 per cent for organizing the classroom and activities and for chatting informally.

SLA research provides no reason why any of these activities is not a perfectly rational use of the first language in the classroom. If twenty-first-century teaching is to continue to accept the ban on the first language imposed by the late nineteenth century, it will have to look elsewhere for its rationale. As Swain and Lapkin (2000) put it: ‘To insist that no use be made of the L1 in carrying out tasks that are both linguistically and cognitively complex is to deny the use of an important cognitive tool.’