

## Afterword

To advocate the judicious use of mother tongue, as this book does, is to swim **with** the irresistible flow of common sense but **against** the tide of thirty years of Western, Direct Method orthodoxy. We feel we owe it to our readers to demonstrate that the tide of Direct Method orthodoxy is now fast ebbing in the US and Europe, both among university academics and among practising teachers.

What follows is a chorus of voices advocating sensible use of mother tongue in teaching the target language

### A. **Is there direct method in our madness?**

Professor Guy Cook of Reading's Applied Linguistics Dept writes: <sup>m. Uk</sup>

"..... In the early decades of the 20th century came the direct method: teachers should not exploit the relationship between the students' own language and the new one.

Students should not translate  
learn vocabulary equivalents  
use bilingual dictionaries

or be given explanation in their first language.

Then came arguments that grammar rules should not be taught at all ( not even in the target language ), that errors should not be corrected, and that language should not be graded or simplified. Both the language and the classroom activities should be as similar as possible to those outside.

These notions have been extremely influential. A whole series of well-tried activities have been outlawed:

translation, because it involves both languages  
deductive teaching and manipulation of forms  
( because they involve explicit attention to rules)  
dictation, choral work, repetition and rote-learning  
( because they are not how language is "really" used)

→ drilling, teaching from the front and correction

( because they are authoritarian).....

Direct Method, in various guises, was the dominant methodology of the 20th century. It draws on two unsubstantiated assumptions. The first is pedagogic: that students prefer it. The second is psycholinguistic: that as children learn a first language without reference to any other, a good basis for second language learning would be to reproduce this process as far as possible.

This central <sup>odd</sup> dogma- <sup>the a</sup> that child is the best model for all learners has proved durable, surviving structural, behaviourist, universalist, functional and interactive approaches. This is <sup>off</sup> because the processes and ends of first and second language learning are obviously different. Second language learners usually end up less proficient, but they learn much faster. At a conservative estimate of 10 hours a day, a five year old has had 18,250 hours of meaning-focused interaction but still can only speak like a five

year-old. Any adult learner in these circumstances would be expressing serious criticisms. ....

The assumptions of the Direct Method have fitted in suspiciously well with the commercial and political interests of English speaking countries. Increased immigration and mobility have made mixed language classes common within those countries. The result is that in ESL courses and EFL private language schools, the direct method has been a necessity. More surprisingly, it also spread to places where monolingual classes remained the norm. The strange belief developed that native speakers were the best teachers, even though they may have no knowledge of their students' language specific difficulties. Publishers were happy, because they could significantly reduce their costs and produce textbooks for any market, irrespective of language and culture. "

( These extracts are from **Is there direct method in our Madness?**, first published by Richmond on their web-site, <[www.richmondpark.net](http://www.richmondpark.net)> and then re-published by E.F Gazette.

B. **Leprechauns, tooth-fairies and English-only in EFL**  
The strange things people believe in.

" .....Knowing your students' language can mean a huge advantage over native speakers of English who do not speak Portuguese. In fact... ssshhh- don't tell anybody I said this- but even encouraging students to think in their own language once in a while is actually OK. Probably many of you Brazilian teachers of English reading this article right now are nodding your heads and maybe even yawning because this is something you have suspected to be true for many years already. Sadly , most of the EFL world still believes otherwise.

It is still common to see posted on an English classroom wall **English Only** or something of the sort. The sign commonly appears next the **No Smoking** sign or the newer **No Cell Phones** sign. I <sup>used to</sup> be one of those teachers that enforced the no L1 rules... .. I stamped out non-English words in my classroom like an exterminator does cockroaches. I went so far as to put a jar on my desk once. It was to collect fines. I said: " for every non-English outburst , I shall collect 25 cents ." This sort of worked and was even sort of funny until one day a Swiss student stashed a 20 dollar bill in the jar and spent the rest of the day jabbering away in German.

Along with many other teachers around the world, my view on L1 inclusion has since changed to see a learner's first language as a bridge- not a barrier- to the second. But why should I have felt this negatively about L1 in the first place? Where had this notion come from, that a learner's native language is to be left outside the classroom?....."

( the above are extracts from <sup>an article on</sup> a Brazilian website: < [www.disal.com.br/nroutes/nr13](http://www.disal.com.br/nroutes/nr13)> )

C **The " Bridging Strategy": Active Use of Learners' First Language in Second Language Teaching.**

Isamu Murakami, an MA student at Durham University, writes:

" ..... The fact that a teacher shares the same L1 with the students means that s/he can use it as a resource to conduct classroom teaching. Rather than abandoning the L1, as a hindrance which interferes with the students' language learning, we should try to find ways to make use of it. I would like to argue that better language learning in the monolingual, EFL class can and should be promoted by "Bridging" the gap between their L1 and L2., deliberately using the students' L1 as a positive resource. ....

Moreover, when we think of the purpose of second language learning, abandoning student's L1 is not only impractical but false. Since people's mother tongue plays a crucial role in establishing their identity, it should be neither neglected nor subordinated to any other language.

*Bridging* is not a way of going back to the traditional *Grammar-Translation Method*. Use of the native language should not be an excuse for not using much target language in the classroom. *Bridging* is rather the way towards more "humanistic" language teaching, which respects learners' mother tongue and their background culture. The ultimate goal of this approach will not be to produce "fake native speakers" but to promote learners' ability to drive the target language on the basis of their L1 identity. The skill that students in the monolingual EFL context should develop is the ability to use the target language **with** their L1, not without it.....

A sample exercise:        **Bilingual Diaries**

Ask students to prepare a note book in which to keep a 'learning diary'

Ask student to write 5 sentences about their learning process- they do this in Mother Tongue but tell them they must use at least one L2 word in one of the sentences.

