

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The final chapter of this study discusses the findings in Chapter 4. This chapter will also address pedagogical implications and suggestions for English language teaching. It is categorized in the following sequence.

5.1 Summary of Findings

5.2 Discussion

5.3 Pedagogical Implication

5.4 Limitations of Study

5.5 Suggestion for Further Study

5.6 Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings

The data derived from the two instruments (lesson recordings and retrospective semi-structured interviews) revealed that all the subjects who were novice teachers used L1 in their English teaching to some certain degree. The amount of L1 use varied from subject to subject and ranged from 31.25% - 74.07% of class time, with an average of 54.24%. Interestingly, it was noticed that a subject (S4) who taught a revision class used L1 the most. Moreover, it was found that the stages of teaching affected the amount of L1 use in different class times. L1 use was mostly found in the stages of teaching that involved monitoring. On the other hand, L1 was used quite infrequently in the stages of teaching that involved eliciting. The study found that the subjects used L1 for six purposes: to enhance students' understanding, to increase students' motivation, to maintain discipline, to highlight important points, to overcome communication difficulties, and to save time. The study also examined the subjects' perceptions on the use of L1 in an English class. It was found that most of them viewed that L1 was useful in an English class under some conditions or factors such as students' level of language proficiency, the difficulty of the lesson, and teachers' experience and beliefs. They also reported some techniques that they used to minimize L1 in the teaching such as preparing a lesson plan script in L2, simplifying language, paraphrasing, using short and simple questions, using gesture, and using visual aids.

5.2 Discussion

The main aims of this study are to investigate the amount of L1 use, the purposes of using it and the perceptions of novice teachers on its use in an English class. The data from the two instruments revealed variation in the amount of L1 used by the subjects and it was noticed that the subjects used them for different purposes. Also, the teachers' perceptions of the use of L1 in classroom teaching are pointed out. These issues are discussed in this section.

5.2.1 Amount of L1 Use

It is usually the case that teachers such as in this study, who taught in a Thai high school where L1 is normally used a lot as a medium of instruction in EFL classrooms, have a tendency to use L1 in English language teaching, especially in the case of novice teachers. The study tried to find the exact amount of L1 used by novice teachers in English teaching, but it seems to be inconclusive. The study revealed that the amount of L1 used varied much from subject to subject. Also, there is a wide range of L1 use from literature. The appropriate proportion of L1 use seems to be inconclusive. For example, Atkinson (1987 cited in Mee-ling, 1996 (b)) suggests that about 5% of L1 and 95% of L2 would be appropriate. His recommendation about the amount of L1 use seems to be very low. In practice, Turnbull (2001 cited in Littlewood and Yu, 2009) found that L1 (English) used by the teachers of French in Canadian secondary schools ranged from 28% to 76%. Manara (2007) examined the non-native speaker teachers of English in Indonesia and found a range of 0% L1 (English only) to 75% of the class time. In South Korea, Liu et al. (2004) conducted research with high-school teachers of English and found that they used L1 from 10% to 90%, with the average of 60%. In Kuwait, Kharma and Hajjaj (1989) found that EFL teachers spent on average 20% of their class time speaking L1. Thus, the results from this study and many others indicated that the amount of teachers' L1 use varied considerably from situation to situation. Moreover, it was found that the stages of teaching also affected the amount of L1 use. Nation (2003 cited in Nazary, 2008) suggested the notion of a 'Balance Approach'. He believed that L2 played an important role in classroom teaching while L1 should also be used to facilitate L2. He did not define the appropriate proportion of L1 use since it is difficult

to say exactly how much L1 and L2 should be used in language teaching. The teachers themselves may have to manage their language use for each particular situation which would be caused by many factors which will be discussed in the next topic.

5.2.2 Purposes of L1 Use

As shown in the study, the amount of L1 use not only varied from subject to subject, but also varied during class time. This suggested that the use of L1 seems to correspond with the stages of the teaching or the teachers' purposes. This study found that the subjects used L1 to enhance students' understanding the most. This result is consistent with other studies on teachers' language use (Liu et al., 2004; Al-Hadrami, 2008; Al-Shidhani, 2009). The study of Liu et al. (2004), found that high-school teachers of English in South Korea often used L1 to explain language points, especially grammar and vocabulary, when their students appeared to be having difficulty understanding them. It was found that L1 used for this purpose might be triggered by the students' level of proficiency and their learning experience. As this study was conducted with Thai high-school students who had not been familiar with an L2 environment, L1 might appear in these classes as a tool for helping students understand difficult points more easily.

