Analysis of four Chinese EFL classrooms: The use of L1 and L2

Du Yi
Y.Du-3@sms.ed.ac.uk
Institute for Applied Language Studies

The role of the L1 has long been a contentious issue in second language education, on which both theorists and researchers have expressed widely varying views. While some of them (eg. Lado 1957; Krashen and Terrell 1983) emphasized the negative influence of the L1 on L2 learning and teaching, some others (eg. Cook 2001; Jiang 2002) argued for its positive role.

Although there have been a large number of studies on the use of L1 and L2, there seem to be few on L1 use in Chinese university EFL classrooms, especially investigating the language use of those who teach English to students at different proficiency levels. This study observed four Chinese EFL teachers, who were teaching the reading-and-writing course to non-English major students at four different levels, and aimed to investigate their actual use of L1 and L2, including both the grammatical patterns and functions of their language use.

The study found that these teachers switched often at unit boundaries, but rarely at clause boundaries. They also switched frequently within units, especially within noun phrases, and the 'Chinese determiner + English noun' pattern is the main one they had in common. Furthermore, the teachers used Chinese as the matrix language in their mixed utterances in most cases, and these mixed utterances nearly always fitted Myers-Scotton's (1993a) Morpheme Order principle and System Morpheme principle. The functions for which they used Chinese could be divided into four main categories: facilitating developing lesson content; supporting students and carrying out classroom management; delivering information related to teaching agenda or examinations; and facilitating communication beyond language learning and teaching. The most frequent function common to all four teachers was translation. Furthermore, the study used four different 'frames' to analyze classroom discourse, and found that the teachers used the L1 with varying frequency across these frames

References

Cook, V. (2001) Using the first language in the classroom. *Canadian Modern Language Review,* 57/3: 403-423.

Krashen, S. D. and Terrell, T. D. (1983) *The natural approach: Language acquisition in the classroom.* Oxford: Pergamon.

Lado, R. (1957) *Language across cultures.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Myers-Scotton, C. (1993a) *Duelling languages: Grammatical structure in codeswitching.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Jiang, N. (2002) Form-meaning mapping in vocabulary acquisition in a second language. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition,* 24, 617-637.