Collect in the diaries and write in your reactions using mainly L1 but with some things here and there in L2.

As the students to write more entries, ask them to go up from one word in L2 to two words, three words etc.....until they are writing whole sentences mainly in L2.

In parallel, increase the amount of L2 you use in your reactions to their entries.

( if you are a native speaker of L2, not the students' L1, respond to the students in the opposite fashion. Use L2 and add just one word of the students' L1. Gradually increase the amount of L1 as you learn it. Eventually your comments will be entirely in their L1!)

( to read the whole of Isamu-san's article, go to **Humanising Language Teaching** at < [www.hltmag.co.uk](http://www.hltmag.co.uk) > and select Year 3 Issue 6 November 2001.)

D Andrew Morris, at the time of writing a member of the English Language Teaching Improvement Project, Bangladesh, writes:

<sup>can not</sup>  
" I ~~can't~~ see the problem with judicious use of the students' mother tongue- especially at lower levels. For example, in many activities the instructions needed to carry out the task may be more linguistically complex than the language of the task itself. Similarly, it is important to explain to students, especially those who come from traditional learning backgrounds, what lies behind the methods we are using, and this can only be done at this level through the students' own language.

Of course this need disappears as students progress, and <sup>it</sup> should be encouraged to do so. Even at beginner levels, I try to introduce simple instructions, greetings and basic conversation in English. Nevertheless, the students' <sup>own language</sup> is a useful tool and to ignore it is to waste a valuable resource. Similarly, as a learner of other languages myself I find it necessary at times just to clarify a point of vocabulary or grammar in English, again especially at beginner level. It's absurd <sup>for st's</sup> to operate all the time in a new second language, and ignore the many rich and valuable points of comparison there may be with their own.

Incidentally I've taught in a number of countries and always made an effort to learn the language. I am now a trainer in Bangladesh, and also occasionally use Bangla with teachers whose own English is weak and state a preference for this in feedback after observations."

<sup>Lesson</sup>  
↑  
( On November 3rd , 1999, Andrew Morris contributed the above text to a debate on the use of L 1 in the L2 classroom which had then been running for about a week <sup>on</sup> ELTCS-L Digest on the Web; <ELTECS-LIST1.BRITISHCOUNCIL.ORG > )

E. Writing about the problem of students "lapsing" into mother tongue and the teacher's feeling of guilt about this Lindsay Clanfield and Duncan Foord suggest that the right way of dealing with the problem is to be proactive. They continue:

" This means you the teacher should actively control and influence how and when the mother tongue is used. Don't waste time trying to completely eliminate <sup>the use of</sup> those of mother tongue from the classroom, when this is likely to be futile. Instead concentrate on ways of harnessing, exploiting and playing with L1. Decide when it might be beneficial to use L1 and why. This might include reading as well as speaking L1. Encourage and approve of mother tongue use at chosen moments and in designated activities. Explain your choices to your students, if you think it would be helpful. If you can do this, your classroom is likely to be more authentic <sup>in</sup> the sense that it reflects the natural interplay of L1 and L2 which is inherent in second language acquisition. Not only is this more authentic, but it is also more fun and more relaxed for you and your students."

<sup>a couple of</sup>  
Here are ~~two~~ five minute exercises that Lindsay and Duncan propose:

### Code Switching ( all levels)

This means using more than one language in an utterance. ( I'll have some *café con leche* (milk). ) Bilingual kids do this all the time, so why shouldn't learners?

On occasion, encourage learners to use mother tongue words or phrases in a communication activity to maintain fluency and build up confidence.

### Funny Names ( all levels)

In preparation translate the following names literally into the students' L 1. So, for example, George Bush becomes *Jorge Arbusto* in Spanish or *Georges Buisson* in French.

George Bush  
Nicholas Cage  
The Doors  
Sting

Johnny Walker  
Johnson & Johnson  
Johnny Cash  
Playboy Magazine

Wall Street  
Louis Armstrong  
James Bond  
Seven-up

Dictate the mother tongue versions of these names and ask the students to take them down in English. How many do they get correctly?

( To read the whole article go to Page 13 of **It's for teachers**, No 3, February 2002: **In Defence of L1: Using L1 in the classroom** )

To round off this *Afterword*, Mario writes:

" When you first get a class of students learning English it makes sense to find out from their Mother Tongue teachers how they perform in L1. If you are teaching someone the flute and you know they play the clarinet quite well, it's worth finding out about their breathing and fingering with the instrument they already know.

It helps me to discover that Daniel is extraordinary poor at reading aloud in his mother tongue.

It is useful to know that Regis has a 30% hearing loss in both ears, consequent on a diving accident. No wonder he finds English listening comprehension hard.

When I listen to Serife giving a talk in English, I notice she does not respect sense groups but regularly breaks phrases up this way:

*and*  
^  
*flows through the // pipe under the effect of // gravity force  
comes to // the surface of // the liquid*

It is very useful to be able to check that she does not distort sense groups this way in her mother tongue. If she did, then the problem manifested in L2 would be much more deep seated.

*This*  
^  
It is excellent to discover that Dominika is a prolific dairy writer in her native language. This means she may well do good inner monologue writing in English. *could* be her way into creating a written "voice" for herself in English.

Suppose Ali can't spell well in Arabic, why should I expect it to be easy for him in English, especially as the one-way street perversely runs the wrong way, for him?

It makes sense to think that some part of a person's performance ability in L1 will carry over into L2, at least in an attenuated form. There is certainly high diagnostic value in looking at an L2 learner's performance in a variety of areas in L1.

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