Moreover, it was also found in this study that when the subjects monitored the students while doing a task, they mostly talked with the students individually in L1. It could be because when they walked to the students' desk, they would see whether the students doing their task were on the right track or not, which reflected their understanding. Therefore, if they noticed that the students got confused, they would use L1 to clarify and help them correct the problem. This might be supported by Pennington (1995) who explained that teachers could employ different languages in different modes (i.e. whole-class, pair work, and individual mode). In her study, one teacher used English (L2) only in the whole class, while using Cantonese (L1) to speak to individual students working at their desks. This teacher reported that since his students were at lower level and could not manage a lesson taught in L2, he had to use L1 to help them understand the lesson when talking with them in person (Pennington, 1995).

The frequency of L1 use might also depend on the difficulties and complication of activities used. As S2 taught a writing task, and there were many steps to complete it, this task required the students' writing skill and language used for writing. So the subject had to use L1 to help them understand the task so that they could complete it. This result is supported by the study of Manara (2007), which revealed that the teachers who taught the 'Writing 4 Course', which was the last writing course in the curriculum, often used L1 not only to explain some theoretical concepts and the process of writing, but also to smooth the flow of ideas and discussion in order to enable the students to accomplish their writing tasks.

Other purposes of L1 use in this study seemed to vary from subject to subject or from class to class. For example, S3 used L1 to maintain discipline very often, while L1 for this purpose was not observed much in the other three subjects' classes. It was noticed that S3 mostly used L2 in her teaching, but when she dealt with students' discipline, she frequently turned to L1. This might be because of the students' behavior. From the observation, she dealt with this issue for many times, especially with particular students; not the whole class. Al-Hinai's study (2006) also showed that L1 is widely used for class management and control and it is more effective than L2 for dealing with discipline problems. In this study, when the subjects used L1 to deal with students' behavior, it seemed that they could get the students' reaction more immediately than using L2. It was noticed that when L2 was used for this purpose, students would normally ask their friends about the meaning. That was the reason why S3 firstly used L2 and then had to switch to L1 since she could not make students understand her statements. Also, since she mostly used L2 in her teaching and immediately switched to L1, it signaled to the students that she shifted from teaching to discipline mode which made them pay more attention (Cook, 2001). However, the study of teachers' two language variations in the Hong Kong secondary English class by Pennington (1995) revealed that one of the teachers rarely used L1 for brief disciplinary remarks, but he instead frequently used short and concise English (L2) phrases or sentences to direct even with a particular students or the whole class.

Moreover, many reports of the subjects in this study showed that they also used L1 for the aim of time-saving. Actually, this purpose seemed to occur quite often and many times it also occurred together with other purposes. For example, the subjects used L1

to explain grammar points. Certainly, they aimed to enhance students' understanding, and at the same time they also would like to make the lesson faster, otherwise it would take more time for L2 explanation, and might lead the subjects to try many techniques to make the students understand. Also, it was found that L1 was used much near the end of the class time. This might be caused by the time constraint. The subjects needed to finish the lesson in time. It might reflect the students' low concentration at this period. They would not pay good attention to the lesson, so the subjects had to switch to L1. Pennington's (1995: 85) study also found that near the end of the class time, the students were not doing what the teacher asked so the teacher gave full directions for the exercise in Cantonese (L1). This seemed to be a shortcut for the teacher to finish the lesson within the short time remaining near the end of the class time.

The subjects also used L1 to overcome communication difficulties since they could not continuously use L2 to communicate with the students. This might be because the subjects themselves lack the confidence and competence to use L2. In the same way, the subjects in this study were trainee teachers who had little teaching experience so L1 was a useful tool for them to cope with any unprepared situations. This is called 'survival strategy' by Mee-ling (1996 (b)) as she found that the teachers used L1 to deal with a difficult situation. This can be supported by the study of Al-Shidhani (2009) who also found that 35% of teachers felt that teachers' use of L1 was associated with a lack of confidence in their own knowledge of L2.

In addition to the purposes found in this study, L1 is suggested for other functions, for example, to talk with students about personal matters (Littlewood and Yu, 2009). This includes their learning problem or personal problem. Furthermore, L1 can also be used to give background information (Liu et al., 2004; Franklin, 1990). It means that the teachers used L1 to give background information about history, places, and subject matter, in order to give the students background knowledge for understanding the lesson or doing tasks. Also, the teachers can use translation as a tool to test the students' mastery of forms and meanings (Atkinson, 1987; Franklin, 1990; Al-Shidhani, 2009). These purposes of L1 use were not observed in this study. This might be because of many factors such as the nature of lessons and contexts.

From the results of this study, the factors that mainly influence the teachers' L1 use could be summarized into 4 categories. First, students' factor—this factor included students' level, their learning experience, and their behavior. Second, difficulty of lesson and activities used in the lesson—it means both the difficulty and complication of the activities. However, if the activities are complicated but students are familiar with the activities, then L1 could be reduced (Littlewood and Yu, 2009). Third, time constraint—this might be one major factor, especially for teachers who would like to make the lesson go quickly in order to finish the class as planned. Finally, the teachers themselves—this includes teachers' experience, their language proficiency, and confidence. Actually, the last two elements would go together. If the teachers have good L2 competence, they would be confident to use it. However, the teaching experience would help develop these two elements as Mee-ling's (1996 (a) cited in Littlewood and Yu, 2009) study in a Hong Kong context found that a majority of trainee teachers have more confidence in using L2 as they gained more experience.

5.2.3 Teachers' Perceptions on the Use of L1

The results from this study revealed that most subjects agreed that English (L2) should be used as much as possible, whereas Thai (L1) should be used purposefully and under particular conditions influenced by many factors mentioned above; students' factors, lesson factors, time, and the teachers themselves. As English is not generally used outside class by students, the subjects then reported that the students could at least get a chance to practice the language in the classroom when they used English. This idea was supported by the study of Manara (2007) examining the use of L1 support in English classroom in an Indonesian context. She found that the majority of teachers agreed that English (L2) should be used to the fullest. Also, many studies conducted in Oman revealed that L2 was primarily used in language teaching, and L1 was also useful for some particular purposes and under some conditions (Al-Hinai, 2006; Al-Hadrami, 2008; Al-Shidhani, 2009). For example, Al-Shidhani (2009) examined the teachers' beliefs about using Arabic (L1) in the English (L2) classroom in Oman. She found that over 90% of teachers agree that English should be spoken as much as possible in English lessons. However, 40% of respondents agreed that teachers could be allowed to use L1 (Al-Shidhani, 2009). Nevertheless, it is remarkable that this result might be influenced by different contexts and the culture of different countries as well.

This implies a yes-but situation in the use of L2 in a language classroom since the subjects know that they should use as much L2 as possible, but they also had their reasons to use L1 in many particular situations. The researcher noticed that many times even if L1 was used for a particular purpose, it might not be able to solve the real classroom problem that the subjects would like to solve. For example, interviewing with S1, she reported that she used L1 to highlight the importance of reading instructions before doing any exercises since her students did not read the instructions which made them do the exam incorrectly. Actually, the real problem of this situation might not be caused by the students' attention to the instructions, but might be because the students were not familiar with the activity or exercise, which made them confused. Therefore, the use of L1 in this case might not be able to solve the correct problem. This issue is supported by Mee-ling (1996 (b)). She suggests that 'most of the time, it is the teaching method which should be adjusted, not the language of instruction' (Mee-ling, 1996 (b): 98). Hence, if the subjects tried other techniques of teaching, they might be able to avoid using L1 and their problem might be solved differently.

Moreover, it was noticed that L1 was used much in revision class (S4's class). The subject felt that L1 could make her students understand the lesson clearly in order to do the exam. Although the subject was quite satisfied with their use of L1 in this class, this might imply that the subject aimed to teach English in order to help students do the examination rather than use L2 to communicate. This teacher's perception might distort the actual objective of language teaching as Larsen-Freeman (2000) explained that in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the students can learn from classroom management exchanges, and realize that the target language (L2) is a vehicle for communication, not just an object to be studied. However, most of the subjects still perceived that they should use as much L2 as possible in language teaching which might show that they have the same notion as Larsen-Freeman (2000) in the importance of L2 as a tool of communication in language classrooms.

5.3 Pedagogical Implication

In this study, it was found that L1 was used in language teaching for many purposes. However, to Nation (2003 cited in Nazary, 2008), though L1 can be used in language

classrooms, L2 should be still maximized. Thus, the teachers should find other ways to minimize L1 use and use it effectively. There are many ways to minimize L1 use in language teaching.

First, teachers should be concerned about the issue of wait time after asking questions. From the researcher's implication, it was found in this study that the subjects used L1 after asking questions in L2 without or giving only a little wait time for students to think about the answer. The students sometimes did not answer the teachers' questions immediately because they might not understand the questions or the content in the lesson, or they were processing answers. Therefore, teachers should give more time for students to process the answers before supplying them with L1 because it would create a students' habit to wait for and listen only to the teachers' L1, and eventually ignore L2. This can be supported by Gall (1984 cited in Watson Todd, 1997) as he suggests five steps involved in answering a question. A student firstly has to attend to the question which means that he should not only hear it, but need to listen to it as well. Then, he translates its meaning, generates a covert or unspoken response, gives an overt response or a spoken answer, and finally revises his responses after giving an answer. Through this process of answering, students need time to think about the answer, especially in the step of generating both covert and overt responses. It is not for students to suddenly give an answer; therefore, teachers should give them wait time after asking question to let them process the answers before answering. However, to help them get the right answer, teachers need to provide them enough information and clear questions (Watson Todd, 1997).

Second, from the interviews, the subjects suggest their techniques to use for minimizing L1 such as simplifying language, paraphrasing, using short and simple questions, and using gestures. Littlewood and Yu (2009) stated this result may be consistent and added with other communication strategies to help students understand teachers' L2 such as substituting an item with a similar meaning, explaining in simpler terms, contrasting with items from a similar lexical set, exemplification, and giving clues.

Third, as the teacher is the most important person to build an L2 atmosphere in the classroom, it is also important for them to have confidence not only on teaching performance, but also their language proficiency. Since the study found that being

novice teachers also influenced the use of L1, it is logical to say that if the teachers have more experience in both teaching and using L2, they might become more confident in using L2, and L1 would decrease. This is supported by the survey of Korean teachers of English of Kim S.-Y (2008 cited in Littlewood and Yu, 2009) which found that ‘the more English they use, the less anxiety they feel’. One way to cope with this problem as S1 suggested is to prepare a lesson plan with some script to speak in L2. This technique is helpful since it could help teachers speak L2 sentences correctly and confidently. However, it is not possible to write every L2 sentence in the lesson plan. So, teachers may expect possible problems, for example, the explanation of the meaning of difficult vocabulary, in order to prepare the language in advance. Notably, teachers should be well prepared and know the steps of the lesson well in order not to be frustrated and keep the teaching in the right track.

Finally, in this study there are many techniques revealed from the subjects’ interviews on how to avoid using L1—prepare items before teaching, such as posters, pictures and realia, or sometimes teachers can use body language to help students understand through actions or gestures. These techniques can help to reduce not only the teachers’ talk, but also their L1 use (Cameron, 2001: 210). However, regarding preparation of any items before class, it might increase the teachers’ work and cost in which teachers should decide to select the most effective way to employ in order to maximize students’ learning.

These strategies require the teachers to practice, and have a vocabulary bank and flexibility to select an appropriate word; therefore, they should continuously develop their language ability as well as knowledge of the subject matter so that it can help teachers to avoid using L1 or use it sensibly as an effective supplementary teaching medium, but not as a float that they grasp just for survival (Mee-ling, 1996 (b): 98).

5.4 Limitations of Study

The recordings of each subject’s teaching were done in the different period of a semester, which means that they taught different lessons even in the same class level.

Therefore, it brought about differences of the activities or tasks used in the class, which may affect the subjects' L1 use.

Moreover, since each subject was recorded just once, it might not reflect the nature of that class though the subjects were reminded to act naturally following their lesson plan and were informed that the recording will not be judged on their teaching performance. Also, due to the small number of subjects, generalization of the results of this study should be done with caution.

5.5 Suggestion for Further Study

This study focused only on the teachers' side and the findings reveal that one of the factors influencing a teacher's L1 use is the students. Therefore, it is interesting to further investigate the students' side about how the teacher's L1 use affects students' learning, and their performance. It may be investigated by looking at the students' reactions when a teacher uses L1.

5.6 Conclusion

This study was designed to examine the teachers' L1 use in an English class. The study was done with four trainee teachers who were teaching English at a high school in Bangkok, Thailand in their teaching practicum. The data collected from both lesson recordings and retrospective semi-structured interviews were analyzed to answer three research questions: (1) How much L1 do novice teachers use? (2) What are the purposes of their L1 use? and (3) What are their perceptions on L1 use in an English class?

According to the result of the study, all the subjects used Thai (L1) in their English teaching. L1 was used, on average, more than half of the teacher talking time in this study. The amount of L1 use varied from subject to subject and depended on the stages of teaching. This variation also showed that the subjects used L1 purposefully, in which six purposes were identified in this study, i.e. to enhance students' understanding, to increase students' motivation, to maintain discipline, to highlight important points, to overcome communication difficulties, and to save time. The different purposes of L1

used might be caused by many factors such as student factors, lesson factors, time constraint, as well as the teachers themselves. This use of L1 in English teaching was viewed by the subjects as being useful if it was used purposefully and under some particular conditions. However, since it is an English class where students could at least practice the target language, it was still confirmed that L2 should be used as much as possible. Since the proper amount of L1 use in an English class is still controversial, it should be the teachers' job to manage their language use and exploit the techniques to minimize L1 which would be derived and developed from their teaching experience.

The researcher hopes that the results in this study will be useful and helpful to teachers in order to manage their language use, especially L1, so that it will be purposefully used as an effective supplementary teaching medium in order to facilitate students' language learning, and not only as a survival strategy.